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Teaching Through a Social Justice Lens: A Unit of Study Designed for Second-Year Heritage Spanish Students

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Teaching Through a Social Justice Lens:
A Unit of Study Designed for Second-Year Heritage Spanish Students

by
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A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Introduction

As I reflect on my six years of teaching, I realize how my educational philosophy and teaching practices have changed. One of the challenging, yet rewarding, parts of being a teacher is adapting curriculum to fit the evolving needs and interests of my students. I began my teaching career as a Spanish 1 and 2 teacher. In the fall of 2018, I was given the opportunity to develop curriculum for and teach a class that was new to my district, Spanish for Heritage Speakers. Heritage language students vary greatly, but are similar in that they speak a language other than English at home and have had little to no formal education in the heritage language (Helmer, 2013; Parra, 2017; Potowski et al., 2008; Valdés, 2005). The purpose of this course was to serve as an alternative to the traditional Spanish courses offered at my school. The course still gave students world language credits, but celebrated the knowledge and experiences of students who speak Spanish at home in a way that the other Spanish courses did not. Before this, I had little experience with curriculum writing and working with heritage speakers.

The following school year, I was given permission to create the second year of the course, Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2. Both courses felt like a mix of language arts and history class, but I did not feel I was empowering students in the way they deserved. We studied different topics like dictatorships, environmental issues, and identity, but I questioned how this work was impacting students. As I began my course work at Hamline and watched the world around me become an increasingly hostile place for my Latinx students, my interest in developing social justice curriculum was piqued. This led

me to the following research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?*

In this chapter, I explain how my own educational experiences and my experiences working with my Latinx students awakened my passion for social justice and transformed my approach to developing curriculum for my heritage Spanish students.

My Educational Experience

My first Spanish class was as a freshman in high school. I am not a heritage speaker of Spanish, nor does anyone in my family speak Spanish. Spanish was always one of my favorite classes. I had passionate teachers and was motivated by how each new grammar rule felt like a puzzle to solve. When we learned about culture, I was excited to imagine how the Spanish language might allow me to connect with new people in my future. However, the culture lessons never moved beyond musicians, foods, and celebrations. Vocabulary and grammar were the basis of instruction. There were fewer opportunities for deeper questioning than I would have liked. By far the most transformative experience of my high school career was a trip to Costa Rica after my junior year. I cannot discuss this trip without mentioning the immense socioeconomic privilege I had to have such an experience as a teenager. After a week of group excursions and explorations, I had the opportunity to stay with a host family for one week. I had never had to share a bedroom until then, nor worry about warm water in the shower running out. For the first time in my life, I realized my privilege. This trip led me to reflect on the benefits I had been awarded by being born into my family. It also brought me immense joy to use my limited Spanish to connect with such a special family. I cried the day I had to say goodbye and we still keep in touch today.

After my trip to Costa Rica, I knew I wanted to major in Spanish in college. I decided on a Jesuit university in the Pacific Northwest for my undergraduate studies. I was excited to be part of a university that focuses heavily on social justice and the humanities. I had a unique experience as a Spanish major enrolled in the Secondary Education Program and in an additional program to get my English Language Learner (ELL) teaching license. These three programs were quite disconnected. I remember only one or two of my Spanish courses that went beyond teaching surface level culture and addressed inequities in the Spanish-speaking world. My World Language Teaching Methods course introduced me to content-based instruction. However, my cooperating teachers during my student teaching placements primarily focused on using vocabulary lists and grammar from a textbook as the basis of their curriculum. Students found their classes fun, but social justice was never addressed. The schools in which I had my student teaching placements had diverse student populations, but unfortunately, I never received any training or experience working with heritage Spanish students.

My coursework for the ELL teaching license was part of the MA TESOL program. Most of my classmates were graduate students, and many of them were Muslim men and women attending my university through study abroad programs. This was the first time in my college and K-12 experience that I was not surrounded by nearly all white faces. I am thankful for the ways in which these classmates and professors taught me how to listen and to be curious about others who are different from me. The highlight of this program was a student teaching experience in my last summer semester. I co-taught a middle school class with two other teachers. Our students spoke a combined 12 languages. Through this summer experience, I became aware of the struggles of being

an immigrant or refugee. I realized that I was equally passionate about working with ELL students as with Spanish students. I started to question what kind of setting I wanted to teach in upon graduating.

Throughout my undergraduate experience, I had professors who made social justice the forefront of their curriculum and challenged my worldviews. They guided me in questioning systems and understanding the power of my own voice. However, I felt that the university's social justice emphasis could be superficial at times. Some of my fellow undergraduate students volunteered during the week and completed service projects over spring break, but did not know how to engage in difficult conversations or call out a microaggression in class. I am grateful for my experience in a unique combination of programs, but I returned home after graduation still unsure of what social justice looked like in action.

Teaching and Professional Development Experience

My first year of teaching I was a long-term substitute for three teachers in the same middle school in a large suburb in the Midwest. I was a Spanish substitute for four months and an ELL substitute for three months. I spent most of that year trying to get comfortable and to stay afloat as a new teacher. I worked with three different ELL groups in the spring, one of which was a newcomer group. Students' curiosity and excitement were contagious. I loved returning to the ELL setting because my ELL students had unmatched enthusiasm for learning. I did eventually miss being a Spanish teacher but was renewed with energy by the special connection I made with my ELL students.

The next year, I was hired as a Spanish teacher in the same district I attended school K-12. At first, my schedule was split between the two high schools in the district.

Eventually, I was able to teach full time at one school. It was after my third year of teaching in the district that I was asked to create the Spanish for Heritage Speakers course. Unfortunately, the only way this course could be offered was if it was a combined class with the AP Spanish class. I was upset by how inequitable it was to combine these two different groups of students and voiced my concerns to the administration. Nonetheless, the administration maintained there were not enough students signed up to run the course otherwise. I had no choice but to move forward with planning the course and designing curriculum.

That summer, I attended AP training and a one week institute through The Center for Advanced Research on Language Acquisition (CARLA) at the University of Minnesota called Teaching Heritage Languages and Learners. The CARLA course was essential in giving me a starting point for developing curriculum. For the first time, I learned about heritage student needs and experiences from professionals. I created a substantial unit on identity work for the beginning of the year. After the first weeks of the school year, every student who signed up for AP Spanish had dropped the class. Twenty-four Spanish for Heritage Speakers students remained.

This first year of the course was incredibly stressful and I often wondered if I was completely failing my students. It was humbling to stand before them as a non-heritage speaker of Spanish and admit that I was learning as much, if not more, from them as they were learning from me. I was overly concerned with creating lessons and units that I thought would engage students. I was afraid they would drop the class and I felt pressured to prepare them for the AP Spanish exam. For this reason, we completed cultural comparisons and writing and reading activities nearly every day. Students learned

about the cultural practices of other Spanish-speaking communities outside of their own, but I did not teach them to ask *how* and *why* questions.

During the summer of 2019, I revamped some of the units I taught this first year, developed a curriculum for the Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 course that would begin in the fall, and started my MAEd program. In my MAEd course, I learned about activist-educators including Paolo Freire, bell hooks, and Sonia Nieto (Freire, 2014; hooks, 1994; Nieto, 2010). I once again felt inspired to include social justice in my curriculum but felt unsure of how to begin this work. The next school year, I felt like I was making improvements to my units for the Heritage Spanish classes. I was impassioned by comments made by students such as, “This class is the only time of day I am not the only brown face in the room. I can relax here for once.” At this point I still enjoyed teaching Spanish 2 for three periods of the day, but I knew my heart was with my heritage Spanish students.

When the opportunity arose in Summer 2020 to attend another CARLA course called Teaching Language Through the Lens of Social Justice, I knew this was exactly what I had been looking for to take my understanding of social justice to the next level. In this course, I learned the specifics of what it means to transform a cultural lesson into a social justice lesson. I found out about the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016) and the recommended components to ensure a unit qualifies as a social justice unit. I felt I finally had a solid understanding of what social justice education looks like in practice. I realized that teaching with a social justice lens benefits everyone by promoting equity, meeting individual student needs, and guiding students to ask difficult questions (Glynn et al., 2018; Hackman, 2005; Johnson & Randolph, 2017; Nieto, 2010). Social

justice work begins in the classroom and spills out into students' and teachers' lives beyond the school walls. Because of this crucial knowledge I gained from the social justice CARLA course, I now feel prepared to transform my existing units and create new units with a social justice lens.

Capstone Project

Heritage Spanish speakers are a unique group of students. Some of the students in my classes are ELL students and some are native speakers, meaning they were born outside the United States in a Spanish-speaking country. I also have students who are far more comfortable speaking English than Spanish. My students self-select, meaning as long as they speak and listen to Spanish to some degree outside of the classroom, they are invited to enroll in the Spanish for Heritage Speakers courses. With such diversity in terms of backgrounds and reading and writing skills, I have to ensure that my units allow for all students to receive the support they need and to experience personal growth. Each year, there are students who want to take the AP Spanish Language and Culture test or the CLEP Spanish test for university credit. Conversely, I have students who are in danger of failing their other classes and view enrollment in Spanish for Heritage Speakers as the best choice for earning elective credits required for graduation. I need my Spanish for Heritage Speakers courses to be communities in which all of my students feel supported, listened to, and empowered. The best way I know how to create such a community is by developing curriculum through a social justice lens.

The reality for my Latinx students is that they are living in a society that currently does not demonstrate care and appreciation for their lives and stories. Research shows that heritage Spanish students continue to be marginalized in U.S. public schools (San

Miguel & Donato, 2009). Heritage Spanish students are harmed by monolingual ideologies, teacher biases, narrow views of culture, and problematic textbooks (Irizarry, 2017; Leeman et al., 2011; Leeman & Martínez, 2007; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020). Not only do I want to help my students think critically inside the classroom, but I also want to collaborate with them to recognize and combat injustice everywhere it exists. In this way, they will leave my classroom empowered as individuals and as a community. This gives me hope for a better future for them and for all people of color.

My capstone project is a curriculum designed for my Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 course. It is a six week unit on education systems. Although Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 typically has fewer students than the Spanish for Heritage Speakers course, students in the second year of the course feel comfortable working with each other and with me. My unit is intended for any secondary teacher of heritage Spanish students who is looking to use social justice as the basis for all curriculum. It could also be adapted for use by any heritage language teacher. I hope to inspire other teachers by encouraging them to go beyond teaching surface level culture with implementation of the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016) and by designing purposeful assessments that move students to action.

Chapter Summary

My research question for my capstone project is the following: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?* This chapter has provided an overview of why this question is of the utmost importance to me. As a non-heritage speaker of Spanish, my love for the language first blossomed when I was a high school student connecting with a host family in Costa Rica. My interest in social

justice and the humanities led me to a university that had an inconsistent social justice lens. I started my teaching career with a desire to learn more about social justice in action. Thanks to professional development opportunities and inspiration from social justice activists, I have learned how to start the process of altering my Spanish for Heritage Speakers curriculum so that each unit has a social justice lens. This curriculum change is essential in order to teach students to think critically, challenge oppressive systems, and act against injustice.

In Chapter Two, the literature on heritage Spanish students and social justice education is reviewed. In Chapter Three, I explain my unit of study and answer how and why I chose this to create the unit. Chapter Four provides an overview of what I have learned by completing this project and explains the potential implications and limitations of my project.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

My beliefs on teaching culture and engaging students have shifted considerably in my three years as a teacher of heritage Spanish students. As a white, non-heritage Spanish speaker, I have realized how important it is for me to acknowledge my privilege and gaps in knowledge. I must invite students to share their expertise and learn alongside me. Now more than ever, my heritage Spanish students need to feel that their voices are heard and that their stories are celebrated in my class. This realization has led me to the following research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?* In this chapter, I review the literature on heritage Spanish students, social justice education, and the intersection of heritage Spanish students and social justice education.

In the first section, I review the literature on the different needs of heritage Spanish students compared to second language (L2) students. By definition, heritage students speak a language other than English at home (Valdés, 2005). In this chapter, I explore the literature on how heritage Spanish students' language skills and experiences vary. I review the impact of teacher biases and misconceptions on heritage student identities and success in the classroom. This literature informs my capstone project by highlighting how and why I must teach heritage Spanish students differently than I do L2 students.

Next, I review the literature on social justice education. There are several ways one can incorporate a social justice lens into their teaching, but true social justice

education emphasizes equity and action. I explain how the literature demonstrates that the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016) and Hackman's (2005) "Five Essential Components for Social Justice Education" merge with pedagogies like culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, critical pedagogy, and multiculturalism to guide teachers in developing social justice curriculum. This literature informs my work by highlighting specific elements of social justice education and explaining how these elements go beyond the shallow methods of teaching culture that are traditionally employed in world language classrooms.

Lastly, I review the literature on the intersection of heritage Spanish students and social justice education. I evaluate the ways in which textbooks and teaching methods have harmed heritage Spanish students. I also explore how the literature demonstrates that a social justice lens acknowledges and begins to repair trauma experienced by students of color. I review several studies that show how implementation of a social justice lens increases heritage Spanish student agency and positive feelings about their identities.

First, I review the literature on who heritage Spanish students are and how their identities take shape in the world language classroom.

Heritage Spanish Students

The first section of my literature review defines heritage languages and students. Before discussing the present-day reality and experiences of heritage Spanish students, one must acknowledge the history of marginalization and discrimination against Spanish-speaking students in public schools. The percentage of Spanish speakers attending public schools in the United States is at its highest level than ever before.

Engaging heritage Spanish students looks different than engaging L2 students, due to heritage students' unique experiences and histories. If heritage Spanish students do not trust their teacher or feel like the legitimacy of their language skills is questioned, they will be unlikely to participate in class (Schneider et al., 2006). No single heritage Spanish student is the same. It is essential that teachers honor each student's culture and identity in order for all heritage Spanish students to be successful (Nieto, 2010).

Definition of Heritage Languages and Heritage Students

Latinx. Throughout this section of the literature review, heritage Spanish students are referred to as Latinx students. The term *Latinx* was added to the Merriam-Webster dictionary in September of 2018. This term is an inclusive, gender-neutral term to refer to anyone of Latin American descent (Merriam-Webster, 2021). I use *Latinx* in place of the *Latino*, except when used in a direct quote. Other terms like *Hispanic* are sometimes used to refer to Spanish-speaking individuals or individuals whose families descend from Spanish-speaking countries. However, because the majority of my heritage Spanish students self identify as Latinx, Latino, or Latina, I use the term *Latinx* to refer to the population of heritage Spanish students that I teach. It is best for teachers to ask students how they identify themselves before deciding on terminology to employ, especially if the teacher is not of the same ethnic background as students.

Outdated Terminology. Interest in studying heritage languages and heritage students has become increasingly popular in the United States since the 1970s (Draper & Hicks, 2000; Potowski et al., 2008). Previously, those interested in these topics would refer to heritage language courses as native speaker courses. Heritage students were referred to as native speakers, quasi native speakers, or bilingual students. The issue with

these outdated terms is that they approach heritage languages and heritage students through a deficit lens and fail to accurately encompass the abilities and experiences of heritage students (Potowski et al., 2008; Valdés, 2005).

The Concept of Heritage Languages. Typically, the term *heritage language* is used to describe languages spoken by immigrants, refugees, and indigenous communities (Durán-Cerda, 2008). Heritage languages differ in that some are at risk of going extinct, while others are commonly spoken in countries throughout the world in which the heritage language is not the official language. Spanish is a heritage language that fits the latter of these two notions (Valdés, 2005).

Heritage Students. Carreira et al. (2019) declared that there are two main types of heritage language students. The narrow definition of heritage language students applies to those with linguistic knowledge of the language. The broad definition applies to students who may have emotional ties to the heritage language, but lack proficiency in it. Valdés (2005) defined heritage language students as “those members of linguistic minorities who are concerned about the study, maintenance, and revitalization of their minority languages” (p. 411). This is an example of a narrow definition according to Carreira et al. (2019). World language teachers tend to consider heritage language students as students whose home language is one other than English. Typically, heritage students are bilingual in English and the heritage language, as their formal schooling in the United States is conducted in English (Valdés, 2005). Because most heritage students have not had opportunities to be educated in the heritage language, they likely lack strong literacy skills, but have strong speaking and listening skills as a result of living in

communities where the heritage language is spoken (Helmer, 2013; Parra, 2017; Potowski et al., 2008; Valdés, 2005).

The definition of heritage students used by world language teachers minimizes the complex and varying experiences and skill sets that heritage students bring to the classroom. Durán-Cerda (2008) and Valdés (2005) highlighted this fact by explaining that heritage students may be Spanish-dominant or English-dominant. They may be children of American-born parents or immigrants themselves who moved to the United States at a young age. I do not intend to discount the unique identities of my heritage Spanish students. For the sake of better understanding the population I focus on in this capstone project, I can assert that each individual in my Spanish for Heritage Speakers courses receives their education in English but speaks Spanish to some degree at home. Although students self-select when enrolling in the courses, they all fall under the narrow definition of heritage language students as described by Carreira et al. (2019). In Chapter Three, I discuss the specifics of my heritage students' demographics and language skills.

Heritage Students vs. L2 Students. No matter a heritage student's background or proficiency in Spanish and English, what sets a heritage student apart from other Spanish students is their cultural connection to the heritage language (Helmer, 2013). Heritage Spanish students rely on their bilingual or multilingual skills on a daily basis to navigate different settings including their school communities and neighborhood communities. Non-heritage students, often referred to as L2 learners, do not have access to opportunities to practice the Spanish language outside the classroom setting. Heritage students begin their language education at home, while L2 learners begin their language education at school (Carreira et al., 2019; Durán-Cerda, 2008; Valdés, 2005).

History of Marginalization and Discrimination Against Heritage Students

Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Policies and Practices. Beginning as early as the 19th century, it became clear that Spanish-speaking communities living in the United States would not be given the same treatment and respect as other groups, particularly white and non-immigrant groups. Anzaldúa (1987) reflected:

I remember being caught speaking Spanish at recess--that was good for three licks on the knuckles with a sharp ruler. I remember being sent to the corner of the classroom for ‘talking back’ to the Anglo teacher when all I was trying to do was tell her how to pronounce my name. (p. 54)

The experiences described by Anzaldúa were not unique. In “Latino Education in Twentieth-Century America: A Brief History,” San Miguel and Donato (2009) described a public education system in the United States set on marginalizing Latinx students and promoting ideals of the white, English-speaking majority. MacGregor-Mendoza went further: “From the onset, the language and culture of the Spanish-speaking populations in the U.S. were seen as foreign, inferior and incompatible with educational and economic progress” (2020, p. 20). Most Latinx students were forced to attend schools with inferior classrooms, teachers, and access to resources due to claims that Latinx students were a health risk and slowed down the learning process of English-speaking students. In addition to poorer school facilities, Latinx students faced discrimination in the form of low expectations, English-only laws, and curriculum lacking in rigor (San Miguel & Donato, 2009).

Present Day Latinx Experience. Despite wins like the enactment of bilingual education policies, San Miguel and Donato (2009) declared that for present-day Latinx

students, the reality is that educational spaces are still discriminatory and exclusionary. They stated, “The future looks bleak, given that there is an educational trajectory of continued unequal education, high dropout rates, increasing segregation, campaigns to eliminate bilingual education, and a historic backlash against Latino immigrants in the United States” (San Miguel & Donato, 2009, p. 44).

Disparities in the educational experiences and successes of Latinx students compared to white students continue to exist, despite Latinx students comprising 27% of the total population of students enrolled in elementary and secondary schools in the United States in 2017 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020c). Eighty-one percent of Latinx public school students graduated from high school in the 2017-2018 school year, compared with graduation rates of 89% for white students and 92% for Asian/Pacific Islander students (NCES, 2020b). According to Shapiro and Partelow (2018), these disparities could be in part due to the Latinx teacher-student gap. In 2018, only 9% of public school teachers in the United States were Latinx (NCES, 2020a). Heritage Spanish students rarely see themselves reflected in the appearances and experiences of teachers. Schneider et al. (2006) provided another reason for the lower success rates of Latinx students: families who have recently immigrated to the United States may be unfamiliar with the public school system and put their full trust in teachers. While this explanation accounts for the Latinx immigrant experience, students whose families have been living in the United States for two or three generations will likely resent the public school system for its repeated history of discrimination against Spanish-speaking students.

History's Impact on the Teaching of Spanish. The history of marginalization and discrimination against heritage Spanish students has implications for how Spanish is taught as a world language course in public schools in the United States. In the event that schools do not have Spanish programs specifically for heritage speakers, heritage Spanish speakers are typically lumped together with L2 learners that have no experience with the language. MacGregor-Mendoza (2020) claimed that Spanish teachers currently teach with the mindset that Spanish is a *foreign* language meant for L2 learners and must transform this mindset to one of “acknowledging, accepting and legitimizing the linguistic and cultural skills brought to the classroom by Spanish as a Heritage Language (SHL) learners from their communities here in the U.S.” (p. 19).

Some Spanish teachers hold fast to the notion that only one valid standard of Spanish exists. When heritage students are placed in classrooms with teachers who hold these views, their language and cultural experiences are judged unfairly by their teachers while their L2 classmates remain unscathed. Leeman et al. (2011) maintained that monolingual ideologies present in world language classrooms can go so far as to erase heritage students' identities. Teachers must remember that the generations of discrimination and mistreatment by Spanish-speaking students will not be easily forgotten, especially if they are never acknowledged in the classroom (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020).

Identity of Heritage Spanish Students

Teacher Assumptions and Biases. Heritage Spanish students connect their identities to their language. Anzaldúa declared: “Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself” (1987, p. 59). Whether in Spanish courses created for L2

learners or in courses specially designed for heritage students, teacher assumptions and biases toward heritage students can negatively impact how heritage Spanish students view their identities. From a language standpoint, heritage students may feel pressured by teachers to be completely fluent and literate in Spanish. Leeman et al. (2011) conducted a study on the identities of heritage Spanish students participating in a service learning program. By surveying student participants, they found that most students had at one point been shamed by their high school Spanish teachers for speaking what the teachers considered deficient Spanish. Durán-Cerda (2008) surveyed heritage Spanish students in heritage Spanish courses at a community college in the southwest United States. All students surveyed felt they had inadequate Spanish-speaking abilities and had low self-esteem in regard to speaking Spanish in academic settings.

In addition to harmful attitudes about language abilities, teachers may also negatively impact heritage Spanish students by the way in which they view their students' cultures, particularly if they hold narrow views of culture. MacGregor-Mendoza (2020) explained:

Language educators at times may attempt to view SHL learners as mirrors, either wholly or fractured, of the heritage cultures from which their family is descended, rather than as individuals with unique personalities that have absorbed viewpoints from multiple sources. (p. 27)

Although it is true that all students have baggage tied to their identities (Nieto, 2010), it must be noted that in the case of heritage Spanish students, much of this baggage comes from schooling and language-learning experiences. While L2 learners can distance themselves from a Spanish-speaking identity in the world language classroom, this is not

the case for heritage Spanish students. Their true identities and cultures are threatened in the classroom if teachers emphasize that there is one standard Spanish language and one narrow view of culture (Draper & Hicks, 2000; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020; Parra, 2017).

Engaging Heritage Spanish Students

Impact of Teacher Misconceptions on Engagement. Teacher misconceptions not only affect the identities of heritage Spanish students but the manners in which they engage in the classroom. In “Barriers to Educational Opportunities for Hispanics in the United States,” Schneider et al. (2006) asserted that weak relationships between heritage Spanish students and their teachers can cause students to disengage from work. Teacher bias toward heritage Spanish students in the form of stereotyping and holding low expectations leaves students feeling disconnected from school. This is in addition to the disconnect that heritage Spanish students already feel from the lack of Latinx representation in the public school teacher workforce in the United States (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020; National Center for Education Statistics, 2020a).

Heritage Spanish Student Resistance. When heritage Spanish students feel their identities are not being respected, they may disengage as an act of resistance. Kohl (1994) called this phenomenon *not-learning*:

Not-learning tends to take place when someone has to deal with unavoidable challenges to her or his personal and family loyalties, integrity, and identity... To agree to learn from a stranger who does not respect your integrity causes a major loss of self. The only alternative is to not-learn and reject the stranger’s world. (p.

6)

In a two-year critical ethnography conducted by Helmer (2013), Mexican-origin heritage

Spanish students participated in not-learning because they felt their teacher misunderstood their identities and acted with disrespect towards them. According to Ogbu (2003), one explanation for students not-learning in Helmer's ethnography (2013) is their possible status as involuntary or nonimmigrant minorities. These people live in the United States as a result of enslavement and colonization by white Americans. Involuntary or nonimmigrant minorities view their education through a lens of conflict between them and white Americans. They may revert to what Ogbu referred to as *oppositional educational strategies* (2003). Salazar (2010) criticized Ogbu for failing to acknowledge differences among individuals in minority groups and the ways in which resistance can be a positive form of self-advocacy. In their study, ELLs felt like they were being pressured to choose between English and Spanish. Those students who did not want to give up their Spanish showed resistance. Salazar argued, "When students are pushed to choose, they often perceive schooling as a subtractive process, and they protect their native self by disengaging, resisting, calling for huelgas, and opting out of schooling" (2010, p. 123).

Summary

Depending on the available opportunities, heritage Spanish students in public schools in the United States may enroll in heritage Spanish courses specifically designed to meet their language needs or in traditional world language Spanish courses that are designed for non-Spanish speaking students. These heritage Spanish students speak Spanish at home and have typically received their education in English (Valdés, 2005). When teachers fail to acknowledge that heritage Spanish students have legitimate knowledge of the Spanish language and cultures of Spanish-speaking communities,

students may feel their identities are threatened (Draper & Hicks, 2000; Durán-Cerda, 2008; Leeman et al., 2011; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020; Parra, 2017). This can result in students falling behind in school and participating in acts of resistance (Helmer, 2013; Ogbu, 2003; Salazar, 2010; Schneider et al., 2006). Teachers must reevaluate the attitudes and biases they hold toward heritage Spanish students so that history can be changed, for “they are the bearers of linguistic and cultural treasures that are anxiously waiting to be revealed and examined” (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020, p. 30). The literature presented in this section of the literature review demonstrates the dangers of teacher biases and the complexities involved in designing curriculum that engages and meets the needs of heritage Spanish students. In the next section, I explain definitions of social justice education. I highlight the various recommendations of researchers and teachers on how to create a framework for social justice education in the world language classroom. This section also explores teaching pedagogies connected to social justice education.

Social Justice Education

Social justice is defined by Nieto (2010) as “a philosophy, an approach, and actions that embody treating all people with fairness, respect, dignity, and generosity“ (p. 46). Other researchers, authors, and teachers have their own definitions of social justice and social justice teaching that are explored in this second theme of the literature review. Traditionally, world language teachers have taught culture in a way that focuses on L2 students and avoids controversy (Enns-Kananen, 2006; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020). Teaching culture in this way is the opposite of teaching with a social justice lens. This section of the literature review explains the difference between teaching culture and teaching through a social justice lens and advocates for a transformation in the way

culture is taught in the world language classroom. There are several approaches to teaching with a social justice lens, but two resources that can be applied to any subject area are the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016) and Hackman's (2005) components for social justice education. Other teaching pedagogies that fit into a social justice framework are explored in this section, including culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogies and multicultural education.

Definition of Social Justice Education

In the Context of Education. For teachers who are new to social justice education, finding a place to begin can be overwhelming. There are several definitions of social justice education in use and many different approaches to implementing social justice in the classroom (Hackman, 2005). Nieto's (2010) definition helps one understand that social justice is not only ideas, but actions. She described four components of social justice education as challenging ideas that lead to discrimination, providing individual students with all necessary resources for them to succeed, utilizing students' unique strengths in the classroom, and encouraging students to think critically. Similarly, Hackman (2005) asserted that social justice education goes hand-in-hand with equity. It analyzes systems of power, challenges students to act for change, and provides opportunities to critique everything. Instead of discussing it as a buzzword, educators need to make social justice "part of the lived practice in the classroom" (Hackman, 2005, p. 103). When social justice is at the core of the curriculum, all members of the classroom benefit (Glynn et al., 2018).

Defining Social Justice Education in the World Language Classroom. Interest in social justice education in the context of the world language classroom arose from

concerns about how culture is taught (Johnson & Randolph, 2017). Many studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of social justice approaches in social studies, math, and science classrooms, but little has been done to examine this approach in world language classrooms (Glynn et al., 2019). Osborn (2006) agreed that although much has been done to examine critical approaches to education, education professionals have yet to consider how world language education can be part of this work. Like Hackman (2005), Johnson and Randolph (2017) emphasized equity as a key component of social justice education in the world language classroom. However, they added that equity needs to be examined not only in regard to what is taught, but also in how the curriculum is taught. This approach to equity must acknowledge society outside the classroom walls (Johnson & Randolph, 2017). While Osborn (2006) was hesitant to define social justice education, as it is something that will continually evolve, his approach to curriculum was similar to that of Johnson and Randolph (2017). He emphasized the importance of evaluating curriculum “based on their effects on promoting positive cross-national and cross-cultural understanding” (Osborn, 2006, p. 17).

According to Johnson and Randolph (2017), implementing a social justice lens in the world language classroom should be seamless, as such an approach lends itself well to existing world language proficiency goals and the World-Readiness Standards employed by many educators. Nonetheless, this is not always such an easy task, especially when teachers lack a collaborative teaching community. In a study examining how world language teachers incorporated social justice into their curriculum and instruction, Glynn et al. (2019) found that several teachers found it overwhelming to dedicate more class time and more time outside the school day to integrating social

justice content. This challenge can be particularly true for heritage language teachers, who are usually world language teachers certified to teach the heritage language or native speakers who may lack experience as language teachers. A collaborative teaching community for heritage language teachers is oftentimes nonexistent, and the teacher is left to seek out support on their own (Draper & Hicks, 2000).

Problematizing Traditional Methods of Teaching Culture in the World Language Classroom

A misconception in the field of world language education is that teaching culture in the form of celebrations, traditional dress, and food amidst vocabulary and grammar practice promotes equity and diversity (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020; Nieto, 2010). If culture is not taught from a critical perspective, it becomes nothing more than content (Johnson & Randolph, 2017). This is especially dangerous for heritage students, who are then robbed of the opportunity to make meaningful connections between their lived experiences and what they learn in the classroom (MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020). Culture is based on historical, economic, and societal conditions and cannot be watered down to the visible products and practices of a community (Nieto, 2010). Enns-Kananen (2016) acknowledged that many world language teachers aim to move beyond teaching shallow views of culture. However, she claimed that “we don’t get our hands too dirty” by avoiding difficult conversations on topics like Black Lives Matter protests and refugee crises (2016, p. 557). She criticized advocates of social justice education in the world language classroom for their lack of urgency in regard to addressing cultural conflicts in the classroom (2016).

Controversy of Teaching Language with a Social Justice Lens

Teaching a language, and particularly teaching a language with a social justice lens, is a political act (Glynn et al., 2018; Helmer, 2013; Johnson & Randolph, 2017; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020; Osborn, 2006). Researchers who argue that world language teachers must move beyond teaching with a proficiency-based approach advocate for curriculum that acknowledges the ways in which language is political. This approach to curriculum is possible through a social justice lens due to the fact that important issues in today's society, including immigration and multiculturalism, are issues deeply connected to language and language study (Johnson & Randolph, 2017). Such an approach with a critical and social justice lens requires that teachers do more than just teach content, but also teach students about critical thinking and values. Neutral education is impossible (hooks, 1994; Glynn et al., 2018). One such way in which teachers can provide language students with opportunities to think critically about the political nature of language is through examination of varieties of the language that are considered prestigious and varieties that are stigmatized (Helmer, 2013).

Components of Social Justice Education

In order to clarify the necessary elements of social justice education, Hackman (2005) wrote "Five Essential Components for Social Justice Education." While this is not an exhaustive list, Hackman's intention is to "provide for socially and politically conscious K-12 teachers a clearer sense of how to focus their classroom content and process" (2005, p. 103). These social justice components can be integrated with other pedagogies and theories, including multicultural education, culturally relevant pedagogy, culturally sustaining pedagogy, critical pedagogy, transformative learning, and

community-based learning (Glynn et al., 2018; Hackman, 2005; Johnson & Randolph, 2017). Hackman's five components are content mastery, tools for critical analysis, tools for social change, tools for personal reflection, and an awareness of multicultural group dynamics (2005). In the sections that follow, each component is examined along with its connections to other relevant pedagogies and theories.

Content Mastery. The goal of Hackman's first tool is to guide students in developing a wide range of knowledge that prepares students for action (2005). Students must be taught history from a critical lens that allows them to better understand the impact the U.S. has had on communities near and far, whether helpful or hurtful (Hackman, 2005; Johnson & Randolph, 2017; Nieto, 2010). The Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards are divided into four domains: Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action. Each domain has five key standards (2016). Glynn et al. (2018) advocated for using the Justice domain when teaching content to ensure students examine the impact of injustice and power dynamics in the world.

Tools for Critical Analysis. Hackman (2005) defined critical thinking as studying content from diverse perspectives, guiding students to consider different experiences, examining power and oppression, and investigating other options besides the dominant viewpoint. Historically, critical thinking in the classroom has been seen as a threat to authority. Students have been taught to conform (hooks, 1994). Proponents of critical pedagogy, multicultural education, and culturally relevant pedagogy alike agree that a critical approach is key to guiding students to promote change (Freire, 2014; Glynn et al., 2016; hooks, 1994; Johnson & Randolph, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Nieto, 2010). Social justice educators must teach students to critically analyze educational

practices and even critique textbooks instead of accepting what is taught and how it is taught at face value (Glynn et al., 2016; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Leeman et al., 2011). Implementing tools for critical analysis rejects what Freire called *banking education* (2014). Banking education is devoid of inquiry and involves the teacher passing all knowledge onto the passive student. Tools for critical analysis ensure teachers' efforts "coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization" (Freire, 2014, p. 75).

Tools for Social Change. There are multiple approaches to implementing tools for social change, but no matter the approach, this implementation is key to transform student attitudes from feelings of disempowerment to possibility (Hackman, 2005). To fully challenge inequities in the world and in their communities, students need to be educated on reducing prejudice and collective action (Teaching Tolerance, 2016). Enns-Kananen (2016) suggested that world language classes could have goals centered on learners being able to "encourage each other's participation and engagement, move into and out of silences, ask difficult and even unanswerable questions, and transition from thinking to acting for social change" (p. 561). Acting for social change in the world language classroom might take the form of implementing project-based learning or service learning (Glynn et al., 2018).

Tools for Personal Reflection. Personal reflection is an essential component of social justice education for all: students, teachers, members of dominant groups, and members of marginalized groups (Boler, 2013; Glynn et al., 2016; Glynn et al., 2018; Glynn et al., 2019; Hackman, 2005; hooks, 1994; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020). Before beginning the work of teaching for social justice, teachers must reflect on their own

identities, biases, and assumptions in order to be capable of creating equitable classroom environments in which students are guided to conduct their own personal reflections (Glynn et al., 2018). hooks (1994) called on educators to commit themselves to the demanding work of the process of self-actualization. This step is so essential that MacGregor-Mendoza (2020) declared that without it, teachers will “promote successive cycles of half-hearted implementations and missed opportunities for achieving real change, all of which will result in ineffective outcomes and continual disappointment” (p. 30). Personal reflection can be especially uncomfortable for white teachers, who must acknowledge ways in which they have benefited from privilege and evaded marginalization based on race (Glynn et al., 2019). This reflection is what Boler (2013) called *pedagogy of discomfort*. Teachers and students push outside their comfort zones by analyzing emotional reactions to understand the privileges they hold or ways in which they unknowingly agree with dominant perspectives (Boler, 2013).

Awareness of Multicultural Group Dynamics. Advocates of social justice education, multicultural education, and culturally relevant teaching stress the importance of welcoming all student voices in the classroom and giving students opportunities to demonstrate their expertise (Burgo, 2017; Glynn et al., 2016; hooks, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1995b; Nieto, 2010; Osborn, 2006). Hackman (2005) warned, however, that “if an educator does not consider the group dynamics as they pertain to social identities and multicultural perspectives, they miss the true potential of student-centered teaching and social justice education” (p. 108). hooks (1994) asserted that teachers should reevaluate the notion of creating a safe space in their classrooms. Instead, they should focus on creating a classroom community. She cautioned that creating such a community

based on respect will lead to teachers getting more feedback from students, and teachers should be prepared to be critiqued and challenged (hooks, 1994). Social justice educators know who their students are and how they learn best. They center student voices but do not demonstrate colorblindness or expect students from traditionally marginalized groups to take on the burden of educating students from dominant groups (Glynn et al., 2018; Hackman, 2005; hooks, 1994).

Summary

Creating a world language curriculum through a social justice lens requires that educators emphasize equity inside and outside classroom walls (Hackman, 2005; Johnson & Randolph, 2017). Critical thinking in the world language classroom challenges students to question oppressive practices and histories with absent narratives (Freire, 2014; Glynn et al., 2016; hooks, 1994; Johnson & Randolph, 2017; Ladson-Billings, 1995a; Nieto, 2010). The decision to be an educator for social justice means accepting the impossibility of neutrality and engaging students in difficult conversations (Ennser-Kananen, 2016; Glynn et al., 2018; hooks, 1994). This literature informs my capstone project by demonstrating how Hackman's (2005) five components for social justice education merge with practices from pedagogies like culturally relevant pedagogy and critical pedagogy to aid in the development of curriculum that moves students to action.

In the next section, I integrate research on the histories and identities of heritage Spanish students and on social justice education to assert that heritage Spanish students must be taught using a social justice lens in order to increase agency and feelings of empowerment.

The Intersection of Heritage Spanish Students and Social Justice Education

Current research makes the case for social justice education in the heritage Spanish classroom for multiple reasons. Many heritage Spanish students are not being taught material that inspires them, nor in a manner that inspires them. As Osborn (2006) stated, “teachers need to engage students in all aspects of the process, letting them take ownership, express interest, and shape the focus of activities” (p. 20). This section of the literature review explores the disconnect between teaching practices and the needs of heritage Spanish students. This exploration includes how student narratives and identities are either missing completely or delegitimized in textbooks (Irizarry, 2017; Leeman & Martínez, 2007; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020). The literature presented in this section also identifies how a social justice lens centers students of color and challenges the ways in which white norms have been favored in the U.S. public school system (Alim & Paris, 2017; Glynn et al., 2018; Johnson & Randolph, 2017; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020). Lastly, this section explains how different approaches to implementing a social justice lens have positively impacted heritage Spanish students.

The Disconnect between Heritage Spanish Students and Secondary Coursework

Before revisiting the stark differences between heritage Spanish students and their non-Spanish speaking peers, it must be mentioned that not all language students receive an educational experience that matches current best practices. According to Osborn (2006), most language teachers learn in preparation programs that students need practice conducting collaborative communicative activities with peers. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to see language students sitting in their desks filling out worksheets.

Although a classroom experience that relies heavily on a textbook and decontextualized activities harms all students, it is especially detrimental to heritage Spanish students.

Since it is common for heritage teachers to feel isolated and unprepared, as declared by Draper and Hicks (2000), those with sufficient funds may purchase textbooks for use in class, either as a starting point or as the complete basis of curriculum.

Textbooks, particularly those created specifically for heritage Spanish students, have the power to lower heritage student self-esteem and advance the notion that Spanish spoken by heritage students is illegitimate (Leeman & Martínez, 2007; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020; Parra, 2017). Leeman and Martínez (2007) reviewed 12 textbooks published between 1970 and 2000 designed for heritage Spanish students. They concluded that instead of intending to increase students' pride in their identities, the goal of these textbooks was to teach a standardized version of Spanish that is more accepted by society. Scalera (2000) divided heritage Spanish textbooks into two categories: textbooks that teach heritage Spanish as though it is a foreign language, and textbooks that are designed for ELLs. Both categories are problematic. One ignores the existing language skills of heritage Spanish students. The other utilizes translations of English texts instead of highlighting authentic texts written by Spanish speakers (Scalera, 2000). Parra (2017) detailed several heritage Spanish textbooks published after the year 2000. A critique of each text is omitted, but Parra reminded heritage language teachers that even the best textbook or curriculum is useless if the teacher does not reflect on their knowledge and practices (2017). If heritage Spanish teachers decide to employ textbooks, they might first consider the negative experiences heritage Spanish students have had with textbooks in other subject areas.

The damage caused by textbook use in the heritage Spanish classroom is exacerbated due to the fact that heritage Spanish students are deprived of opportunities to learn their own histories in their other coursework. In “For Us, By Us: A Vision for Culturally Sustaining Pedagogies Forwarded by Latinx Youth,” Irizarry (2017) reflected on a two-year ethnographic study of Latinx high school students conducting participatory action research. One member of the study spoke of his experience and proclaimed, “We have a history. We have stories. In the book it is just like one little page, *la última* [the last page]. *Merecemos mejor* [We deserve better]” (p. 89). Heritage Spanish students need social justice education so they can be exposed to an accurate picture of history and be able to critically analyze their history and the history of other marginalized groups (Hackman, 2005; Johnson & Randolph, 2017; Nieto, 2010).

In order to feel empowered in all courses and in the heritage Spanish classroom, heritage Spanish students require not only meaningful content mastery, but also tools for critical analysis (Hackman, 2005). A crucial transformation must occur in the way heritage Spanish students are taught culture. Non-heritage students view culture through an academic lens, whereas heritage students view it from a community lens (Burgo, 2017). Teachers must acknowledge and celebrate the cultural knowledge that heritage Spanish students possess, and also must promote cross-cultural awareness. Beaudrie et al. (2009) maintained that for heritage Spanish students, cross-cultural awareness “encourages students to make connections with the heterogeneity of Latino cultures in the USA, while valuing and respecting their own cultural background” (p. 161). They further declared that because the cultures and identities of Spanish speakers in the United States are so multidimensional, the traditional notions of culture must be critiqued (Beaudrie et

al., 2009). Teaching students to critique the notion of culture in the classroom satisfies Hackman's tools for critical analysis (2005).

Why Students of Color Need Social Justice Education

Many researchers and educators in the field of world language education have called for a change in the way world languages and cultures are taught (Beaudrie et al., 2009; Ennser-Kananen, 2016; Hackman, 2005; Johnson & Randolph, 2017; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020; Osborn, 2006). This change is necessary not only for white students learning another language in addition to English, but for students of diverse backgrounds and language traditions. A social justice lens challenges teachers to put equity at the forefront of their work and center voices that have traditionally been silenced in the world language classroom (Glynn et al., 2018).

Although teachers cannot undo the pain that students of color have experienced and continue to experience in a society and education system in which racism and marginalization run rampant, they can begin to repair harm by refusing to turn a blind eye to this injustice. MacGregor-Mendoza (2020) affirmed:

These abuses represent generations of mistreatment that are not overcome quickly and lightly, particularly if they are not acknowledged either as part of the foundation of the cultural and linguistic heritage of the learners in the classroom or as part of the continued prejudice that SHL learners face outside the classroom.
(p. 28)

As mentioned previously, culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally sustaining pedagogy both lend themselves to social justice education (Glynn et al., 2018; Hackman, 2005; Johnson & Randolph, 2017). Proponents of these pedagogies contend that the

identities and stories of students of color are threatened and policed on a daily basis in public schools (Bucholtz et al., 2017). Teaching through a social justice lens rejects the notion that students of color should meet standards created by the white middle class and calls for an “emancipatory vision of schooling” (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 3). Because the study of a language is inherently connected to issues like immigration and diversity, as asserted by Johnson and Randolph (2017), it is the responsibility of world language teachers to be leaders in transforming Alim and Paris’s emancipatory vision of public education (2017).

The Impact of Social Justice Education on Heritage Spanish Students

When one makes the decision to be intentional about social justice education, it can be tempting to focus solely on difficulties that students experience inside and outside the classroom, as is evident in Enns-Kananen’s “A Pedagogy of Pain: New Directions for World Language Education” (2016). Acknowledging pain is essential, but because research on social justice education in the world language classroom is a newer development, successes of implementing multiple components of social justice education must be discussed (Glynn et al., 2019). Continuing the study of their heritage language has numerous benefits for heritage Spanish students including greater success in school and society and stronger abilities to communicate in both English and Spanish in a variety of settings (Durán-Cerda, 2008; Leeman et al., 2011). While it is important to recognize these benefits, for the sake of my capstone project I am more concerned with the impact of social justice education on heritage Spanish students’ agency and pride in their identities. Leeman et al. (2011) defined agency as “the recognition of one’s ability to act” (p. 484).

Research on social justice education and critical approaches to teaching heritage Spanish students demonstrates a positive relationship between such an approach to teaching Spanish and heritage students' feelings of empowerment. Irizarry's (2017) ethnographic study of Latinx high school students involved in participatory action research revealed that although students were initially hesitant to participate, they eventually felt encouraged and energized by confronting oppressive practices in their school system. Irizarry called the phenomenon "from apathy to agency" (2017, p. 92). Students not only learned about oppression, but felt called to act in the name of providing all students, including Latinx students, with more positive schooling experiences. This participatory action research included Hackman's components of social justice education, and clearly included what might be the most important component of them all: tools for social change (Hackman, 2005). Glynn et al. (2019) also discovered that teachers who incorporated social justice into world language curriculum were met with a renewed sense of motivation and agency in their students.

Service learning programs are other examples of tools for social change (Glynn et al., 2018; Hackman, 2005). Leeman et al. (2011) and Petrov (2013) found that service learning was especially impactful for heritage Spanish students in promoting higher self-esteem and stronger feelings of connectedness in their communities. Similarly, Belpoliti and Fairclough (2016) and Beaudrie et al. (2009) observed heritage Spanish students at the university level demonstrate increased levels of engagement and positive perceptions of their identities in heritage Spanish courses that focused on inquiry and cross-cultural awareness, respectively. Helmer (2013) conducted an ethnographic study of Mexican-origin heritage Spanish students. While most students in her study resisted

engaging, one teacher overcame student resistance by creating a student-centered approach to teaching. This approach highlights Hackman's tool of awareness of multicultural group dynamics (2005). Just as heritage Spanish students are multifaceted, complex individuals, so are the approaches to social justice education. When Hackman's (2005) five components are implemented in curriculum and instruction, it is evident that teaching through a social justice lens has a positive impact on heritage Spanish students' agency and self-esteem.

Summary

In this section, the literature demonstrated the relevance of social justice education in the heritage Spanish classroom. Students have faced the delegitimization of their Spanish and the erasure of their histories by textbooks that do more harm than good. Through a social justice lens, teachers and students can work together to create an "emancipatory vision of schooling" that benefits all students, but primarily students of color (Alim & Paris, 2017, p. 3). The literature in this section also highlighted the ways in which social justice approaches like service learning and student-centered classrooms positively impacted heritage Spanish students' feelings of belonging and empowerment.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of Chapter Two was to highlight the pertinent literature that aids in answering the research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?* In order to design effective curriculum for heritage Spanish students, it is crucial that I synthesize the existing literature on the experiences, assets, and identities of heritage Spanish students, social justice education and how it can be implemented in the world language classroom, and how educators have positively

impacted their heritage Spanish students by teaching with a social justice lens.

The first section of this chapter reviewed how definitions of heritage students have evolved over time. The literature evaluated in the first section highlighted how heritage students differ from each other and from L2 students due to the unique backgrounds of heritage students and their history of marginalization and discrimination. The second section of this chapter demonstrated how social justice education can be implemented in the world language classroom and asserted that teaching a world language is anything but apolitical. The third section of this chapter integrated literature on how social justice education has positively impacted heritage Spanish students in the Spanish classroom.

Chapter Three of this capstone outlines the curriculum project and provides a rationale for the relevance and necessity of this curriculum. Chapter Three also identifies the intended audience for this curriculum. Lastly, I explain how I implement best practices according to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two to design the curriculum through a social justice lens.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

When I first began teaching heritage Spanish students, a population of students that I had never worked with before, it was my responsibility to develop curriculum and seek out professional development opportunities to become more educated on how to best meet their learning needs. As I have gained experience as a heritage Spanish teacher over the past few years, I have learned a tremendous amount about who heritage Spanish students are and have shifted my views on what best practices are for ensuring heritage student success in my classroom. This shift, combined with new knowledge of social justice education and acknowledgment of widespread racism in society, has led me to develop a curriculum to answer the question *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?*

This chapter considers the rationale for implementing curriculum design based on my research question. First, I describe the curriculum as a six week unit of study on education designed to be the first unit of the year in a Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 class. Then, I explain how the paradigm Understanding by Design is utilized to begin the unit design with the unit theme, social justice takeaway understandings, and language and social justice standards. I describe how a unit template designed by Glynn et al. (2018) can be adapted and used to ensure that a social justice unit is effective and meets all of Hackman's (2005) components for social justice education. Next, I explain the setting and intended audience for the unit. I share the unit theme, social justice takeaway understandings, formative assessments, and authentic summative assessments. I also

describe the necessary steps for project completion. This curriculum design is based on the research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?* Each component of this chapter is intended to ensure that teachers who are new to social justice education can successfully implement a unit that engages their heritage Spanish students and increases their sense of agency.

Project Overview

The project is a curriculum design for a Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 class. It is a unit of study on education that is intended to be the first unit of the year. The duration of the unit is approximately six weeks. The purpose of this curriculum design is to utilize a social justice lens to empower heritage Spanish students and increase their sense of agency.

This section gave a general overview of the project. The next section explains the rationale and paradigms behind the creation of the project.

Rationale

I chose to develop a curriculum for my project because my goal is to provide other teachers who are new to social justice education with an example of how to implement each of Hackman's five components of social justice education: content mastery, tools for critical analysis, tools for social change, tools for personal reflection, and awareness of multicultural group dynamics (2005). As an undergraduate student and in some professional development settings within my district, I have found discussion of social justice and culturally sustaining pedagogy to be vague and ineffective. I intend for my unit to provide heritage Spanish teachers and other world language teachers a concrete idea of how world languages can be taught with a social justice lens. The

creation of a web page or presentation in place of a complete unit would have been insufficient in guiding teachers, and in turn students, to action.

The curriculum was written using the paradigm Understanding by Design (UbD) (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). Wiggins and McTighe argued that backward design is most effective for designing curriculum because it ensures the standards are met, it appropriately prepares students to complete the summative assessment(s), and it eliminates busy work. Curriculum created using UbD begins with identifying the desired results, then moves to determining acceptable evidence of learning, and ends with planning activities and instruction (2011). The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (2015) are implemented in the unit along with the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016). The World-Readiness Standards are divided into 5 “C” categories: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities. Many teachers and world language departments employ the use of these standards in unit design and lesson planning if their states or districts lack common world language standards, as is the case for me. These standards support the learning of a language for use beyond the classroom walls (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). The Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards are 20 standards divided into the four domains of Identity, Diversity, Justice and Action. Each standard has grade level outcomes (Teaching Tolerance, 2016). Hackman’s (2005) essential components for social justice education of content mastery, tools for critical analysis, tools for social change, tools for personal reflection, and an awareness of multicultural group dynamics serve as a guide in this unit to ensure that the curriculum design satisfies specific criteria of social justice education.

In *Words and Actions: Teaching Languages Through the Lens of Social Justice*, Glynn et al. (2018) provided insight on how to unite principles of UbD with Hackman's tools and the ACTFL and Teaching Tolerance standards. Specifically, they suggested that teachers designing new social justice units first identify a unit theme, essential questions, and social justice takeaway understandings. Social justice takeaway understandings are written as part of the unit design to determine the knowledge teachers want students to gain that will extend beyond the unit. These takeaways also guide teachers in later determining what vocabulary and grammar focuses students will need. The next step is to determine how the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards will be met and to choose the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards most relevant for the unit. The Social Justice Standards guide both teachers and students in reflecting on progress made throughout the unit and align with the social justice takeaway understandings. The incorporation of these standards into the unit supports long-term, transferable understanding emphasized by Wiggins and McTighe (2011).

Then, after unit goals are created, teachers must decide on the unit assessments. According to Glynn et al. (2018), at least one assessment should be summative and authentic. Such an assessment gives students the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge in a personal way and complete a task that they might actually perform outside of the classroom. Glynn et al. (2018) supported the use of the Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA) as the format for the authentic summative assessment. IPAs involve the three modes of communication: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006). While I do not rigidly follow the IPA format for every unit that I teach, my unit follows the basic premise of the IPA for summative assessments so

they are authentic and assess all three modes of communication. A unit design template from Glynn et al. (2018) and a lesson design template from Clementi and Terrill (2017) were adapted for the creation of my unit to satisfy components of social justice education and the implementation of an IPA.

In this section, I identified Understanding by Design as the paradigm that is implemented for the curriculum design (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). I described the recommended process for developing original curriculum according to Glynn et al. (2018), which builds on the principles of Understanding by Design and guides teachers in linking the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards with the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015; Teaching Tolerance, 2016). I explained the importance of identifying each component of Hackman's (2005) five tools for social justice education and including social justice takeaways and authentic assessments in the curriculum design. In the next section, I describe the setting for this curriculum implementation.

Setting

School Setting and Demographics

The curriculum design is intended for use in a high school in a suburb of a large city in the Midwest. The high school serves students in grades 9-12 and is one of two high schools in the district. The student population is approximately 1700 students. The demographics of the school are as follows: 58% White, 18% Black, 12% Latinx, 8% Asian, 4% two or more races, and .4% American Indian or Alaskan Native. Forty-one percent of students qualify for free or reduced lunch. The graduation rate is 94%. About 90 teachers are employed full-time in this school. Only four staff members at the school

are Latinx, which emphasizes the fact that Spanish-speaking students do not see themselves represented in the faces of adults with whom they interact on a daily basis.

Spanish for Heritage Speakers Background and Demographics

District-wide, the most common language spoken in students' homes other than English is Spanish. The heritage Spanish courses have existed in this high school for three years. Spanish for Heritage Speakers is offered first hour and Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 is offered second hour. The other high school in the district does not have a heritage Spanish program. Students from the other high school are able to enroll in the Spanish for Heritage Speakers courses and take a shuttle between the two high schools first and second hour.

Typically, enrollment in Spanish for Heritage Speakers is between 22 and 30 students. Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 has lower enrollment and has historically had 10 to 12 students. Most recently, nearly half of students enrolled in the Spanish for Heritage Speakers classes are ELLs. About one-quarter of students were born outside of the United States and 80% qualify for free or reduced lunch. Students have roots from Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, and Venezuela. Five students are registered to take the AP Spanish Language and Culture exam in May.

World Language Courses Offerings

Students are highly encouraged to take two years of the same world language course, but it is not a requirement. Students receive elective credits for world language classes. The school offers Spanish, ASL, Chinese, French, and German. The Spanish program offers Spanish 1 through Spanish 4 with an option to take Spanish 5 at the other high school in the district. Both Spanish for Heritage Speakers courses are year-long

courses and qualify as world language classes. Students receive elective credits upon passing the courses. One middle school in the district also has a Spanish for Heritage Speakers course that is offered for one semester in seventh grade and one semester in eighth grade.

In this section, I outlined the school setting and demographics of the curriculum design. I explained the current reality of students enrolled in the Spanish for Heritage Speakers program and how students in this school are encouraged to take language classes for elective credits. In the next section, I describe the intended audience of this curriculum design.

Audience

The intended audience for this project is teachers of heritage Spanish students in grades 10-12. The unit learning activities and assessments are appropriate for students who have a proficiency level of intermediate high or above, according to the ACTFL Proficiency Benchmarks (2017). If a school offers two years of heritage Spanish courses, the curriculum should be used in the second year of the course as the first unit of the year. In this way, the teacher will already have a relationship with students and know their proficiency levels. The teacher will then be able to differentiate and adapt unit materials as needed to ensure all student needs are met. The unit can still be implemented in a first-year course, but in this case, it would not be recommended as the first unit of the year. Because the teacher instructions for the curriculum are written in English, this unit could also be adapted by any world language teacher or any heritage language teacher interested in teaching through a social justice lens.

Literature on heritage Spanish students and heritage Spanish programs is becoming more and more widespread. However, it can still be difficult to find a curriculum with a social justice lens specifically for heritage Spanish students. It is not uncommon for schools with heritage Spanish programs to only have one teacher for the program. Speaking from experience, it is overwhelming and isolating being a new heritage Spanish teacher without the time or resources to attend professional development opportunities and create a quality curriculum from scratch. It can be tempting to find a textbook to rely on. Nonetheless, using a textbook is not the best method of engaging heritage Spanish students, and can in fact be a harmful practice, as was demonstrated in the literature review of Chapter Two (Irizarry, 2017; Leeman & Martínez, 2007; MacGregor-Mendoza, 2020; Parra, 2017). Furthermore, textbooks are expensive and become obsolete rather quickly. By creating a six week unit on education for heritage Spanish students designed with a social justice lens, I hope to provide heritage Spanish teachers and other teachers interested in social justice with a starting point that can be implemented for years to come.

Before utilizing this curriculum, it is necessary that every teacher undergo Hackman's tool of personal reflection (2005). Teachers, especially white teachers like myself who are teaching a language that is not their own, must examine how their own biases may come into play and be prepared to have their identities and perspectives challenged by students.

In this section, I clarified the intended audience for this curriculum design and emphasized the importance of undergoing personal reflection before implementing the curriculum. In the next section, I describe specific components of the curriculum design.

Project Description

This curriculum design is a unit of study on education. The essential questions are: *How do injustice and inequity exist in education systems? How can we combat these issues?* This unit is intended to be the first unit of the year in a Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2 course after a week of community-building activities. Since this is the first complete unit I have designed using a social justice lens, I created it for the second year of the heritage program instead of the first year of the program. By the second year of the course, there is a strong sense of community and trust in the classroom, which is essential for meeting Hackman's tool of awareness of multicultural group dynamics (2005).

The social justice takeaway understandings for this six week unit are: *1. Education systems favor privileged groups and further the oppression of marginalized groups. 2. Just because a policy has been in place for a long time does not mean it should not change. 3. As individuals and as a group, we have the responsibility to stand up to injustice.* The social justice standards addressed in this unit are as follows: *Justice 12. Students will recognize unfairness on the individual level (e.g., biased speech) and injustice at the institutional or systemic level (e.g., discrimination). Justice 13. Students will analyze the harmful impact of bias and injustice on the world, historically and today. Justice 15. Students will identify figures, groups, events and a variety of strategies and philosophies relevant to the history of social justice around the world. Action 17. Students will recognize their own responsibility to stand up to exclusion, prejudice and injustice* (Teaching Tolerance, 2016).

The unit plan details formative assessments and learning activities that prepare students for the summative assessments. These formative assessments and learning

activities include weekly journal responses, an analysis of historical events related to the Latinx educational experience, small and whole-group discussions, reflection on individual educational experiences, comparison of education systems around the world, and analysis of education policies. Students engage in activities to practice all three modes of communication throughout the unit: interpretive, interpersonal, and presentational.

One of two presentational summative assessments in the unit is an investigative project in which students research an event related to discrimination against Latinx students in education systems and give a presentation that includes connections to social justice themes and an activity so classmates can dive deeper into the topic. This presentation satisfies Justice Standards 13 and 15. To follow the format of an IPA, students complete an interpretive reading assessment on an opinion article about how education can eliminate racism. This assessment satisfies Justice Standard 12. Then, students complete an interpersonal speaking assessment in which they discuss in pairs what they would do and how they would respond in five scenarios related to social justice issues. This assessment satisfies Justice Standard 12 and Action Standard 17. The culminating summative assessment is the authentic presentational assessment. At the end of the unit, students create a visual presentation advocating for the changing of a current policy or the implementation of a new policy related to education. The visual presentation is accompanied by a one to two page essay, which includes a section in which students reflect on how their attitudes toward policy and activism have changed, how they have come to view their sense of agency and their ability to promote change in the world, and

how the project impacts their life as students and leaders. This assessment satisfies Justice Standards 12 and 13 and Action Standard 17.

In order for me to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum as a whole, students complete weekly journal exercises and self-assess their progress on unit objectives and social justice standards throughout the unit. By the end of the unit, each student should be able to complete each learning objective at a 3 or 4 on a 4-3-2-1-0 scale. Student feedback, reflections, and self-assessments aid in answering the research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?*

The unit contains an overview, a unit calendar, an explanation of how the unit satisfies all five of Hackman's (2005) components for social justice education, daily lesson plans, materials, assessments, and grading rubrics for six weeks of study. Because I implemented Understanding by Design to develop this curriculum, the assessments and evaluation rubrics were created first (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). These are highlighted in the beginning of the unit overview to properly lay the foundation for the unit as a whole. The purpose of this unit is to combine best practices for implementing social justice in the heritage Spanish classroom to introduce students to elements of social justice and awaken them to the power they hold to advocate for change.

In this section, I explained the unit theme, essential questions, and social justice takeaway understandings, and relevant social justice standards for my curriculum design. I described formative assessments that incorporate all three forms of communication to prepare students for summative assessments. I introduced the summative assessments that follow the format of an IPA. I discussed how elements of one of the presentational summative assessments, student journal responses, student self-assessments, and student

feedback guide me in answering the research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?* In the next section, I provide a timeline for this project.

Project Timeline

The timeline for the creation of this project was twelve weeks. Because I have taught a unit on education in the past, the first few weeks of my work were devoted to compiling existing resources. Then I spent two weeks developing the unit overview template, which includes information on the unit theme, essential questions, social justice takeaway understandings, goals, standards, summative assessments, formative assessments, and daily learning activities. During this time I refined the summative assessments and corresponding evaluation rubrics. The rubrics include social justice components recommended by Glynn et al. (2018). The unit overview was designed using a template from Glynn et al. (2018). From there, I created a unit calendar and adapted a daily lesson template from Clementi and Terrill (2017) to ensure that any teacher who implements this curriculum in their classroom can easily understand the pacing and flow of the unit as a whole. Approximately five weeks were dedicated to creating the teacher instructional plans and supporting materials for each daily lesson of the unit. I utilized the last week of the project timeline to meet with my content expert and make final revisions to the presentation of the curriculum.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Three explained the rationale for curriculum design based on the research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?* I described the paradigms implemented to design a six week unit on education.

I also illustrated how and why this unit design begins with determining the unit essential question, social justice takeaway understandings, appropriate ACTFL World-Readiness Standards and Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards for the unit. I described the unit essential questions, social justice takeaway understandings, relevant social justice standards, key formative assessments, and summative assessments for the unit. I outlined the setting and intended audience for this curriculum and laid out the timeline for the unit of study. In the next chapter, I reflect on what I have learned through the capstone process and review the literature pertinent to the curriculum design process.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Introduction

In the last couple years, I have felt increasingly unsatisfied with the curriculum for the Spanish for Heritage Speakers program at the high school where I teach. I knew I needed to make changes to my units of study to increase student engagement and better meet the needs of my diverse students. I want my students to leave the classroom feeling proud of their identities and empowered to be responsible, active, and compassionate citizens. After listening to this sense of dissatisfaction and attending unique professional development opportunities, I arrived at the research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?*

In this chapter, I reflect on my learnings from the capstone project, particularly in connection to a disconnect I discovered between how I teach heritage Spanish students and how I teach Spanish 2 students. I revisit the literature review and the importance of the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016) and Hackman's (2005) essential components for social justice education to my capstone project. I discuss implications and limitations of the project. I describe future projects, including a plan to transform my entire heritage Spanish curriculum using a social justice lens. Finally, I explain plans for communicating results and how the project is a benefit to the profession.

Learnings from the Capstone Process

I have learned an invaluable amount about myself as a learner and teacher and about social justice education by completing this capstone. I learned how to bridge the disconnect between teaching heritage Spanish students and teaching L2 learners in a way

that benefits all. I came to a deeper understanding of the tenets of social justice education and how to put these into practice in the context of a world language classroom. Above all, I was reminded of the importance of staying curious, reflective, and open to change as I progress in my teaching career.

I have spent the past three years teaching Spanish for Heritage Speakers 1 and 2 in the morning and Spanish 2 in the afternoon. These are very different student populations and I took very different approaches to teaching these courses. By completing this capstone project, I realized that there are certain materials and activities I use with Spanish 2 students that my heritage Spanish students would also benefit from, and vice versa. In the past, I only implemented the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (2015) and the use of weekly self-assessments in my lesson plans for Spanish 2. I began using Integrated Performance Assessments (IPAs) (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006) with my Spanish 2 courses in the last year, but had never tried assessing my heritage Spanish students in this way. By taking the time to thoughtfully and intentionally create my six week unit for this project, I realized that these are two practices that would benefit my heritage Spanish students by helping them take more responsibility for their learning and providing them with cohesive assessments that focus on all three modes of communication.

Because I collaborate with three other teachers in my district to create each unit of study for Spanish 2, each unit is planned using the paradigm Understanding by Design (UbD) (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). As Wiggins and McTighe suggested, we use backward design to determine the desired end results of each unit, then design summative assessments, and finally create the daily lesson plans. I always intend to use UbD when

developing units for the Spanish for Heritage Speakers program, but being the only teacher of these two courses while teaching an additional third course has sometimes resulted in last-minute planning. Designing my unit unhurriedly and purposefully using UbD for my capstone project made me realize that my dissatisfaction from units I previously taught my heritage Spanish students was likely due to the fact that the unit assessments and learning activities were disconnected and unorganized. Inversely, deepening my understanding of what social justice education looks like in the world language classroom has inspired me to rethink how I can use content-based instruction with a social justice lens in my Spanish 2 classes, instead of over-relying on using vocabulary and grammar instruction as the basis of each unit.

I have long been curious about social justice education, but prior to attending a week-long professional development course and completing my capstone project, my understanding of social justice in practice was vague. Now I have a deep understanding of Hackman's (2005) essential components for social justice education and the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016). I feel confident moving forward in adapting other units to teach Spanish through a social justice lens. As I created my six week unit of study throughout the semester, I came to understand that one truth about being a social justice teacher is that it can be uncomfortable and time-consuming work. As I create more units with a social justice lens, I trust that I will get more efficient in giving feedback. Nevertheless, in the present moment I have to acknowledge that taking on this kind of work is not for the teacher who wants to work bell to bell and leave everything at school at the end of the day. However, I see immense pay-off in creating thoughtful, longer units that can stand the test of time better than shorter units that fail to provide

students with deep learning. More importantly, engaging in this work has revitalized my pride in my career and my dedication to being a reflective teacher.

In this section, I described my learnings from the capstone process. I explained connections I made between teaching heritage Spanish students and teaching Spanish 2 students. I reflected on the importance of implementing UbD for each unit I teach. Finally, I described my learnings about being a social justice educator, not only related to aspects of curriculum design but also in regard to the dedication, time, and reward involved in this commitment. In the next section, I revisit the literature review and reflect on the most impactful sources for the creation of my capstone project and the answering of my research question.

Revisiting the Literature Review

The research I conducted on heritage speaker identities and experiences was critical to reaffirm the importance of using student-centered practices that honor the uniqueness of each student. Nevertheless, I found my research on incorporating the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016) and Hackman's (2005) essential components for social justice education to be most vital in the creation of my six week unit of study.

Social Justice Standards

As someone who had never before designed a complete unit of study using a social justice lens, I found the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards to be indispensable. These standards are divided into four domains: Identity, Diversity, Justice, and Action. Within each domain, there are five key standards. Along with the 20 standards, there are grade level outcomes and scenarios for four different age groups.

Teaching Tolerance also provides all of this information in Spanish (2016). I was able to review the standards, decide which ones were most relevant to my unit of study, and combine these standards with the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards (The National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015) for the creation of my unit overview. Because the outcomes for each standard are written in student-friendly language, I seamlessly added them to the can-do statements document that students use on a weekly basis throughout the unit to self-assess on their growth. I also connected each summative assessment of the unit to the relevant Social Justice Standards. In this way, social justice is always at the forefront of my work. I will be returning to these standards as I continue to adapt other units and I encourage any teacher interested in social justice to explore this resource as a starting point.

Components for Social Justice Education

Hackman's essential components for social justice education are content mastery, tools for critical analysis, tools for social change, tools for personal reflection, and an awareness of multicultural group dynamics (2005). I had never implemented these components intentionally in my units of study. I quickly realized the value and necessity of incorporating each of these tools in my unit. Because my unit highlights specific and multiple learning activities and assessments that satisfy each of the five components, I am confident that my unit does in fact satisfy the necessary requirements of a social justice unit.

Two of the five tools that were of particular importance during the creation of my project were tools for critical analysis and tools for personal reflection (Hackman, 2005). In my six years as an educator, I know I have not provided my students with sufficient

opportunities to ask *how* and *why* questions nor consider multiple perspectives. For a class of heritage Spanish students taught by a white, non-heritage Spanish speaker, it is essential that students are encouraged to see viewpoints besides the dominant one. Without intentional focus on implementing tools for critical analysis, any unit that I create fails to fully represent a social justice lens.

Learning about tools for personal reflection (Hackman, 2005) for teachers and learners alike challenged me to rededicate myself to being a reflective educator. It was uncomfortable at times during the unit creation process to ask myself if I was choosing an activity or text because it lined up with my viewpoints or if I was choosing it because I thought it would serve my students well. It is difficult but necessary to consider how the ways in which I attempt to create a safe classroom space for *all* can actually result in only choosing a safe space for *me*. Prior to the capstone process, I had not regularly implemented meaningful journal exercises with my heritage Spanish students. I anticipate it will be immensely beneficial to write my own responses and engage with student responses throughout the unit as a means to help me answer my research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?*

In this section, I reflected on how the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016) and Hackman's (2005) essential components for social justice education informed my capstone project. The next section discusses the implications of the project.

Implications

While my capstone project is intended for use with a second-year Spanish for Heritage Speakers course, it could be adapted for use by any teacher interested in social justice, ranging from heritage teachers of other languages to social studies or English

teachers. I wrote the teacher instructions and provided translations of some of the unit materials in English for this very reason; my intention is that my project reaches as wide an audience as possible.

Many world language departments at the secondary level rely on textbooks to guide grammatical and vocabulary instruction. The department at my own school is beginning to look elsewhere for curriculum inspiration. My project could inspire a transformation not only in how heritage Spanish is taught, but how any world language is taught. By using the framework outlined in my unit of study, world language departments could refocus their programs on content-based instruction through a social justice lens. Perhaps world language departments might even begin to regularly incorporate the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016) in each of their units to inspire students to be responsive, respectful, caring, and empowered citizens inside the classroom and beyond.

In this section, I explained the possible implications of my project. In the next section, I describe limitations.

Limitations

Although the students in the Spanish for Heritage Speakers program at my school self-select, meaning there is no entrance exam they must pass to be able to enroll in the courses, there is a general expectation that students have a proficiency level of intermediate high or above by the time they enroll in Spanish for Heritage Speakers 2. My capstone project, therefore, is designed for students at this level. The unit is intended for use in the second year of the program so that teachers, including myself, will be familiar with student proficiency levels by the time the unit is implemented. If students

are not at a level of intermediate high, some texts and activities may need to be adapted. Alternatively, more scaffolds could be provided to these students.

Another potential limitation is that the unit includes a small number of texts in English. If English Language Learners (ELLs) are enrolled in the heritage courses, these texts may not be accessible to them. The texts in English have thus far been appropriate for the students in the Spanish for Heritage Speakers program at my school. It is essential that teachers understand student strengths and needs before implementing this unit. I must add that using English texts and allowing students to write and speak in English at times in a heritage language course is not a limitation nor something to be considered problematic, but rather it is a celebration of students' multilingualism.

One final limitation of this project is that I will not implement it in its entirety until the following school year. I do not have evidence of student feedback, reflections, and self-assessments to aid in answering the research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?*

In this section I outlined potential limitations of this project, including the use of texts that may need to be adapted and a current lack of evidence in answering my research question. In the next section, I describe future projects.

Future Projects

This project focuses on a unit of study on education systems for use in the second year of a Spanish for Heritage Speakers program. Future projects include the creation of units of study on other topics. I plan to use my capstone project as a model to transform every unit that I teach my heritage Spanish students to be through a social justice lens. In the past, I have created shorter units that are not as meaningful as I would like them to be.

I envision designing units of four weeks and beyond that satisfy all of Hackman's (2005) essential components and can be used for years to come. At the same time, I now feel comfortable enough with Hackman's components and the Teaching Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016) to begin adapting existing units for the Spanish 2 courses I teach so that they are also taught using a social justice lens.

When I teach the unit on education systems in the following school year, I will use student feedback, reflections, and self-assessments to aid in answering the research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?* I have taught a unit on education systems the past two years, but it was not done purposefully through a social justice lens. I plan to use data from the past, including student grades and notes to myself in my lesson plans, to compare the success of the unit and student progress. While this is not a strict research project, I anticipate that this comparison will be beneficial in determining changes that need to be made and/or practices that I must continue in order to best serve my students.

In this section, I expressed future projects for myself and other teachers to expand unit design and implementation using a social justice lens. The following section outlines how I will communicate the results of this project.

Communicating Results

The unit of study will be shared with other Spanish teachers in my district as we begin revamping our curriculum in the summer of 2021. Our goal is to have better alignment across the different levels of our program and to eliminate the use of outdated textbooks in favor of more content-based approaches. I will also share my project with the teachers who participated in the same professional development courses as me on

teaching heritage language learners and teaching through a social justice lens. I am a member of online communities for heritage Spanish teachers and Spanish teachers across the country and plan to share my project with these communities. I have gotten wonderful ideas from other teachers who have shared their work via online platforms and I hope that my project can be useful for anyone interested in social justice, particularly anyone just beginning this work and lacking a strong in-person collaborative community.

This section explained how I plan to communicate results. The next section discusses how this project is a benefit to the profession.

Benefits to the Profession

Studying the effectiveness of social justice curriculum in a world language classroom setting is a new concept (Glynn et al., 2019; Osborn, 2006). It is not uncommon for heritage language teachers to lack a collaborative teaching environment (Draper & Hicks, 2000), and teachers have admitted that finding time to devote to teaching through a social justice lens can be incredibly challenging (Glynn et al., 2019). I hope that my research and six week unit of study can serve as an example for any teacher interested in beginning the work of teaching through a social justice lens. Teachers of high school heritage Spanish students can immediately implement the unit of study. As they get comfortable with the tenets and commitments of teaching through a social justice lens, they can begin to adapt existing units and learning activities.

Research has shown that social justice education positively impacts heritage Spanish students' engagement, sense of agency, and feelings of empowerment (Glynn et al., 2019; Helmer, 2013; Irizarry, 2017). Teaching through a social justice lens demands high levels of personal reflection from students and teachers alike (Glynn et al., 2018;

Hackman, 2005). I firmly believe that implementation of my unit of study and of other units of study using a social justice lens has the power to transform everyone in the classroom as teachers and learners. Classroom spaces have the potential to become tight-knit communities in which there is a strong sense of mutual respect and in which all voices are heard and honored.

Chapter Summary

Chapter Four summarized and considered the process of creating a six week unit of study to answer the research question: *How does teaching through a social justice lens impact heritage Spanish students?* I analyzed the ways in which I have grown as a learner and teacher by creating this project. I realized how essential it is for teachers interested in social justice to have a guide in the form of the Tolerance Social Justice Standards (2016) and Hackman's (2005) essential components for social justice education. While my project is ready for use in a heritage Spanish course for students with proficiency levels of intermediate high or above, my hope is that it can serve as an example for any teacher who wants to use a social justice lens.

Teaching through a social justice lens is difficult, uncomfortable, and at times isolating work. However, creating my first unit of study entirely through a social justice lens has been one of the most meaningful and empowering experiences of my teaching career thus far. I am prepared to continue transforming my curriculum using a social justice lens to ensure that my heritage Spanish students have the most equitable and affirming learning experience possible. They deserve nothing less.

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