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## Using an Interactive Word Wall to Increase Spanish Language Acquisition for Urban Middle School Learners

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Using an Interactive Word Wall to Increase Spanish Language Acquisition for Urban  
Middle School Learners

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in Education.

Hamline University

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## Chapter One: Introduction

### Overview

Learning a second language is a valuable skill to add to any student's education. Lin et al. (2015) describe the ways in which learning a language can decrease learning anxiety, and Williams (2018) shows how learning can be engaging and project-based within world language classrooms. As with any subject, there are many ways and theories in which second languages are taught. Many teachers in the United States have taught second languages focusing on grammar, writing, and the language itself, rather than conversation and putting the language to use. Linguist Stephen Krashen (1989) has shifted this mindset into focusing on comprehensible input as a way to teach a second language. He also focuses on the need to lower students' affective filter and lower stress and anxiety levels in order for learning to occur. Using Krashen's theories in combination with best practices on teaching vocabulary outlined by Jackson et al. (2017), Lesaux et al. (2012), and Coppens (2018), this research and project will aim to pursue an engaging and interactive world language classroom as Hammond (2015) and Hollie (2018) outline, characterized by a supportive environment with high expectations.

My capstone project and research are focused on answering the question: *What are the ways in which interaction, collaboration, and dialogue impact students' Spanish language acquisition?* More specifically, my research and project will aim to answer: *How can an interactive word wall affect Spanish language acquisition in an urban classroom?* In my seven years as a Spanish teacher, I have encountered many strategies for teaching, engaging students, vocabulary instruction, and general language acquisition. In my classroom filled with diverse learners in an urban city setting, with English as the

primary language for teaching, I am challenged by meeting the needs of my students from various backgrounds and levels of literacy development. Therefore, I consider teaching strategies that will engage all my students in learning Spanish. I consider my own journey toward learning the Spanish language and what strategies helped me as a student and guided me toward proficiency in my second language.

Just before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I began exploring the idea of a word wall in the middle school Spanish classroom, only to be interrupted by schools closing for the next year. As schools have been back in session for the past year, the focus has shifted to social emotional learning, with the Spanish language acquisition falling to the side. What if the two of these can be combined? If the word wall idea becomes interactive, meaning that the words are not simply stuck on the wall, but that they come alive in the classroom through activities, games, collaboration, and conversation, then all students' needs can be met through the variety of differentiated activities that can be done using the interactive word wall.

The remainder of this chapter will delve deeper into my personal and professional rationale regarding this topic of research. It will explore the experiences I have had surrounding this research question, as well as the expected benefits and significance that this research can bring to the field of Spanish language acquisition. This chapter will end with a summary and expected outcome from this research and project, as well as a connection to current published research concerning this topic of study.

### **Personal Rationale**

I began learning Spanish as a white female in a suburban middle school in the United States, and now am a white female teacher of the Spanish language and culture in

a school located in a diverse city setting with students who are multilingual, but the language of instruction in school is English. Though my first language is English, I was always very interested in learning the Spanish language because I loved friendship. Knowing a new language would help me make more friends with people who I otherwise would be unable to communicate with! However, I was not at all an advanced reader or writer. I relied on the vocabulary instruction, learning how to put together sentences in concrete ways, and paying careful attention to examples. I quickly learned that reading and listening, the receptive parts of learning a new language, came easier than speaking and writing, the productive parts of learning a new language. I never experienced learning with a word wall, except in lower elementary grades in my reading classroom. The idea of using high frequency words in the classroom in interactive, engaging, and collaborative ways appeals to all types of learners and learning styles. I was a very introverted person, but having examples and routine activities would give me a sense of structure and ease in order to begin using the language in productive ways. On the contrary, students who are naturally extroverted leaders may thrive using an interactive word wall. Students who are higher achieving will find ways to extend their learning, and students who are struggling with learning Spanish will find ways in which they can access this new vocabulary in manageable ways. Because of my passion for learning and teaching Spanish, I have become more and more passionate about finding ways to make learning Spanish accessible to every type of learner who walks into my classroom.

Personally, I am a learner who appreciates visuals, music, and organization. I was always quiet and an independent learner, so collaborative activities were challenging to me. Learning the Spanish language is where I first began to experience collaboration in a



classroom, and the more I worked with others, the more comfortable it became! Since my language skills were limited as a beginner, it made the collaborative speaking activities more manageable because there was only so much conversation I could produce. In reflecting on my learning style, I think having directed conversations and utilizing a word wall as guidance with sentence starters could be a huge motivating factor for students who struggle with reading, collaboration, or even with staying on task. Adding visuals for students who need aid in comprehending and making meaning of these words and phrases would be an added bonus. The more ways in which students can make meaning as they learn a new language, the better.

Keeping in mind my own learning preferences and background, having grown up in a predominantly white suburban area, I have always been passionate about learning and pushing myself to grow as an individual and teacher. My experience as a student in school is much different than my students' experiences currently in their urban classroom. My education was individualistic, independent, and most of the time, I learned on my own. The classroom environment seemed competitive. Now, as a teacher, my students are eager to share, work in groups, discuss their lives, and participate as a class and with one another. Learning is a team effort. My diverse group of students are much more collaborative and conversational than I ever was as a student, pushing me as a teacher to stray from what I am familiar with to grow toward what I know will serve my students better.

### **Professional Rationale**

Professionally, as a middle school educator, I have encountered students at many different levels: dependent and independent learners, striving and fluent readers, students

who have experienced various forms of trauma and students who are resilient, often the same students, students who show up as introverted, and students who show up as extroverted. Dependent learners are typically students who need more guidance and support in the classroom, while independent learners are ready to apply their learning on their own. Striving readers are constantly trying their best yet may be at a lower level, while fluent readers are independent in their reading without needing to pause for direction. Demographically, 45% of the students I serve identify as African American, 24% identify as White, 14% identify as Asian, 9% identify as Hispanic, and 1% identify as American Indian. 10% of my students use special education services, 65% qualify for free and reduced lunch, and 11% are English language learners. Students are at many different levels in their learning, and in reflecting on my practice, I have noticed that I am challenged to meet the needs of all my students. I cannot simply take what worked for me as a white suburban student and apply it to my classroom. I must push myself as a teacher to learn new strategies and try new teaching styles.

I found myself focusing on vocabulary and comparing English and Spanish, but falling short when I serve students whose first language is not English or students who are striving readers in English. I tried focusing on storytelling, but again, my striving readers continued to struggle and readers who excelled did not always find reading in a new language as interesting. Dr. Sharroky Hollie is an author and educator who focuses his work on cultural responsiveness. When discussing the ideal form of vocabulary instruction, Hollie (2018) claims, “Notably, the overarching goal of vocabulary instruction is for the student to *own* the word, not merely to memorize a definition for it” (p. 124). I believe this is true because I notice that when students learn the word, work

with it, establish their own working definition and use it, they then begin to own the word and it becomes part of their vocabulary.

Dr. Hollie focuses on the idea of validating, affirming, building and bridging knowledge in the urban classroom. We must validate and affirm where students are at in order to build and bridge their knowledge to the next level. When discussing vocabulary instruction as it relates to language acquisition, Hollie (2018) asserts, “Reinforcement and practice are essential because students are internalizing new words by making connections and expanding their conceptual understandings” (p. 133). Dr. Hollie is someone who I respect very highly and who I look toward in order to model my classroom and core beliefs as an educator. As an urban educator, I believe in validating, affirming, building, and bridging, and work to practice this as a Spanish teacher aligns with those core beliefs.

As a middle school educator, I know that middle school is a time in which students have high social and emotional needs, and I believe my classroom can help to meet some of those needs. Through interaction, collaboration, and dialogue, students can build on their learning of ways to be social in an academic setting. An interactive word wall can help to provide students with a structure in order to ground their conversations. Especially when beginning to learn a new language, students need to dialogue in an organized way because they do not have enough vocabulary to speak about every topic they would in their first language. By providing systems, sentence starters, and methods of dialoguing, students can be validated and affirmed in their social needs, while I can also provide structures to build and bridge their learning into productive academic dialogue. An added benefit is that these systems and structures help support students who

may have anxieties surrounding collaboration with others, as they learn to have conversations that are grounded in a specific topic. Without the openness of a non-academic conversation, students can learn to have structured dialogue in a way that is collaborative and meets their needs to help them grow in their social and emotional skills.

As students grow accustomed to the practices of dialogue, conversation, and collaboration as it relates to Spanish language acquisition, I believe these strategies will transfer to their other academic content areas, and to their social lives as well. As a middle school educator, it is my belief that helping students grow in their social and emotional skills is as important as teaching them the content of Spanish. As students acquire the language, they will also acquire the skills needed to be social and emotional people in today's world, complete with collaboration skills, conversation techniques, and the ability to engage in meaningful dialogue.

### **Benefits and Significance**

This research surrounding the ways in which interaction, collaboration, and dialogue impact students' Spanish language acquisition will benefit students, families, colleagues, and policymakers. Pierce and Cole (2018) discuss how collaboration can be taught in sustainable ways, while Loyola (2016) urges discussion within language classrooms. Burns (2016) goes on to describe how collaboration can and needs to be deepened among students. This research will not only be put to good use in my classroom, but it will also be able to transfer information, skills, and activities into the lives of students, their home lives, their other classes and content areas, and into the

hands of policymakers in the field of education. Education should be about collaboration and bringing the community together in ways that are beneficial and supportive to all.

This research is significant to students because they will learn collaboratively in ways that benefit the society that they live in. It is increasingly important for students to graduate with skills outside of their degree in order to collaborate effectively in their workplace (Burns, 2016). If they begin to learn these strategies through structures in place beginning in middle school, and ideally younger, they will have coveted skills in order to become valued members of society. Not only will this research guide social skills for students, but it will also prove that these skills aid in Spanish language acquisition in my classroom (Spathis, 2020). Having proficiency in another language is an added skill that is becoming more and more important in workplaces today. Language learning will become fun and accessible for students with an interactive word wall guiding structured dialogue and collaboration in order for urban learners to be successful as they bridge their social needs toward academic conversation.

Families benefit from this research as students' skills will transfer to home. Students will come home with activities that can be accomplished at home. Families can have conversations guided by these collaborative structures in order to support their students' learning at home. As an urban educator, my experience is that families are highly supportive of their children's learning, and are seeking guidance in how to best support at home. With structured yet accessible techniques for families to utilize at home, communities of learners can come together. When these structures can be applied across content areas in order to guide conversations and dialogue surrounding academic contexts, students can thrive!

Colleagues will find this research significant because it can be applied to their content areas as well (Yates et al, 2010). Academic and content-specific vocabulary exist in every subject area. Therefore, this research will be beneficial to colleagues of all disciplines whether to solve word problems, organize units of study within science content, or even to identify parts of speech in the English/Language Arts classroom (Yates et al., 2010, p. 32-34). When similarities exist among all content areas, students will begin to acknowledge certain structures and expectations for learning, and therefore, their learning will transfer across disciplines as they apply social learning strategies in each of their classes. The same theories of language acquisition that exist for the Spanish language will also be true for the English language, science content vocabulary, or any other content and class with specific academic vocabulary (Shanahan, 2019). Utilizing an interactive word wall aligned with discussion and dialogue protocols will help students to have productive academic conversations in and out of the classroom.

Last but not least, policy makers in the field of education will benefit from this research topic. Not only is this research beneficial to students, families, and colleagues, it is beneficial to community members and policymakers who are looking to have collaborative and skilled future workers and leaders. This work is culturally relevant and works to build upon the skills students come to school with, and bridge their skills to the next level of becoming contributing members of society (Hollie, 2018). Policy makers can count on this research being essential, equitable, and exciting for all educators and students alike as they experience collaboration techniques that take academic vocabulary use to the next level.

## Summary

Overall, this research will prove to be an important asset to all members of the education community as this research looks to answer the question: *What are the ways in which interaction, collaboration, and dialogue impact students' Spanish language acquisition?* In addition, this research will look at how an interactive word wall can affect Spanish language acquisition in an urban classroom. Because of my own personal and professional experiences, I am learning that students, families, educators, community members, and policymakers connected to the urban classroom will find this research to be valuable. Students of every background and skill level will be able to access the skills of interaction, collaboration, and dialogue and these skills will begin to advance their language acquisition skills in the Spanish language classroom, as well as have potential to transform their learning in all other content areas. When the focus is on social and emotional skills paired with language acquisition, students will be supported in their development.

Utilizing this background knowledge, the next section of this capstone will explore current research and literature surrounding the topics of language acquisition, vocabulary instruction, middle school learners in the urban classroom, as well as interaction, dialogue and collaboration. This literature review will focus on how learners at various levels in their development in the urban classroom can benefit from these skills and strategies to help develop and build their own language acquisition. By exploring current research, the interactive word wall which will be created as a project in connection to this capstone research, will come to life as the research supports the collaborative structures and activities that can be created using an interactive word wall.

In the end, the needs of students will be met through this research by utilizing strategies that can turn into foundational structures and strategies present in the classrooms of learners who are seeking social and collaborative learning opportunities in a society that is increasingly reliant upon collaborative productiveness.



## Chapter Two: Literature Review

### Introduction

In the context of the United States, the population of people who are multilingual is growing year by year. According to Heavy (2013), “Some 60.6 million people, or nearly one in five people in the United States aged 5 or older, spoke a language other than English at home in 2011... That is up from 23 million in 1980, or almost one in 11.” She continues to state that over the past three decades, the number has risen 158 percent, and the population has only grown 38 percent (Heavy, 2013). Because of this, it is increasingly important for English-speaking students to have access to authentic multilingual resources in school. Specifically, Spanish is the language with the second largest population of native speakers in the world (Thompson, 2021). In the context of the United States, there is a growing population of Spanish speakers, which makes it a very valuable language to learn. Therefore, the skill of knowing and speaking Spanish will allow people to collaborate and integrate themselves within this world.

For the purpose of this capstone paper and project, the student population discussed is in the United States, learning Spanish as an acquired language. These are middle school students ages 11-14 in which English may or may not be their first language, but it is the language of instruction at school. Teachers in these contexts could benefit greatly from using interactive word walls in order to prepare students with vast vocabulary knowledge. It is important that teachers are considering a world in which we are preparing students for jobs that may not currently exist. Knowing a language such as Spanish in a world that seems to be able to “google” anything and know it, is a skill that is not simply known and acquired by searching online. Middle school students are

curious, social, and seeking belonging (Hollie, 2018) while navigating a world that seems to have stopped beneath them due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Teachers must be providing students with skills necessary to have collaborative conversations and productive dialogue with their peers (Hammond, 2015). These are skills that will be able to transfer into any classroom, and in their life beyond the classroom. Being able to have those communication and collaboration skills while acquiring the Spanish language is an ability that will set students apart within the United States, a country in which there are many languages spoken other than English.

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) put out proficiency guidelines for what students should be able to do in each level of their language acquisition journey, including as novice learners (2017). There are interpretive, interpersonal, presentational, and intercultural communication skills that students will come away with as a result of learning Spanish. Through authentic texts, conversations, and discussions, students will begin to build and grow these skills that will stay with them throughout their lives. Spanish language acquisition must be done in a way that students are provided with comprehensible input, which in turn will allow them to acquire the vocabulary and language skills necessary to have these communicative skills (Krashen, 1989).

As students build and acquire Spanish vocabulary in the classroom, so too will they begin to acquire the Spanish language. Through experiencing vocabulary instruction in a variety of methods and exposures as well as actively participating in learning activities, students will feel a sense of belonging that they seek as middle school students. As Lin et al. (2015) mention when describing Krashen's affective filter hypothesis,

“When negative feelings such as fear and shyness are at a low level, learning efficiency increases and vice versa” (p. 729). As their affective filter decreases, their self-confidence and self-efficacy will increase, and they will feel success in the language learning process. With comprehensible input along the way, students will then begin to interact, have dialogue, and collaborate in a way that is normed and supported in school. The process of acquiring a language is so important in the 21st century and students must feel validated and encouraged in their language acquisition journey.

In Chapter One, the context of this research was discussed and examples were shared of the importance of this study and project. In Chapter Two, current research will be shared and synthesized in order to provide a greater understanding to the research question: *What are the ways in which interaction, collaboration, and dialogue impact students' Spanish language acquisition?* By reviewing literature related to this research question, readers will also be given greater context to the secondary research question: *How can an interactive word wall affect Spanish language acquisition in an urban classroom?* Areas of research covered will include Spanish language acquisition, vocabulary instruction, middle school learners in the urban classroom, and finally, interaction, dialogue, and collaboration. In considering definitions and importance of each of these topics, paired with implications to Spanish language acquisition, research will prove that a connecting point between these topics, in order to build skills among middle school learners, will be an interactive word wall.

### **Spanish Language Acquisition: Defined & Importance**

Spanish language acquisition is the process of learning and acquiring the Spanish language. This is done through the four modalities of language learning. There are two

receptive modalities of reading and listening, and two productive modalities of writing and speaking. Through the process of acquiring a language, students move through levels of proficiency. The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has laid out proficiency guidelines for novice language learners and what they can do to learn and progress throughout the journey of learning a language. This section will outline what Spanish language acquisition is, what acquisition means at a novice level in a middle school classroom, and the best ways to engage novice language learners in their learning. Spanish language acquisition is most effective when it can be student centered, taught in the target language, interactive, and experiential.

### ***Definition of Spanish Language Acquisition***

Stephen Krashen, an American linguist and leading educational researcher, proposed the input hypothesis which means people acquire language by understanding stories, messages, and sentences (Krashen, 1989). Krashen (1989) recognizes that there are two main competitors to his input hypothesis. The skill-building hypothesis claims that language is learned by explicit instruction of the rules of the language, and through practice and repetition; the language is acquired because it becomes automatic. The other competing hypothesis is the output hypothesis. This theory suggests that when language is attempted, through natural consequences of success or failure in others' understanding of the attempted language produced, acquisition is confirmed or altered. Input hypothesis claims that with more input, comes more acquisition. This also aids in building vocabulary because with more comprehensible input, there is more learned vocabulary.

Many linguists and language teachers have begun utilizing the input hypothesis in their teaching strategies. Specifically, the input hypothesis has been taken one step further

into the 'i+1' hypothesis. Payne (2011) paraphrases Krashen when explaining that the 'i+1' hypothesis of language learning is for the aim of the teacher to push students beyond their current knowledge of the language. By providing more input to students, this raises their understanding enough to push them to the next level (Payne, 2011). If teachers are constantly informing their instruction through feedback loops with students, they can constantly be adding more language learning beyond their students' current understanding in order to provide them with enough comprehensible input to increase their acquisition.

### ***Importance of Acquisition***

Language acquisition is the goal and the aim of any language classroom. Krashen (1989) suggests that acquiring a language can occur without learning all the rules and details. His input hypothesis predicts that language input leads to more language acquisition and production. This theory proves that interaction and dialogue with a language is what allows students to begin acquiring the language. By first receiving input of the language, students can then acquire what is necessary to be able to collaborate, communicate, interact, and dialogue with their newly acquired language.

What makes this theory even more productive is when it is paired with Total Physical Response (TPR) and Teaching Proficiency through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS). TPR, first developed by Dr. James J. Asher in the 1960s, is the process of pairing gestures and motions with new vocabulary. This allows for students to interact with the language they are acquiring, and links these new words to their brains in a way that is more active than the passive manner of simply listening to input (Asher, 1969). TPRS was then created in the 1990s by Blaine Ray, who created TPRS in order to

address words that cannot be paired with gestures and are more abstract. As language input increases, TPRS allows students to respond to higher-level questions, pushing them to greater levels of acquisition.

When considering students who struggle with language learning, while also considering the importance of comprehensible input and language acquisition, Spathis (2020) discusses how to guide students. She suggests supporting struggling students through images and visual aids to add meaning, word walls and sentence starters to build confidence, follow repetitive routines, incorporate gestures and acting to make language more active, and add more wait time in order to allow students time to process new information. The repetition of TPR as well as the gestures and acting in order to make language more active are supported in many theories throughout this research, adding to the credibility that active learning is powerful to increase student learning and language acquisition.

In all, language acquisition is the goal and this research question aims to increase language acquisition. By pairing comprehensible input, gestures, acting, and repetition, students will constantly be expanding their access to language input. With increased language input, students will begin to produce language in a way that they can communicate and collaborate in productive conversations. Language input leads to learned vocabulary that can become a part of acquired language. There are countless methods of vocabulary instruction in order to provide comprehensible input for students to grow in acquiring the Spanish language.

## **Vocabulary Instruction: Defined & Importance**

Vocabulary instruction is a key aspect of language acquisition. Specifically, the use of high frequency words can help students to develop language skills and make connections. Displaying vocabulary through word walls can increase mastery and retention of new vocabulary (Yates et al., 2010). Jackson et al. (2017) point out, “Research shows a strong relationship between vocabulary and academic achievement” (p. 72). Thus, vocabulary instruction must be a focus of teaching. This section will discuss main components of vocabulary instruction, how differentiation can occur within vocabulary instruction, and the ways in which word walls can be interactive and guide vocabulary instruction to be done in a meaningful way.

### ***Definition and Components of Vocabulary Instruction***

Vocabulary instruction must be explicit, focused, and accessible to all students. Dr. Sharroky Hollie, a leading coach, researcher, and instructor in the field of culturally and linguistically responsive instruction, describes four main principles of vocabulary instruction. Hollie (2018) describes the idea of not only providing a definition to students, but also context of a word’s meaning. Vocabulary instruction must involve students in an active way such as through dialogue, comparing and contrasting, analyzing, and focused use of the targeted vocabulary words. Teachers must provide multiple exposures to each word paired with information in a meaningful context regarding the vocabulary. Finally, word analysis must be taught in order for students to understand where words come from, and the many patterns that words contain in their meaning.

The four principles stated and explained in the previous paragraph of context, active involvement, multiple exposures, and word analysis are foundational to vocabulary

instruction. Shanahan (2019) and Vintinner et al. (2015) agree that vocabulary instruction must focus on connections between words, context of words, and involvement of students in reviewing these words as well as interaction among classmates. When these four principles are utilized and students are involved, students will develop their vocabulary and therefore will experience growth in their language acquisition. To see connections being made among words in vocabulary instruction is exciting for teachers and students alike, and will build student agency as they begin experiencing success in learning a new language. With increased comprehensible input and understanding of vocabulary words, students will naturally begin communicating and having dialogue in a new language and feel great progress.

When considering these principles of vocabulary instruction, one might wonder how much vocabulary can be comprehended in one sitting. Otero (2020) describes, “I only add five to eight terms at a time - early in a course there may be more new words than that in a single text, but emphasizing too many new terms at once may overwhelm most learners” (para 3). When high frequency words are chosen as a focus, students know how to target their energy and engagement. Though there may be infinite options of vocabulary to teach, teachers must be selective in these high frequency vocabulary words in order to target useful, important, engaging vocabulary words that students can immediately find to be practical. As previously mentioned, students must be able to experience multiple exposures to each vocabulary word in order to begin acquiring the language. Students must experience these words through comprehensible input in the modality of listening as well as see it in print through the modality of reading in order to begin producing the vocabulary in speaking and writing.



In order to provide multiple exposures to these vocabulary words, teachers must be creative in their strategies. Jackson et al. (2017) provides the idea of word walls, which are “organized collections of vocabulary words displayed in a classroom” (p. 72). These word walls should not simply be word lists on a wall, but they need to become interactive in order to make those multiple exposures to words, creating opportunities for connections between vocabulary words in order to provide meaningful context for students (Jackson et al., 2017). When students see words surrounding them and are constantly hearing them and experiencing these words in several contexts, there is no choice but to begin acquiring the new vocabulary, and therefore, language.

### ***Importance of Well-Developed Vocabulary Instruction***

Vocabulary instruction is key to language acquisition. It is foundational, and it is important that it becomes engaging and interactive for students. Because students are beginning their journey to acquiring the Spanish language, there must be dynamic learning opportunities in order to engage with the vocabulary and language to inspire students in their continuation of language learning. As Coppen (2018) puts it, “...with little additional effort, a word wall could be more than just a word bank; it could also be a dynamic, interactive, student-led tool for instruction” (p. 28). Teachers need to put that additional effort forward in order to provide student-centered opportunities for vocabulary and language acquisition in the classroom. Greater acquisition of vocabulary and student participation improves students’ capacity to learn, which will in turn lead to a greater sense of self-efficacy (Vintinner et al., 2015). Especially in middle school, it is imperative that students are becoming increasingly independent in order to advocate for themselves and take initiative in their learning.

When considering middle school students and urban learners, it is crucial to provide a variety of access points for the varied levels of learners in the classroom. Students come to the classroom with a wide range of vocabulary from their home language and culture, and it is the job of the educator to validate and affirm those words, and build and bridge their prior experience into the vocabulary development that will occur in the classroom (Hollie, 2018). The interactive word wall can create higher levels of engagement for students in order to increase retention of word knowledge as well as opportunities for teachers to provide touch points of differentiation within the interactive word wall and vocabulary instruction, like students self-selecting challenging words or choosing between a variety of activities for more practice (Vintinner et al., 2015). Alber (2014) confirms this information when stating that students do indeed need multiple exposures to vocabulary words in a variety of ways before truly understanding those words and being able to apply them. When multiple exposures of vocabulary words occur, and students begin utilizing the new vocabulary, teachers know that language acquisition is taking place.

### ***Implications of Vocabulary Instruction in Spanish Language Acquisition***

When it comes to the context of Spanish language acquisition, vocabulary instruction is extremely important. As Krashen's theory suggests, with increased vocabulary acquisition comes increased language acquisition. Hollie (2018) suggests that there are five dimensions of knowing a word according to research cited from Cronbach. These dimensions include generalization, application, breadth, precision, and availability (p. 124). When it comes to language acquisition, students must not simply be able to define the word, but they must also be able to make the word available and be able to

incorporate it into their vocabulary. As Hollie (2018) states, “The ultimate goal in culturally responsive vocabulary instruction is to lead students to the dimension of availability - the level at which students *own* the words” (p. 125). By validating and affirming their current vocabulary, followed by building and bridging their vocabulary toward the next step of being able to productively use the language, students will begin to proceed to acquiring the Spanish language.

In all, when vocabulary instruction occurs through repetition, multiple exposures, and appears frequently in print and authentic materials, students will acquire the vocabulary (Otero, 2020). Students must feel comfortable in the context of the classroom and feel validated and affirmed in order to acquire the vocabulary, especially in the middle school classroom. When students learn new vocabulary, and begin understanding strategies regarding *how to* acquire vocabulary, they gain knowledge that will help them know what to do when they come across a word they do not know (Hollie, 2018). Students acquiring a new language, in this context, the Spanish language, must utilize these acquisition strategies in order to build up their self-efficacy and feel successful. Middle school students are seeking to belong and are wanting to find ways to become more independent, and these strategies will help to guide them in this journey.

### **Understanding & Relating to Middle School Learners in the Urban Classroom**

As a Spanish teacher in an urban classroom, there is an element of challenge to teach Spanish in a way that recognizes students and their cultures, while bridging what they already know with a different and new culture. Scalise (2020) challenges language teachers to use a social justice framework and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) in order to help students learn language and to help them identify, affirm, and learn about

cultures. This section will discuss the specific needs that urban learners bring to the classroom, the best practices teachers can use to meet the needs of urban learners, and how these needs and skills can be addressed and utilized in the Spanish language classroom.

Middle school students have a specific set of social and emotional needs that they bring to the classroom. They have vastly different levels of their social and emotional skills and their needs must be addressed in the classroom through skills such as self-regulation, self-efficacy, responsibility and integrity (Silver & Stafford, 2017). As Silver and Stafford (2017) say, “Self skills and social skills don’t necessarily trump academic skills, but the two are intricately entwined” (p. 3). There are ways in which these needs can be addressed throughout content that must be considered in every classroom. These skills can enhance collaboration, interaction, and dialogue which can increase learning opportunities and achievement. This section will discuss social and emotional skills and needs as they relate to middle school learners in the urban classroom.

### ***Defining Middle School Learners***

For purposes of this research, middle school students are students who are in grades six through eight and are 11-14 years of age. More specifically, this research is taking place in the urban classroom: a classroom in a diversely-populated city in the United States. These middle school learners are in the prime years of so many changes: physical, emotional, academic, interpersonal, and many more. Academically, students are discovering what it is to be a student, to manage varied classes, grades, teachers, and content areas. Silver and Stafford (2017) explain that students who develop a strong sense

of self-efficacy become students who can work harder, and sustain their learning despite great obstacles. On the other hand, learners with low self-efficacy often display learned helplessness. This is when students believe that nothing they do contributes to what is happening around them or to their success or lack of success (Silver & Stafford, 2017). Vygotsky (1980) developed a theory of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) in which students have work that is just right for them with a slight challenge enough to be pushed and engaged, but not overwhelmed (Silver & Stafford, 2017). When teachers can provide work that is in students' ZPD, students can develop their self-efficacy and decrease the learned helplessness they may be displaying if they are in their zone of frustration, beyond their ZPD.

Hammond (2015) also discusses the importance of students building their self-efficacy and independence. She explains, "One of the primary ways students develop a sense of agency and independence is through language and talk. Talking helps us process our learning. Talking helps us connect with others. Talking helps us expand our thinking when we hear the ideas of others" (Hammond, 2015, p. 148). When teachers can help students to build their rapport with other students through language and talk, students will begin shifting their own mindset. In this language and talk, teachers can better provide feedback to students in a way that helps them to reframe their thoughts, thus building their self-efficacy.

When self-efficacy is discussed, it is important to note that self-efficacy, academic motivation, and academic success are all intertwined. Lesaux et al. (2012) saw in their study that middle school students show increased motivation when academic *and* developmental needs are addressed. Middle school students have such specific needs

during an age of growth and change that teachers would be remiss to teach to the academic *or* developmental needs of their students in this age group. These needs must be addressed through the lens of culturally sustaining pedagogy (CSP) in order to connect and affirm students and their unique identities (Scalise, 2020). Lesaux et al. (2012) has found in their study on academic vocabulary intervention that when high-quality academic vocabulary is paired with language instruction, students' academic motivation will grow. When academic vocabulary instruction is paired with student choice and CSP, students will begin to develop their effective communication skills, build confidence and self-efficacy, and thus, grow in their language acquisition.

### ***Importance in Understanding Middle School Learners***

It is of utmost importance to consider the specific developmental stage of middle school students in the urban classroom. Students are seeking belonging, and are seeking to become independent learners. Lesaux et al. (2012) point out that students find it motivating to experience their progress, and that as they “feel smarter”, their motivation increases in that content area. When students feel progress, students are engaged. This is similar to when a person is completing a project. If they are at the point of frustration and do not know how to proceed, the project will stop and a mental block occurs. Students are alike in the sense that they do not want to feel this mental block; they want to know how to proceed and they have the capacity to do so.

Fostering academic language and vocabulary gives students the capacity to know how to communicate and have confidence to take action in difficult situations. Interactive word walls give middle school students the opportunity to gain this vocabulary and engage students in a way that furthers their understanding of the learned content (Yates et

al., 2010). Throughout the process of interacting with academic vocabulary and engaging in vocabulary-rich content, students are fostering a sense of independence, motivation, and success. In feeling this way, students feel comfortable interacting with one another and taking risks to persevere when tasks might feel more challenging or overwhelming, because a safe environment has been fostered in which students feel safe to make mistakes (Silver & Stafford, 2017). Silver and Stafford (2017) describe, “In such classrooms, failure is seen as an event, not an outcome” (p. 78). It is imperative that middle school students feel this way, as failure can cause complete shutdown for students. Teaching and learning must support students in their journey toward becoming academically independent, motivated, and successful.

### ***Connecting Middle School Learners to Spanish Language Acquisition***

According to Krashen (1987) and Krashen (1988), the affective filter hypothesis describes that a learner’s mood and attitude can control their quality of learning (Lin et al., 2015). When acquiring a language, the affective filter needs to be lowered so that fear and anxiety are reduced. If students have learning anxiety while trying to acquire a second language, negative emotions can appear and learning outcomes will suffer (Lin et al., 2015). Students can actually be incapable of processing a second language when the affective filter is heightened. However, when students are feeling supported in the challenges of language acquisition, their guard will lower, anxieties will decrease, and they will begin feeling success (Lesaux et al., 2012). When students have multiple exposures to content and vocabulary when acquiring a second language, as previously discussed, students feel that they have many opportunities to experience success. Lesaux et al. (2012) describes, “Students made clear that instructional scaffolds were

instrumental in making rigorous content engaging rather than discouraging” (p. 238).

When students are experiencing support that makes language acquisition comprehensible to them, the success they feel will lower their affective filter and thus allow language acquisition to occur.

Support occurs when students feel safe and understood in the classroom.

Hammond (2015) points out that students feel supported when mistakes are reframed as information to support further learning. Silver and Stafford (2017) agree that struggle should and needs to be normalized for middle school students. Turning mistakes into learning opportunities will help students to feel that struggle. Mistakes and failure are all beneficial moments in their learning process. Language acquisition occurs best when mistakes are made: this means that students are processing the language and making attempts! As the saying goes, you miss 100% of the shots you don't take!

It is critical to understand the developmental stage of middle school learners when teaching content to guide students toward language acquisition in Spanish. Middle school students must feel accepted, supported, along with a sense of safety, belonging, and community, in order to lower their affective filter and begin learning. Where mistakes are bound to happen, growth will also take place. As students feel more and more comfortable with the comprehensible input that is taking place in the classroom, they will naturally begin to acquire the language and want to try it out amongst themselves. This is when interaction, dialogue, and collaboration can flourish in the Spanish language classroom.



### **Interaction, Dialogue, and Collaboration: Defined & Importance**

Interaction and dialogue processes must be present in any language classroom. Loyola (2016) states, “If the teacher is always speaking, the students are not. For students to achieve the communicative practice they need, the solution is simple: The less the teacher speaks, the more students do” (para 4). To keep the classroom student centered is to have students practicing interacting and speaking with one another. This section will discuss common conversational patterns among students, with the focus on urban learners. Students have needs when it comes to interaction and discussion protocols can help to guide their conversations with one another. Utilizing gestures, structures, routines, and protocols surrounding conversation, interaction, and dialogue, will continue to guide learners toward language acquisition and proficiency.

Aside from student interaction and dialogue, collaboration strategies will take language acquisition one step further. By recognizing communication skills and styles that students have and building on those, routines and structures can be created in order to utilize effective collaborative learning strategies in the classroom. Collaboration needs to be specifically designed, especially in the middle school classroom (Burns, 2016). As Pierce and Cole (2018) put it, “When teachers just place students into teams and let them go with a set of tasks and goals, the collaborative aspect of this can be *the* obstacle to learning” (para 2). This section will discuss protocols, structures, and ways to engage each communication style of students in order to create effective collaborative teams and learning tasks.

### ***Definition of Interaction, Dialogue, & Collaboration***

When considering interaction, dialogue, and collaboration, it is important to understand how the brain processes information. Processing is the act of receiving information and storing the information into your brain in a way that makes sense (Hammond, 2015). For middle school students in an urban classroom, processing information in an active way is necessary. This is a way to become an independent learner. In order to become an independent learner, teachers must put structures into place to foster independence. Social talk structures and academic talk structures will guide students toward creating community and express their ideas (Hammond, 2015). Andrä et al. (2020) agrees that active learning allows for students to engage in their learning and to reflect upon the content in a way that helps them to process information to a greater extent.

Burns (2016) outlines five strategies to encourage students toward collaboration. These include creating learning activities that are complex, preparing students to be part of a team, minimizing opportunities for one student to do all the work in a group, building in many opportunities for discussion and consensus, and focusing on strengthening and stretching expertise. When all students have a role in their collaborative learning, even those who may not feel as successful in certain aspects of their learning, all students will learn. When students rely on each other to complete tasks, students will become stronger as a group than they are as individuals.

### ***Importance of Engaging Students through Active Participation***

It is essential to promote learning activities that increase student engagement and active participation in order to encourage students toward persevering in their learning

(Andrä et al., 2020). Collaboration and structures for social skills to be developed will allow middle school students to grow in their self-efficacy. Hammond (2015) says it best when she describes:

The classroom has to be designed around talk and task structures that allow students to define the people they see themselves becoming...when students have a chance to narrate their lives, put language to their experience, and process their thinking through discourse they begin to notice and name their own competence.  
(p. 148-149)

There are various discussion protocols that can be utilized in the classroom in order for students to gain the skills necessary to deepen their learning and understanding (Hammond, 2015). This allows for students to not only increase their motivation, but also to increase their collaborative skills which will in turn prepare them for their future.

Collaboration must be taught, practiced, and utilized repetitively in order for students to begin discussing and collaborating effectively (Pierce & Cole, 2018). In teaching collaborative skills, students must understand clear and concrete goals of the task laid out for them. This will lead to students showing leadership, delegating responsibilities, and growing in their effective communication skills (Pierce & Cole, 2018). When productive collaboration is occurring, middle school students build skills necessary to become engaged and successful learners in their classroom. These skills of collaboration, dialogue, and interaction are necessary skills that allow for students to become contributing members of society and will allow them to feel success in their current state as well as in the future.

### ***Implications of Collaboration in Spanish Language Acquisition***

Interaction, dialogue, and collaboration are three skills necessary for effective communication and necessary skills to succeed in the acquisition of a new language. When attempting to teach language, it is necessary to have student interaction, repetition, and use of the language in the classroom (Payne, 2011). There are infinite ways of providing students with structures to create these engaging moments in discussion and collaboration, and it takes careful and meaningful planning and intentionality in order to make these moments ones in which students are in their zone of proximal development. Students must not feel that the work is too easy, or they will disengage from the collaborative process, as well as not feel that the work is too challenging, or they will quickly give up and disengage.

Gonzalez (2015) outlines several strategies to make class discussions and interactions more engaging and academically challenging at the same time. Concentric circles is a strategy in which the teacher poses a question, and there are two circles of students facing each other in which they can give a response, then rotate one space to the right in order to discuss with a new partner and answer a new question. Fishbowl is a strategy in which two students have a conversation on a topic and students are in a circle surrounding the two students observing, paraphrasing, asking questions, or doing any other discussion task as assigned. Finally, teach-ok is a protocol in which the teacher may introduce a concept to the class or certain vocabulary and then says *teach!*, in which the class responds *okay!* and begins teaching the concept to a partner. This allows for students to paraphrase, elaborate, and discuss in a specific manner that builds connections in their brain. These are only a few discussion protocols that can allow for focused ways

in which students can practice collaboration, effective communication, and dialogue with one another to build their language acquisition skills.

ACTFL outlines a set of specific can-do statements in order for teachers to be able to guide students toward effective communication in the target language. ACTFL's website explains that the can-do statements help to describe what learners can do consistently over time, help learners to set goals, can be adapted to match school curriculums, and can help students to self-assess and teachers to create rubrics. In order to meet these can-do statements and standards, Williams (2018) has created and utilized project-based learning. She has designed tasks that measure knowledge of students of the learned content in order for students to be able to apply it in real-life tasks that require specific but purposeful communication. Because students only have a specific and limited amount of language skills when beginning to acquire a new language, it is the perfect time to learn discussion protocols and practice these communication skills. Middle school students need the opportunity to practice these skills before they are expected to have them mastered. The Spanish classroom and the process of language learning can allow for students to collaborate and dialogue in a productive way.

### **Rationale**

In all, this research outlines the specifics for how interaction, dialogue, and collaboration are essential skills for middle school learners to be able to access language acquisition in an engaging and motivating way. By building their vocabulary in Spanish, students will be able to have focused conversations which will build their self-efficacy and independence in order to feel a sense of success, belonging, progress, and growth. Middle school students need this sense of academic accomplishment and achievement

during a time in their lives where there is a direct relationship between academic success and motivation and students' developmental needs being addressed (Lesaux et al., 2012).

Interactive word walls can be a way to tie together Spanish language acquisition, vocabulary instruction at the beginning level of language learning and acquisition, with middle school students who need interaction and belonging, and successful collaboration skills. Throughout this research, it can be found that word walls, and more specifically, interactive word walls, are only considered in the elementary classroom. Interactive word walls can be utilized in specific and focused routines and discussions in order for students to actively process and participate in the content that they are learning. Actively processing, engaging, and participating are essential skills for students in the 21st century and will transfer to any setting, their future workforce included. This world is increasingly reliant upon collaborative skills in order to achieve successes that have never been achieved before, and collaborative learning in middle school will start students on a path to success in deepening learning and understanding.

### **Summary**

This chapter has discussed the processes surrounding Spanish language acquisition, in which comprehensible input is essential. In order to begin acquiring any language, vocabulary instruction is foundational to begin repetition, meaningful input, and building knowledge in the new language. Specifically, middle school students in the urban classroom are the focus of this topic because they are the context in which this research is pertinent. These students are at a pivotal point in their journeys as students and as humans in their developmental stage that is filled with growth and learning. Throughout this stage of uncovering their own identity, students must learn collaboration,

dialogue, and effective interaction and communication skills that will allow them to interact in the Spanish language in meaningful ways. Vocabulary instruction that is meaningful, through an interactive word wall, can be the method through which students can transfer and apply these skills that are necessary for being productive in society.

This research connects into the project that will be created in relation to this information. Middle school students will thrive by utilizing an interactive word wall that is a center point of the Spanish language classroom and curriculum. It will meet their developmental needs, as well as build the skills that students need now and in their future. Loyola (2016) states that students are often not allowed to focus on the one part of learning a language that they desire the most, which is the ability to speak the language. Students are needing the ability to speak and socialize in the classroom, especially in a time in which academics are pushed to the point in which students are no longer allotted time to interact and collaborate. Language teachers must provide time for students to practice and interact with the Spanish language in a real and genuine way. These ideas and research have guided the answer to the research question: *What are the ways in which interaction, collaboration, and dialogue impact students' Spanish language acquisition?* This research has inspired the secondary question of: *How can an interactive word wall affect Spanish language acquisition in an urban classroom?*

Interactive word walls will meet the needs of all learners, but especially the middle school students in the urban setting. Hollie (2018) claims, "All learners, but especially underserved learners, thrive in environments that stimulate language development and literacy acquisition and surround them with language-rich visuals rife with symbols and print" (p. 183). An interactive word wall puts print as the focus

surrounding the classroom and brings the Spanish language to life as students can see it on the walls around them. Using the focal point of the word wall, students can visualize the language as they receive comprehensible input and as they begin to dialogue, interact, and are supported in their trial and error of the language. Chapter three will begin to discuss the application of this research in the creation of an interactive word wall for the urban classroom of middle school students beginning to learn the Spanish language.



## Chapter Three: Project Description

### Introduction

In encountering research in which language input, instructional scaffolds, collaboration, and vocabulary instruction intertwine, it is clear that there is a need to allow these areas to develop throughout a student's middle school years. Lesaux et al. (2012) points out the infinite anxieties that students endure throughout their learning, and it must be the mission of teachers to lower these anxieties, make learning comprehensible, and provide pathways to meet students' needs. Hammond (2015) and Hollie (2018) discuss the need to create opportunities for students to own their learning through validating their prior knowledge and building and bridging that knowledge to help them grow to new levels. Students need opportunities to become independent learners. As a middle school Spanish teacher for students acquiring the Spanish language for the first time, I have noticed that students need to be presented with exciting, engaging, and equitable activities in order to access the language and, as Hollie (2018) points out, not simply memorize it, but own it and use the language in a productive way. Hollie (2018) shows a chart and cites Cronbach when defining the dimensions of knowing a word. Hollie (2018) shows that this includes the ability to define a word, recognize a situation appropriately, apply multiple meanings, apply appropriate and inappropriate use of the word, and the ability to actually use the word (p. 124). Students are beginning to acquire a new language in which they must be presented with ways to truly understand and utilize the language for the first time. This research has addressed the question: *What are the ways in which interaction, collaboration, and dialogue impact students' Spanish language acquisition?* It has also addressed the secondary research

question of: *How can an interactive word wall affect Spanish language acquisition in an urban classroom?* This project has fully addressed this secondary question as an interactive word wall has been created complete with activities that can be utilized as engaging, exciting, and equitable opportunities for students to access the Spanish language.

For this capstone project, vocabulary flashcards have been designed for each unit of study for 6th, 7th, and 8th graders taught at the middle school level. The 6th graders take the course called “Exploring Spanish”, 7th graders take the course “Spanish 1A” and 8th graders take the course “Spanish 1B”. The 7th and 8th graders meet every other day of the school year, so between these two years, they complete the equivalent of level one of high school Spanish. Beyond these flashcards, sixteen interactive activities were developed in which students can utilize the word wall in a hands-on and collaborative way. Many activities provide the opportunity to work in partners, and be able to exchange feedback in order to accomplish more learning than individually. These sixteen interactive activities include three activities for each modality of language learning: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

In Chapter One, the personal and professional rationale were established for this research, project, and purpose. In Chapter Two, the research that exists to support the importance of interactive word walls was outlined and it led to an explanation of how much these interactive word walls can impact students’ Spanish language acquisition at the middle school level. Chapter Three will outline and describe how this project tied together the research reviewed along with the needs of middle school students. The remainder of this chapter includes a description of why this interactive word wall is

important, how the interactive word wall was created, who it was intended for, what this project has accomplished, and the timeline in which it has been created and implemented.

### **Application of Research to Project Design**

The project created is a flexible curriculum that focuses on an interactive word wall and a variety of activities that can be used to engage middle school students who are beginning to acquire the Spanish language. At the beginning level of learning a language, students need comprehensible input (Krashen, 1987), and great amounts of repetition of the high frequency vocabulary in the new language (Otero, 2020). Utilizing the word wall will be a visual way to allow all students to access these key vocabulary words in an engaging and exciting way. A vocabulary curriculum has been constructed to outline each unit of study for the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade students taught. According to Wiggins & McTighe (2005), stage one has been used to outline the desired results for each unit. This shows the goals, understandings, and essential questions of each unit paired with the key vocabulary that will appear on the word wall throughout each unit. Following stage two and stage three of the backward design curriculum creation (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005), there are sixteen options of interactive activities that can be done using the interactive word wall of key vocabulary for each unit. Some activities fit certain units better than others based on content, but all can be flexible based on the students' needs and interests in each class and grade level. Students will be able to interact with the vocabulary based on their prior knowledge as it relates to that vocabulary, and self-select based on what they find to be more challenging and where they need more practice, and what they already know. The activities have built in differentiation (Vintinner et al., 2015) so that no matter where students are at in their learning of the Spanish language, they will be able to

access the necessary skills to begin acquiring Spanish and experiencing success with the language (Hollie, 2018).

This interactive word wall was intended to meet the standards for novice language learners in the areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, as outlined by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Thus, this interactive word wall has activities created based upon and divided into those four modalities of language learning. ACTFL also outlines five areas of language learning; these activities are specifically designed to meet the interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational standards of communication of language learning. By practicing these activities while using the interactive word wall, students will naturally be practicing the various areas of communication.

### **Intended Setting and Audience**

This interactive word wall project was designed to best serve a diverse multilingual population of middle school students who are in grades six through eight in the United States and are beginning the process of acquiring the Spanish language for the first time. As Hollie (2018) explains, “Culturally, students are more invested in the success of the whole class or their group than individual accomplishments” (p. 99). Because of diverse students’ natural collaborative ability due to collaborative family backgrounds, this interactive word wall will allow students to direct their dialogues and conversations in ways that will increase their productive language abilities in Spanish. Because of the routine and repetition of these activities, this interactive word wall will not only be accessible and best used in urban settings, but in all settings and not only language learning classrooms, but in all content areas. As Jackson et al. (2017) describes,

“As students create interactive word walls, the process enables them to build on prior knowledge, have multiple encounters with new academic vocabulary, and connect learning to inquiry activities and the real world” (p. 72). Vocabulary is learned within all classrooms, so these activities created and demonstrated in this project can be useful in many areas. Some activities may be better used by some content areas more than others. For example, math teachers may benefit more from reading and writing proposed activities as they study word problems in their content. Teachers who teach any type of language will find most, if not all, of these activities to be beneficial to their classroom because they have been designed utilizing the four modalities of language: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Middle school students who are learning to become independent learners in the urban setting will greatly benefit from the interactive word wall created.

As seen in Chapter Two of this research, there is a gap in research of interactive word walls among middle school students, but the research shows how the process of learning a language and utilizing interactive activities and a word wall as visual and engaging guidance can be beneficial and impactful. Andra et al. (2020) describes how pictures and gestures enhance vocabulary memory for eight-year-old students, but this can correlate to middle school students as well and be equally impactful to their learning. Because these middle school students are still learning new vocabulary within new academic content areas, these impactful strategies must still be used. Yates et al. (2010) and Vintinner et al. (2015) begin bridging this information gap to middle school and high school students, yet both recognize the gap in research at how effective interactive word walls can be for adolescent learners. Coppens (2018) begins showing in her research how

powerful the interdisciplinary nature of interactive word walls can be when utilized in a way that students can connect their learning across subject areas. Lesaux et al. (2012) summarizes the need for this research when stating, “When instruction is designed to provide adolescents with learning opportunities that aim to address their academic and developmental needs, there is an opportunity to influence academic motivation” (p. 239). It is clear that combining the social and emotional needs of middle school students with their academic vocabulary development will create long-lasting sustainable growth in all content areas.

### **Desired Results**

Having created this project with the intention of using it among middle school learners in the urban classroom, its desired results are to engage these learners with relevant applications in reading, writing, speaking, and listening. These activities have been designed to actively engage learners who are becoming independent learners. The designed activities have been separated into categories of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and aim to increase engagement, learning, collaboration, and communication in those areas. As students acquire the Spanish language for the first time, they must have a variety of ways and activities to apply their knowledge which provide repetition and practice of the vocabulary they are learning. This interactive word wall was made to engage students who are striving to use new vocabulary as well as students who are striving to reach the next level of vocabulary use.

The main way in which the interactive word wall will be measured is through observation by teachers, administration, and instructional coaches in the building. A walkthrough form has been created and can be viewed on page 28 of the capstone project

that addresses teacher instruction of vocabulary as well as students' use of the interactive word wall in the classroom. By having this form, data can be collected and the interactive word wall can be revised accordingly. The secondary way in which the interactive word wall will be measured is through student surveys. Students will be surveyed in order to determine how the word wall is meeting their needs, and in what ways it can be improved and utilized across content areas. Two survey examples can be found on pages 26 and 27 of the capstone project.

### **Selection of Key Vocabulary**

I have selected specific high frequency high frequency vocabulary from the level one Spanish course in alignment with units of study and guidance from the *¡Qué Chévere!* level one book from EMC Publishing, which is the curriculum utilized throughout this middle school classroom setting and throughout the school district. When learning a new language, there is infinite new vocabulary! However, these activities were designed with the intention of practicing, engaging with, and mastering the high frequency words needed in order to begin acquiring the Spanish language at a beginning and introductory level. This key vocabulary should be introduced with comprehensible input provided by the instructor in the target language, and followed up with practice utilizing these proposed activities to be used with the interactive word wall. These activities were not designed to be the sole method of learning the Spanish language, but as a routine to support repetition in collaboration and communication for students acquiring a new language.

### **Engaging Activities Designed from Research**

The activities were designed utilizing the research in the literature review in chapter two. Some activities were discussed in the research and have been modified to fit the setting of the beginning Spanish classroom. Other activities were created based on tools and activities that have been used in my own classroom and have been proven engaging for students in this unique and individual classroom based on student feedback throughout previous years of teaching, and that will be useful in all content areas. All classrooms utilize reading, writing, speaking, and listening, and therefore can utilize these activities in order to practice, collaborate among educators of these courses, providing interconnectedness and sustainability in the learning of all students. The four modalities of reading, writing, speaking, and listening were considered when designing these activities in order to provide repetitious practice among these four important areas. The main sources and research used to inspire these activities utilizing the interactive word wall were Otero (2020) and Gonzalez (2015). Hammond (2015) and Hollie (2018) were great influences in how these activities were designed as well. All of these authors provided great inspiration and guidance for the way in which these activities were created considering how to best engage middle school learners in the urban classroom.

#### ***Reading Activities***

Reading activities were created in order to utilize key vocabulary words from the interactive word wall within meaningful context. These activities were designed to bring these words to life and show students how to utilize them regularly. Reading activities will also inspire students to speak, listen, and extend to begin writing, as all four



modalities are interconnected. The following four activities will show a variety of ways to use the interactive word wall to practice reading in a focused way.

Dialogue Disarray is practiced when teachers should take a script, conversation, or written dialogue that includes at least two characters. The dialogue should be separated line by line, and scrambled up. Students will work together or independently in order to place the dialogue in an order that makes sense and gives meaning to the words. Students can summarize after, read the dialogue aloud, or even answer comprehension questions.

Partner reading is when students are placed in partners based on reading level. One student should be partner 1, and the other partner is partner 2. While partner 1 reads a section, partner 2 will be listening. Then, they will switch off. Ways to extend and adapt this activity can be found on page ten of the capstone project.

Choral reading can be done in small groups or as a full class. This activity can help struggling readers gain confidence and have support of the whole class. Readers can join in and drop out as needed and based on comfort and knowledge of the passage that the class is reading.

Character comparison is an activity in which students will compare and contrast a character from the text they are reading. They can pick out traits, emotions, and situations to compare and contrast with themselves. How would they have reacted in that situation? Is their appearance similar to that specific character? Word wall words can be used to enhance this character comparison.

### ***Writing Activities***

Writing activities were created to get students to begin practicing writing the new vocabulary words within context. These are higher level activities by nature, because they

involve production of the language, instead of reception. Writing is most often seen as independent work, but these activities can be done collaboratively. These are best done with use of the specific vocabulary list from the word wall.

Sentence or story challenge is accomplished by writing a certain number of sentences using as many words as possible from the word wall. Another variation is writing a story using all of the current vocabulary words. These stories can then be read to one another as an extension. Sentence starters can be used on a case-by-case basis for students who are beginning learners, or for students who may need help getting started.

Alternate ending is an activity in which teachers will provide a text, movie, short story, or anything with an “ending”. Students will then write an alternate ending of their choice using words from the word wall.

Cloze reading is a literacy activity in which a passage of reading is selected. The first and last sentence of the passage must remain unchanged. Throughout the middle of the passage, specific words should be selected, removed, and left with a blank. Students then need to place words from the word wall in the blanks to make sense of the passage in the context they are reading.

Sort and scramble is an activity of categorization. Students will take the set of vocabulary words from the word wall and sort them in a way that makes sense to them. Then, they will scramble up the words and sort them again using different categories. This can be completed in partners or groups. Students can then switch groups and look at how another group of students categorized the words in order to explain how they think their words were categorized. This activity is great for inquiry.

### *Speaking Activities*

Speaking activities, again, are higher level activities because of the fact that they require producing the language. These activities are intended for students who are beginning to learn a new language, so they are at a lower level, but they are still challenging. Speaking is at the core of learning a language. Students desire to be able to speak and communicate with others. Having an interactive word wall with set speaking activities to practice this skill is something that students desire, look forward to, and are excited to practice.

The first activity is called: I have \_\_\_\_\_. Who has \_\_\_\_\_? Students will each have one vocabulary word from the word wall. Using the sentence starter I have \_\_\_\_\_. Who has \_\_\_\_\_?, students will name their vocabulary word and then ask the class who has a different word. This will practice pronunciation of the words, as well as intertwine collaborative speaking and listening skills.

Twenty questions is a game that many people know. This can be played in partners, groups, or even as a whole class. A word will be selected from the word wall. Students must ask questions in order to guess the correct word. They get to ask 20 questions total. Throughout the questioning period, they can make three attempts to guess the vocabulary word correctly. If they do not guess correctly, the round ends, and a new word is selected.

Pictionary can be played in groups or as a whole class. A word will be selected from the word wall, and one student will draw the selected word without talking. The rest of the group will guess what word it might be. This is an opportunity for students to practice pronouncing a variety of words in a low-stress environment.

Charades is similar to pictionary, but involves acting instead of drawing. A word will be selected from the wall, and without talking, they will act out that word. The rest of the group of students will guess what word it might be!

### ***Listening Activities***

Listening activities are practiced in order to have students use their receptive language skills as they carefully listen to a text, song, or video clip. This is essential, because in order to have a conversation, students need to be able to listen successfully as well as speak! Sometimes, listening is a skill that is practiced less, but it is just as important. Especially when learning a new language, students will have fun seeing how many new words they can identify during these interactive activities.

Identify words is an activity in which a passage, song, or video clip is read aloud or played. Students identify words utilized in that passage from the word wall. Students can raise their hands when they hear a word, or even write the word down. A list can also be provided and students can circle words as they hear them.

Listening to definitions can be done as a class or in groups. The teacher or a group volunteer can read the definitions of word wall words, and students will select which word the definition applies to. This can be higher level, because students must not simply identify the word upon hearing it, but they need to know the definition also. This should be done after multiple exposures to the vocabulary words.

The flyswatter game is done in teams, splitting the class into two. Words should be taken from the word wall or written on a white board in a random order. One person from each team will come to the board and will be given a flyswatter. The teacher or a

student volunteer will call out a word from the board, and whichever student smacks the word first gets their team a point!

Bingo is played when students receive a four by four or five by five bingo board. Students can write the words from the word wall in a random manner. The teacher has all the words from the word wall and will call them out until students get four or five in a row.

### **Timeline**

This project creation began in the spring of 2021, and came to fruition in June of 2021. However, the selection of key vocabulary happened throughout seven years of teaching and experience in the middle school Spanish classroom. These words were first a lengthy list of vocabulary and, throughout time, were paired down into this list of high frequency words divided by unit of study. Some of the created activities were used throughout the past seven years in the classroom, but have been modified and tailored for use with the interactive word wall. Its effectiveness will be informally measured based on students' ability to use the high frequency words and communicate in the target language. Formally, students' grades should reflect their excitement and engagement with the Spanish language as well as their formative vocabulary quizzes that will occur throughout these units of study. The goal is to continue and implement use of the interactive word wall in the 2022-2023 school year and to implement and constantly modify these activities in learning about my students' background knowledge and interests to fit the needs of the ever-changing middle school learners in the urban classroom.

## Summary

The interactive word wall project that has been designed and created for this capstone has created ways for students to engage, collaborate, and communicate in the Spanish language which they are beginning to acquire. Middle school students are increasingly social and naturally inclined to seek connections with their peers. This interactive word wall was created to meet the social and emotional needs of middle school students while providing the opportunity to practice collaborative skills needed as students continue throughout school and life beyond school. By engaging with high frequency vocabulary words, students can feel success as they have specific activities to utilize that become routine in the classroom. The intention of the interactive word wall is to guide students toward success and feeling accomplished in the four modalities of reading, writing, speaking, and listening while enduring the difficult task of learning a new language. Students can then begin to transfer these skills in their collaborative needs throughout other classrooms, and in their daily life.

Chapter Four will reflect upon the successes and challenges of the creation of the interactive word wall. Next steps will also be discussed as the interactive word wall will be ever-changing just as the needs of middle school learners are ever-changing and developing. The goal of chapter four will be to summarize and conclude the research and project of the interactive word wall and its uses, effectiveness, and challenges among middle school students in the urban classroom.

## Chapter Four: Conclusion

### Introduction

This capstone research and project have addressed the question: *What are the ways in which interaction, collaboration, and dialogue impact students' Spanish language acquisition?* It has also addressed the secondary research question of: *How can an interactive word wall affect Spanish language acquisition in an urban classroom?* In researching these questions and creating a project to address my findings, I have come to understand the importance of implementing vocabulary instruction through engaging and interactive activities in the classroom. The United States is becoming increasingly multilingual (Heavy, 2013) and therefore it is essential to be able to communicate through reading, writing, speaking, and listening in multiple languages.

This concluding chapter will discuss major learnings from my project. In selecting key vocabulary for my Spanish language classroom, putting together vocabulary lists of high frequency words for each unit I teach, and considering the four modalities of reading, writing, speaking, and listening, I created sixteen different interactive activities. These engaging activities are to be used paired with the vocabulary on the word wall. These major learnings will discuss what I learned, as well as some unexpected learnings that came about along the way.

Next, I will revisit chapter two which is the literature review. Much of my research was very helpful in creating these sixteen interactive activities, and influential in determining which activities to select to be the most engaging and interactive. Much of the research connected and helped to prove the point of how my project was created. The research showed culturally and linguistically responsive strategies and connected best

practices for language learning in a way that I knew the interactive word wall would meet the needs of middle school students developmentally, linguistically, and academically. The gap in research for interactive word walls at the secondary school level is a main reason my project came to be. Word walls are implemented regularly in the elementary classroom, but based on my own observation, once students reach the secondary level of middle school and beyond, word walls stop. Based on my research, interactive word walls can be as meaningful, if not more meaningful, at the middle school level and beyond. Because the academic vocabulary students are learning in all of their content areas becomes more and more complex as they move through their education, it is increasingly essential to focus on vocabulary in order to ensure understanding.

Finally, I will discuss implications and limitations of my research. Based on the implications and limitations, I will consider future research that can be done in this field. I will share how I will communicate the results of my research and project and how it will benefit my students, other teachers, and my field as a whole. I will conclude this chapter with a summary of all of the above.

### **Major Learnings**

Throughout researching, writing, and learning, I have done much reflecting. The biggest takeaway has been the lack of research that exists about how useful, effective, and engaging word walls can be at the middle school level. Based on middle school learners' need for interaction and collaboration (Hollie, 2018) and the research that exists about how much learning can occur with word walls and vocabulary instruction, it only makes sense that the connection be made to utilize interactive word walls at the middle school level. As a researcher, I have learned how important it is to stay organized in order



to make connections between many sources of information and notice where the gaps in information are. Without staying organized, I would not have thought to explore this gap in researching word walls and middle school students.

As a writer, I have learned that revising is very difficult for me! I am a thoughtful and reflective writer, so I feel as though the thought I put into my writing the first time makes it challenging to consider changing and revising because of all the time and effort I have already put into it. This was the most unexpected learning experience because of the amount of feedback I had on this research and project. This pushed me to reflect a second time, take feedback, and revise accordingly. I was also forced to make decisions when I thought that my first instinct was what I wanted to stick with instead of taking the advice of the revision. This was a powerful learning experience as I learned to consider other perspectives.

The final major learning I experienced was my joy and passion for creating something new. After all the research and time spent thinking about the capstone project, to have the opportunity to create the project brought much excitement and a sense of accomplishment to me. Using the interactive word wall in my classroom is going to bring enthusiasm and engagement among all my students, no matter what level they are at. With the support that the word wall vocabulary and interactive activities offer, students will be able to excel.

### **Literature Review: Revisited**

The capstone project I have created has been a direct reflection of the research done. Hammond (2015) and Hollie (2018) have been foundational authors to my capstone. Hammond's research on culturally responsive teaching and how it affects

students' brains has caused me to reflect and consider the best interactive and supportive activities with which to pair with my word wall creation. Hollie's research regarding culturally responsive teaching as well as linguistically responsive teaching has been essential as a language teacher because of the way in which I could validate, affirm, build, and bridge my students' knowledge with the new knowledge they learn in my classroom (Hollie, 2018). Pairing these two authors' research together as a foundation for my capstone has inspired me to create a project that will prove to be engaging, supportive, and full of focused learning for my students for years to come.

Keeping in mind Krashen (1989) and his theories regarding language input in the classroom, I knew creating a project with vocabulary words surrounding the classroom would provide students with a language rich, supportive environment. Connecting this research to ideas of boosting target language vocabulary acquisition provided by Otero (2020), Spathis (2020), and Williams (2018), I knew vocabulary activities needed to be interactive, guided, and student-centered. This would then reduce anxiety in the classroom as outlined by Lin et al. (2015). Connecting back to Hammond (2015) and Hollie (2018), I knew anxiety needed to be low, and academic expectations to be high and supportive in the classroom in order for learning to occur and students to succeed.

Considering general research about vocabulary instruction and word walls proved to be crucial in the creation of my own word wall and making it interactive. Shanahan (2019) provided five simple principles for vocabulary instruction, and this research was best utilized in connection with Coppens (2018), Jackson et al. (2017) and Lesaux et al. (2012) relating specifically to word walls. Albers (2014) provided tips on selecting and teaching vocabulary which was essential when selecting vocabulary lists of my own

throughout this project. In all, the variety of research surrounding vocabulary instruction was key to producing this project and synthesizing it with the research on culturally responsive teaching.

Finally, Hammond (2015) and Hollie (2018) discuss the importance of collaboration and dialogue within the classroom. Pierce and Cole (2018) explain how to explicitly teach collaboration strategies while Gonzalez (2015) provides discussion strategies and Loyola (2016) extends this to the importance of talking in the language classroom. Because of the amount of research surrounding how essential collaboration and dialogue are, combined with my own knowledge and experience of seeing how social middle school students can be, I knew creating an interactive word wall would be the perfect solution and connecting point of all this research.

So, I have done much consideration with my research question: *What are the ways in which interaction, collaboration, and dialogue impact students' Spanish language acquisition?* I have come to the conclusion that interaction, collaboration, and dialogue are foundational to students' Spanish language acquisition. They must utilize the four modalities of reading, writing, speaking, and listening as often as possible and learn within a vocabulary rich environment. My capstone project has answered my secondary research question of: *How can an interactive word wall affect Spanish language acquisition in an urban classroom?* The interactive word wall will positively impact learners within my classroom because of the focused dialogue and collaboration that will occur, preparing middle school students for high school and beyond.

## **Implications**

The main implication of my capstone project is that interactive word walls can be used in every content area, schoolwide. This could provide strong routines for students as they know how to practice certain activities with the interactive word wall, and can simply use different content vocabulary dependent on the subject area. Science, math, social studies, and even physical education teachers can utilize interactive word walls in their classroom. Every content area has content specific vocabulary that is being taught and utilized, and the more students can be supported in their use of this vocabulary, the more ingrained their learning will be. Interactive word walls can be used schoolwide, and students would have an easier time making connections across content areas as well (Yates et al., 2010). Students would be able to recognize the context of words they are learning, and see similarities and differences throughout their different classes. Interactive word walls can be a powerful way to unify a school, increase vocabulary instruction, and engage students across their day.

## **Limitations**

The one unexpected occurrence that impacted my project was just how big my project could have gotten. As explained in the implications section previously, this project could be implemented schoolwide. Because of this, I struggled to know where to stop in my creation of activities, suggestions for use of these activities, and vocabulary list suggestions. I ended up keeping it specific to my content area of Spanish and the vocabulary that I teach, but this project could have easily opened up to every content area and grown to be extensive.

### **Future Research**

Based on the implications and limitations of my capstone project, future related research projects would include expanding this to a variety of content areas. Which of these interactive activities would be most beneficial to which content areas? How can more activities be added and extended to meet the needs of all our learners? Based on surveys given and walkthrough observations performed, what changes can be made to make this more effective and engaging? Beyond this, research could be done on the connection of interactive word walls. How can a science teacher and a Spanish teacher collaborate to make connections across content areas? How can students benefit from this consistency across a school building and throughout vocabulary instruction? Does vocabulary use increase when this routine is built into the school curriculum?

There are many areas to which I can see this research expanding, which is why this capstone project is exciting, brings me joy, and has become a point of passion for me. If teachers from every content area in a school collaborated on interactive word walls and the activities that would most benefit their students and content areas, this research could be groundbreaking! Let us continue to seek ways to become culturally and linguistically responsive (Hollie, 2018) while exploring activities to engage our students in focused learning, high expectations, and unwavering support.

### **Communication of Results**

I will communicate my results by using my interactive word wall in my classroom! I will share this project with other teachers in my building as they notice my new activities and curriculum within my classroom. Based on student surveys and classroom walkthroughs completed by the building administrators and literacy coach, I

plan to then make any changes necessary to my interactive word wall. Following these changes, I will feel more comfortable sharing my project, results, and research more widely. Hopefully, because of waiting to share until I have some points of data from student surveys and classroom observations, I can gain interest from colleagues who also want to use interactive word walls in their classrooms. From here, our research can grow farther and wider as explained in the previous section regarding future research.

### **Benefit of Project**

Overall, this project benefits the teaching profession as a whole by recentering education on students, collaboration, interaction, and engagement. More specifically, it focuses the world of education on the essential topic of vocabulary instruction. This is key to literacy growth in all our students and in every subject area. Vocabulary is also essential to students' success beyond the classroom. Specific vocabulary is used in every job in existence, and with learned techniques to be able to practice, utilize, and understand this vocabulary, students will be prepared to enter into any variety of contexts and job areas and be able to apply understandings of vocabulary within the context of their job.

This project benefits my specific content area as a language teacher because of the push for comprehensible input when acquiring a new language. These interactive activities and having a vocabulary rich environment will provide students with the opportunity to acquire a language through authentic activities and content-specific examples. Vocabulary will not simply be words on a wall, but students will be able to interact with these words within context, and bring understanding to these words in order to collaborate, dialogue, and enhance their learning with their peers. Students will

become rooted in collaborative practices and teamwork as a result of interacting with the word wall.

### **Summary**

This chapter concludes my project research by describing the major learnings and takeaways from my project, and how my research and literature review were a grounding point and critical to the creation of my interactive word wall. I discussed the major implications and expansions this work could have, as well as the limitations of my own research and project creation as I worked within my own content area creation. I reflected on the future research and questions that I am left pondering along with how I plan to communicate my results and findings with colleagues and throughout my own circle of influence. Finally, I discuss the great literary benefit this project has among students and in my professional realm.

This capstone project has been a joy, challenge, and a deep learning experience to research and create. In aligning my interests with my wonderings, I was able to answer my research questions of: *What are the ways in which interaction, collaboration, and dialogue impact students' Spanish language acquisition?* and more specifically: *How can an interactive word wall affect Spanish language acquisition in an urban classroom?* Answering these research questions challenged me to become a reflective educator seeking the perspective of culturally and linguistically responsive research as I strived to create a project that I knew could engage, benefit, and challenge the learners that are in my classroom. I look forward to my use of the interactive word wall as well as the continuation of this research as I seek to polish the interactive word wall into all that I know it can be.

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