The Impact of the Spanish for Fluent Speakers Curriculum on the Attitudes, Motivation, Self-esteem, Language Skills and Academic Future of Latino Students

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Abstract

Recently, educators have called to attention the fact that if we as pedagogues want to contribute to narrow the Latino students’ opportunity gap, it is necessary for us to create effective educational programs that meet the academic, social, cultural and affective needs of those students. In order for such a program to be effective, it should have a flexible curricula adaptable to the diverse needs of students; should promote student’s critical consciousness; focus on identity and affective issues; operate in a bilingual mode; and moreover, it should have a rigorous academic curriculum. The purpose of this study was to identify the impact of a Spanish for Fluent Speakers (SFS) curriculum on the attitudes, self-esteem, motivations and academic future plans of Latino students from the students’ perspective. The results show that the SFS curriculum has a positive impact on students; and that the teacher plays a significant role in this impact.

Keywords: Spanish Heritage Language Learners, Pedagogy of Transcaring, Cultural Responsive Pedagogy, transformative, translanguaging, differentiation, cultural identity, emergent bilingual
Si sólo. . .
Si sólo pudieran ver que yo soy diferente
Que soy única e independiente.
Si sólo se dieran cuenta de lo que tienen enfrente
Y que yo nunca seré como la demás gente.
Si sólo pudieran ver más allá de lo que los ojos ven
Y que yo triunfaré sin importar donde los obstáculos estén.
Si sólo supieran que un día todos mis sueños realizaré
Aunque todo el mundo me diga que con su apoyo no contaré.
(Jacquelin Martínez, SFS II 8th grade student, 2010)

If only...
If only they could see that I am different
That I am unique and self-sufficient
If only they could realize what they have in front of them
And that I will never be like the rest
If only they could see beyond what their eyes can see
And that I will succeed despite where the obstacles be
If only they knew that one day, all my dreams will come true
Even though everyone tells me that they do not approve
(Jacquelin Martínez, SFS II 8th grade student, 2010)

As illustrated in the poem, Jacquelin, like many middle school Latino students, dreams of a bright future: they would like to become a senator, a lawyer, a physician, a famous athlete, a singer, an actress…but they wake up to the cruel reality that most of the people around them do not care. They still have faith in themselves, but when they enter high school, that faith disappears and most of them end up dropping out of school.

Latino students represent an estimated 20% of high school and elementary students across the country, and as a fast growing demographic, are predicted to represent 30% of the nation by 2050 equivalent to 132 million students (Grad Nation, 2012). Currently, one-in-four public elementary school students are Latinos. This is an indication that the young Latino population is growing quickly. According to a report published in 2010 by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), Latino students graduated at a rate of 71%. That is a striking jump from 2006, when the rate was 61%. However, Latino students still lag behind their White peers in high school graduation rates across the country. The national rate is 71% and the rate for White students is 83%. African Americans have the lowest rate at 66% while Asians graduated at a rate of 93% (NCES, 2010).
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What are the circumstances that provoke this situation? How can we, as pedagogues, give students the support, strength, faith and hope they need to surpass all the barriers they will encounter en route to accomplishing their dreams? What can we do to help students develop the motivation, positive attitude and high self-esteem needed to endure the indifference, intolerance, opposition, and/or disempowerment they could experience? Researchers such as Crawford (2004) Espinoza–Herold (2003) and García (2011) have identified what the obstacles are; and others such as: Carreira, 2012, 2007; Carreira and Kagan, 2011; Chevalier, 2004; García, 2001; Gibson, 2003; Llagas, 2003; Parodi, 2008; Peyton, 2008; and Valdés, 2012 have recommended what teachers and administrators can do to eliminate them.

Challenges in the Education of Latinos

Research conducted around the education of Latinos has discovered several challenges affecting the education of Latino students. Those challenges are: the schools’ politics of language, teacher–student interactions, the mechanisms of discipline, the presentation of school knowledge, (Espinoza-Herold, 2003); different English language proficiency levels; and how much previous schooling students bring (Crawford, 2004).

The politics of language, characterized by the English only policy in schools, silences the voices of Latino students; and weakens their self-esteem literally and symbolically. Language is a fundamental aspect of identity. Research has confirmed that language validates identity, culture, social change; and most importantly, language is power (Alarcón, 2010; Beaudrie, 2012; Carreira, 2007, 2012; De Mejía, 2002; Ducar, 2008; García, 2013; He, 2006; Hornberger, and Wang, 2008; Klee, 2011; Koike and Clayton, 2006; Leeman, 2012; Lippi, 2004; Martínez-Roldán and Malavé, 2004; Morales, 2003; Potowski and Matts, 2008; Showstock, 2012; Val and Vinogrodova, 2010; Vélez-Rendón, 2006). Nevertheless, when
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immigrant students come to the United States they lose all of that because they cannot speak English and they are prohibited to speak Spanish. When schools prohibit students to speak in Spanish, they are giving the message that they do not value the students’ culture and language; they get the message that their culture is inferior. Latino students feel marginalized and silenced; they don’t feel they are part of the school community; and consequently, they end up dropping out of school.

Research has also confirmed that schools reproduce the ideologies or views of the world of dominant classes, validate a middle class code speech; and therefore, they diminish the working class ideologies and discourses (Apple and Beyer, 1988; Giroux, 1983; McLaren, 1992; Fine, 1987). Latino students from a working class family may well respond to that situation in two ways: by accepting it and become assimilated or by resisting it. The ones that accept assimilation experience a lot of pain in the process. They develop a dual personality or what Fine (1987) called the two voices. Students train themselves to react in two voices: one’s own voice alternates with an academic voice which denies class, gender, ethnicity and race conflict. The ones that resist are labeled as the subversive, the trouble maker and/or the provocateur. These students confront disciplinary procedures that most of the times are counter-productive.

Espinoza –Herold (2003) found that “Mexican immigrant students were severely reprimanded and punished for not speaking in English, for failing to be punctual and for attempting to work in a collaborative manner with their classroom peers” (p.124). Some examples of the punishment given found by Espinoza-Herold are: Being required to remain standing and stare at a wall for a full hour for being late, prohibiting students from wearing a type of clothing, to speak only when given permission, and suspensions.
This mechanism of discipline exhibited in schools provokes Latino students to withdraw from school because they feel that they are considered reckless and deceitful. Moreover, these practices are selectively enforced when Latino students are implicated. The data gathered by Espinoza-Herold regarding suspensions revealed that “given two schools with almost the same student enrollment, the urban institution with a majority Latino population had almost four times the number of suspensions than the majority White School” (p.124).

Teachers-student interactions are at the heart of the schooling experience; they are a key factor influencing students’ opinion about schools (Espinoza-Herold, 2003). The students interviewed by Espinoza-Herold said that good teachers should be like parents; they should take personal responsibility for students learning like parents do. They perceived that “if the school environment were an extension of a family network, students will not be inclined to drop out” (p.120).

Furthermore, good teachers are those who share power and do not try to control students; and moreover, good teachers give students choices on how to learn. Unfortunately, that was not what they experienced. According to Espinoza-Herold “. . .both students (interviewed) perceived most teachers as being aloof and unconcerned about an individual student’s problems or learning needs” (p.121). Those teachers just impart the information in a lecture format and leave the classroom rapidly without interacting with students (Espinoza-Herold, 2003). In addition, teacher racism and stereotyping was another component of the teacher-student relationship. Those types of teachers would intimidate students overtly saying the immigration officers would come to get them (Espinoza-Herold, 2003).

The content and approaches of classroom instruction is another issue concerning Latino education. The strongest criticism to classroom instruction of the students interviewed by
Espinoza-Herold (2003) emphasizes the superficial treatment of the curricula to their culture and identity. In addition, teachers that attempted to include topics about the Latino culture were discharged and disempowered. Moreover, Latino students are registered in remedial classes characterized by a mechanical presentation of knowledge and that exhibit a teacher-centered approach to instruction.

The different English language proficiency levels of Emergent Bilinguals (EBs) are another challenge faced by educators concerning Latino students, according to Crawford (2004). Many school-age EBs, live in low-income ethnic neighborhoods where English is not spoken frequently, and their parents have limited education and high rates of illiteracy (Crawford, 2004; García, 2011).

Additionally, Crawford (2004) suggests that educators have to be aware of how much schooling some EBs have had before they entered U.S. schools. EBs who enter U.S. schools at the elementary grades have a better chance of catching up with their peers linguistically and academically than EBs who enter American schools in middle school or high school grades (Crawford, 2004; García, 2011). EBs can master social language in six months to a year after entering U.S. schools, but mastering academic language in subject content areas can take up to five or seven years (Crawford, 2004; García, 2011). Crawford (2004) suggests that EBs entering the ninth grade may not master academic language by twelfth grade in order to meet graduation requirements. This often leads to EBs remaining in high school longer than their same age peers and often dropping out of high school (Crawford, 2004). Not only do students of Latino descent constitute the largest ethnic enrollment in the first to the eighth grade, but around the ninth and tenth grades, their drop-out numbers increase. In 2010, about 30% of all Latino students drop
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out of high school compared to 10% White students dropping out (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

A Call for Effective Spanish Heritage Language Programs

Recently, educators have called to attention the fact that, if we as pedagogues want to contribute to narrowing the Latino students’ achievement gap, it is necessary for us to create effective educational programs that meet the academic, social and affective needs of those students. Researchers such as Carreira, 2012, 2007; Carreira and Kagan, 2011; Chevalier, 2004; García, 2001; Gibson, 2004; Llagas, 2003; Parodi, 2008; Peyton, 2008; and Valdés, 2012, among others, have strongly affirmed that the solution is a Spanish for native speakers program. However, in order for such a program to be effective, it should: be taught in a manner different from that used for second language learners (Parodi, 2008); have a flexible curricula adaptable to the diverse needs of students (Beaudrie, 2012); address students’ cultural and individual differences (Carreira, 2012, 2007; Rodríguez, 2014); promote student’s critical consciousness (Leeman, 2012); focus on identity and affective issues (Martínez, 2012; Potowski, 2012); operate in a bilingual mode (Carvalho, 2012); revitalize Spanish within the various speech communities (He, 2006), it should have a rigorous academic curriculum (García, 2001); moreover, it should allows students to use their full repertoire of literacy practices (Stewart, 2014) and to develop literacy skills by expanding the knowledge of genres of written discourse (Chevalier, 2004).

Although research focusing on Spanish heritage languages (SHL), and heritage learners has increased in the last two decades, more research is needed in the areas of effective curricula and programmatic practices; learners’ perspectives in terms of motivation and attitudes (Ducar, 2012); and in classroom based studies (Valdés, 2012). In response to those concerns and to contribute to the dialogue between researchers and educators of SHL, this study has two
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objectives: 1) to describe an unique curriculum to teach Spanish to heritage learners that incorporates all the features researchers has identified for an effective program; and 2) to identify the impact of the program in students attitudes, self-esteem, language skills and future plans from the students’ perspective.

Overview of the Spanish for Fluent Speakers Curriculum

The SFS curriculum of LCPS is fashioned by three levels or courses (SFS I, SFS II, Honors SFS III). It is aligned with the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA Consortium) standards and English language arts standards of learning (SOLS) of Virginia. As many foreign languages courses, they are considered high school elective courses. Seventh and eighth graders can take SFS I together in middle school, but only eighth graders can take SFS II after passing SFS I. If students decide to take SFS in high school, they have to begin with level I, regardless in what grade they are. The last level is Honors SFS III which gives students the opportunity to proceed to AP Spanish.

The SFS curriculum is an integrated curriculum in which the student is the center of that curriculum. This means accepting the culture and language of students, their families and others as legitimate and embracing them as valid tools of learning. It is divided in four thematic units: 1) Thinking like a Researcher, 2) Thinking like a Reader, 3) Thinking like a Writer, and 4) Thinking like a Speaker. The goal of these units is to conscientize students of their identity: where they come from, who they are, and their potential to become a fundamental part in the society of the future. In all units, students have ample opportunities for writing, reading, speaking, listening, and investigating through media; for expanding their cultural knowledge and for reflecting and critiquing on cultural issues. The content of each unit will be based on students’ interests; the teaching learning experience will take the student through different
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creative processes: an investigation, reading analysis and reflection, creative writing and speech writing. Research suggests that writing skills should be stressed more than the others, since heritage speakers’ exposure to Spanish is oral (Chevalier, 2004; Parodi, 2008; Peyton, 2008). Correspondingly, these experiences will be assessed through a written product: an expository essay, literary journal, short story, poetry, mini-play and a persuasive essay/speech. Students will also be exposed in the use of different strategies in learning the language in all three communication modes (interpersonal, interpretative and presentational).

As shown in the next table, the SFS curriculum is all about the learner: knowing themselves, their own life experiences, values, linguistic, social and emotional needs and future plans. It is a curriculum that respects all individuals’ personal characteristics and their moral and ethical contributions, regardless of race, gender, socio-economic status, educational label and/or literacy differences.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SFS 1</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Language Skills</th>
<th>Final Assessment</th>
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| Unit 1 | **Learning about us**  
*Who I am?* | Research  
*Cultural aspect* | Capitalization  
Punctuation  
Outline/Summarize  
Expository paragraph | PP presentation  
Expository essay |
| Unit 2 | **Literature as a legacy of our people.**  
*Where I come from?* | Reading analysis  
*Myths /legends* | Accentuation, main idea  
Chronological order  
Fact or opinion  
Inferences | Journals  
Midterm exam |
| Unit 3 | **Literature as an expression of our self**  
*How I am?* | Creative writing  
*Short story* | Elements of a short story  
Verb conjugation  
Descriptive paragraph  
Narrative paragraph | A short story |
| Unit 4 | **Speech as an instrument of personal growth**  
*How I think?* | Oratory  
*Persuasive essay* | Public speaking skills  
Types of sentences according to speaker attitude | Speech presentation  
Persuasive essay  
Final Exam |

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<th>SFS 11</th>
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| Unit 1 | **In search of our social wellbeing**  
*How to positively use my leisure time?* | Research  
*Hobbies/pastimes* | Research Writing skills  
Active / Passive Voice  
Conjugation Verb to be | PP presentation  
Expository essay |
| Unit 2 | **Literature as a reflection of social consciousness**  
*How to be a good citizen?* | Reading analysis  
*El alquimista*  
*(Pablo Coehlo)* | Sentence structure  
Diacritic Accent  
Special accentuation rules | Literary journals  
Literary review |
| Unit 3 | **Literature and its social commitment**  
*What I care about the most?* | Creative Writing  
*Poetry* | Elements of a poem  
Adjectives  
Rhetoric Images | Anthology of 10 poems |
| Unit 4 | **Citizens’ Rights and Responsibilities**  
*How can I enhance my quality of life?* | Oratory  
*Persuasive essay* | Public speaking skills  
Syntax  
Complements of the verb | Speech presentation  
Persuasive essay  
Final Exam |

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SFS III</th>
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</table>
| Unit 1 | **Seeking out a prosperous future**  
*Attaining a college degree as a tool for prosperity* | Research  
*Professions* | Using APA style  
Copulative sentence  
Distributive sentence | PP presentation  
Expository essay |
| Unit 2 | **Literature as a predictor of our Era**  
*What changes (economic, geographic, social, environmental) will affect my future?* | Reading analysis  
*Essays* | Adversative sentence  
Disjunctive sentence  
Subjunctive mode  
Present tense  
Cognate Words | Literary journals |
| Unit 3 | **Living the future through dramatic creations**  
*What challenges will I encounter in the future?* | Creative writing  
*Mini plays* | Elements of a drama  
Subordinated sentences  
Subjunctive mode  
Past tense | Dramatization |
| Unit 4 | **My profession as a catalyst of change**  
*How can my profession assist me in confronting these changes?* | Oratory  
*Persuasive essay* | Public speaking skills  
Subjunctive Mode: Present Perfect, AP skills | Speech presentation  
Persuasive essay  
Final exam |
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For example, in the first Unit of Spanish for Fluent Speakers I – Thinking like a Researcher- the student will conduct a descriptive investigation about any aspect of their native country they are interested in; prepare a PowerPoint presentation and will write an expository essay about it. Language skills taught in this unit are: capital letters, punctuation marks, outline, summarize, and how to write an expository essay.

In Thinking like a Reader, the student will analyze several myths and legends from different Latino countries and will reflect (by writing in journals) about the meaning/impact those readings have on them. Language skills taught in this unit are: accentuation, chronological order, vocabulary, main idea, details, facts and opinions, and inferences.

In Thinking like a Writer, the student will become familiar with the fundamental elements that comprise a short story. They will experience all the steps needed in the creation of a short story (pre-writing, drafting, editing, and publishing). After editing their drafts, with the recommendations of their classmates, they will present their final product to the class. Language skills taught in this unit are: verb conjugation.

Finally, in Thinking like a Speaker, the student will select a controversial issue, research the topic in order to write and present a persuasive speech in favor or against the topic chosen. Language skills taught in this unit are: speech skills (tone, diction, corporal gestures…), types of sentences according to speaker’s attitude.

Through these units, students from different Latino groups will develop and negotiate a sense of community, defined by a feeling that members of a group also have of a sense belonging. This means that members of a group matter to one another and to the group, and a shared faith that members needs will be met through their commitment to be together. By negotiating community through reflection and critique, students will transcend their own cultural
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experience and will be in a better position to understand, appreciate or even embrace other cultures. In sum, the Spanish for Fluent Speakers is a program that empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using culture to impact knowledge, skills and attitudes. The ultimate goal is to ensure that Latino students achieve and move toward realizing their potential.

Program’s Philosophy

The Spanish for Fluent Speakers Curriculum is based on four different beliefs or principles about: 1) the way students learn, 2) the best way to learn a language, 3) the characteristics that define an effective language arts program; and, 4) the best way to teach emergent bilinguals.

First, the SFS program is based on the notion that learning is a search for meaning; it must start with issues around which students are actively trying to construct meaning. Meaning requires understanding wholes as well as parts; therefore, the learning process should be focused on primary concepts, not isolated facts. In order to teach well, we must understand the mental schemas students develop to perceive the world and the assumptions they make to support those schemas. The purpose of learning is for individuals to construct their own meaning (Brooks, 1993). Therefore, the Spanish for Fluent for Speakers curriculum is based on the interests and needs of Latino students.

Second, the SFS program is centered on the idea that instruction is about differentiation: in content, processes and assessment. This implies that teachers need to know their students interests, needs, learning styles, intelligences, talents and strengths. Teachers need to give students a voice, talk to them, and listen to what they have to say. As Blaz (2006) accurately
SPANISH FOR HERITAGE SPEAKERS explains: “When teachers are able to make required content appeal to students’ interests, students are likely to respond with greater commitment, energy and endurance” (p.8). This means that teachers need to select a variety of learning activities, or strategies according to students’ interests, cognitive capacity or learning styles. Accordingly, this demands that the assessment strategies emphasize critical and creative thinking.

The third principle that guides the program is that learning a language is easiest when it is from whole to part, when it is in authentic contexts and when it is purposeful to the learner (Goodman, 1986). Language is learned as students use it in reading and writing, listening and speaking about science, math, social issues, politics, business and/or any other topic they are interested in. Students should be invited day in and day out to read whole stories, poems, books and essays; to write their own stories, poems, books and essays. Reading and writing are viewed as one of many ways of expanding a student’s understanding of the world. This means that the Spanish for Fluent Speakers curriculum respects learners: what they are, where they come from, how they talk, what they read and write and what experiences they already had before coming to school.

An effective language arts program exhibits the following characteristics:

- Develops thinking and language together through interactive learning.
- Develops children's oral language and early literacy through appropriately challenging learning.
- Draws on literature from many genres, time periods, and cultures.
- Emphasizes writing as an essential way to develop, clarify, and communicate ideas in persuasive, expository, literary, and expressive discourse.
- Provides for literacy in all forms of media.
- Teaches the strategies necessary for acquiring academic knowledge, achieving common academic standards, and attaining independence in learning.
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- Builds on the language, experiences, strategies, and interests that students bring to school.
- Develops each student's distinctive writing or speaking voice.

In summary, while encouraging respect for differences in home backgrounds, an effective language arts curriculum nurtures students' sense of their common ground as productive citizens in order to prepare them for responsible participation in schools, community, and society. However, how can teachers accomplish all those goals given the particular characteristics of the emergent bilingual Latino students described before? They can do it by being a transcaring educator.

In the SFS classroom, the students have a voice, not because they speak in their heritage language, but because they can speak both languages simultaneously according to their communication needs (translanguaging). They have a safe space in which they speak, read, write, do research and learn without feeling embarrassed because they don’t communicate “well” in both languages. It should be noted that translanguaging is not merely going from one language code to another. According to Ofelia García (2013) the notion of code-switching assumes that the two languages of bilinguals are two separate monolingual systems that could be used without reference to each other. Instead, translanguaging assumes that bilinguals have one linguistic repertoire from which they select features strategically to communicate effectively (García, 2013). That is, translanguaging takes as it starting point the language practices of bilingual people as the norm, and not the language of monolinguals, as described by traditional usage books and grammars. Translanguaging takes the position that language is action and practice, and not a simple system of structures and discreet sets of skills. That’s why translanguaging uses an –ing form, emphasizing the action and practice of languaging bilingually. (García, 2011).
According to García (2009) translanguaging or engaging in bilingual or multilingual discourses practices is “... an approach to bilinguism that is centered not on the constructed notion of standards languages, as has been often the case, but on the practices of bilinguals that are readily observable” (p. 15). For example, it is common to see a bilingual family listening to the radio in one language, watching television in another, talking in one language to include all members of the family, or talking in another to exclude the parents.

Students also have opportunities of transculturing, e.g. combining traditions and customs of both cultures; and of flexible assessment opportunities in which they can enhance their works. This is known as a Pedagogy of Transcaring, which also include transcending school boundaries and collaboration between teacher, parents and administrators.

**Method**

Inspired by a survey done by the National Heritage Language Resource Center (Carreira, 2011) to 1,700 college-level heritage language learners, this study queried 196 middle and high school students from a county in Northern Virginia. The purpose was to identify what motivates them to take the course, how do they feel, their view of themselves in the context of the classroom, level of satisfaction, influence of the program on future academic plans, level of language skills attainment, and level of skills transference to English from the student’s perspective.

**Participants**

Most of the students participating in this study come from Central and South America: El Salvador, Honduras, Bolivia, Guatemala, Mexico, Peru, and Colombia. Most of them or their parents are undocumented immigrants. This is a situation that affects their behavior, attitudes and future. Some of those students have experienced the dangerous circumstances of crossing
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the border; most of the time with strangers (coyote), and welcomed by other strangers because some of those parents left them when they were babies. Academically, they have little or zero formal education in the Spanish language; they don’t have any plans to further their education; they believe their future is uncertain. They live in a constant worry that the Migra will take them back. They believe they have little chance to succeed academically because they don’t know the English language and they are prohibited to talk in Spanish. Their self-worth is diminished, thus, they don’t appreciate their Latino culture. Besides, there is no sense of community among them. In addition, since they speak Spanish and some of them can also read and write, the regular Spanish as a second language courses offered in the county were too easy for them. Therefore, the school system was not fulfilling the academic needs of these students.

In an effort to enhance the opportunities of these students to succeed personally and academically, and to optimize their educational contexts, a group of SFS teachers redesigned the Spanish for Fluent Speakers (SFS) curriculum in 2007. The main goals of the SFS curriculum are: to rigorously prepare Latinos students for the mastery of speaking, reading and writing skills in Spanish (and therefore in English or vice versa); and to meet their social and affective needs.

**Questionnaire**

The questionnaire designed consisted of 15 questions in Spanish. Eight of those questions encompassed a Likert scale for the responses; and in four of them, students had to explain their selection. In two of them they had to select more than one response and the last question was an open-ended question in which they had to write a paragraph of five sentences (see appendix A).
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To verify its validity, a group of sixth graders that were taking Spanish Language arts answered the questionnaire. Modifications to this survey were made based on the students understanding of the questions.

An electronic copy of the questionnaire was sent to fifteen SFS teachers asking them to distribute it among their students; and ten of them responded affirmatively to the request. It should be noted that the teachers that agreed to participate were all Spanish native speakers. The students answered a paper/pencil form and the teachers returned the answered questionnaires to the researcher. The responses were tally electronically and the results graphed.

Results

One hundred and ninety six (196) students participated in the survey. Sixty six of them 66 (34%) were in SFS I, 81 (42%) were in SFS II and 41(24%) were in SFS III and eight of them did not answer that question. Even though their first language is Spanish, 94 (48%) learned to read and write in English first and 86 (44 %) learned in Spanish first. Not surprisingly, 48 of them (24%) learned in both languages at the same time. This is likely due to an interest of the abuelitas or mothers to maintain communication and preserve the cultural roots.

As illustrated in the graphs below, almost all of the respondents said they feel very good in the SFS class and that they are very satisfied with the class. When answered why, the top three responses given were: 1) I have learned a lot, 2) the teacher is excellent, funny, caring; and 3) I’m with my friends/can make friends. The same top three reasons were specified when responded if they would recommend the program. Other reasons expressed were: It’s my language and I’m Latino, we are all Latinos, I feel like in my home, I can improve my language skills, I can communicate with others... The students that reported not feeling good/or not
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satisfied with the program explained that the class was too difficult for them. This can be due to the fact that these students may have been registered in the course without being pre-tested.
A large majority of the respondents (85%) stated that the SFS program has helped them in making plans for pursuing a college degree. Three responses stood out when explaining the reasons why: 1) **knowing two languages give me more opportunities for finding a good job after graduation**, 2) **the teacher motivated me a lot**; and 3) **I can get free college credits**. Career goals are very important to students as seemed in the graph below. In regards to the students’ reasons for taking SFS, the students selected the following top three: 1) **better profession or job in the future**, 2) **to earn college credits**; and 3) **it is very important to enter college**. For them learning Spanish is very useful, and necessary; and most of all: it is important because they are Latinos.
The vast majority of the students are very proud of being Latino thanks to the SFS program. When stating why, they predominantly responded: 1) *because I can speak, read and write Spanish much better* and 2) *because I know much more about my culture*. One of the students wrote: “*before, I didn’t want anyone to know I was Hispanic, but by observing how proud my teacher was, little by little I began to feel very proud of being Hispanic, of being Honduran*”. Other responses that stood out were: *we can speak two languages; we are unique, special, and important.*
Discussion

According to these results, it is concluded that the Spanish for Fluent Speakers program described in this study improves the student's self worth. For the first time, Latino students feel that they are important and unique because they get to know their culture and language. More importantly, they get to know themselves: Who they are and where they come from. They understand that, even though they come from different Latino countries, all of them share the same ethical, religious and social values. It gives them a positive vision of the Latino culture changing in this way their attitude about their culture. Correspondingly, they develop a sense of cultural pride and identity. They feel that they are not marginalized and silenced anymore.

They don’t feel embarrassed because they do not speak well in English or Spanish. In the SFS class, students are allowed to express themselves in both languages if necessary (translanguaging). Therefore, they are more motivated for improving their literacy skills in Spanish and English. This is an opportunity for teachers to teach and compare grammar rules and other aspects of both languages. Accordingly, students gradually develop a broader command of two languages and best of all, they are conscious of it. When asking how learning Spanish have affected their school experience, one of the SFS II student said:

“La clase de SFS me está ayudando mucho. Una vez mi profesora de inglés me pidió que hiciera un poema. ¡Este poema tenía que ser del largo de una página! Gracias a mi clase de español pude hacerlo porque ya habíamos aprendido cómo. Por esta razón creo
SPANISH FOR HERITAGE SPEAKERS

 que la clase de español es algo necesario en la escuela. ¡Gracias por ofrecer esta clase!

(The SFS class is helping me a lot. One time, my English teacher asked me to write a poem. It had to be one page long! Thanks to my SFS class I could do it because we have already learned how to do it. This is the reason why I think it is necessary to have the SFS class in the school. Thank you for offering it!)

Moreover, they discover that they belong to a new society that is bicultural and bilingual, and they realize this is a positive and convenient condition. One student stated:

“A veces he tenido que traducir para algún estudiante latino que no sabe nada de inglés y otras, he traducido para maestros que no saben nada de español. Entonces, me siento muy bien conmigo misma” (Sometimes I have to translate for a Latino student that does not speak English, and others, I have to translate for a teacher that does not speak Spanish. Then, I feel good about myself.)

As other student excellently summarize it: “No soy ni de aquí ni de allá, soy de aquillá” (I am neither from here nor there, I am from both places).

When you understand yourself, your self-esteem augments and therefore, you develop a sense of community or belonging, e.g. a feeling of being integrated into the school and community. More importantly, they develop a sense of community among the different groups of Latinos in the school. The SFS program helps to ameliorate the power struggle between ethnicities. They comprehend that Salvadorians are not superior to Hondurans; and Hondurans are not superior to Bolivians or Guatemalans. Students understand that unity means power. Therefore, this is central to their motivation and learning.

Accordingly, the SFS program increases the student’s motivation and engagement in learning. Students affirm that they can learn, are intelligent and they matter. Since 2007, Latino
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students began to participate in the activities offered by their school and county. For example, they participate in the Latin Dance Club, the International Night, the Talent Show, and in the Student Council elections. More importantly, they are eager to participate in the Spanish Language Gala, a county level event. It is a celebration where Latino students’ language and culture are honored. It is also the culmination of a year of hard work in which students can demonstrate what they have learned in the SFS class. Students voluntarily compete in spelling bee, grammar, oratory, short story, essay and poetry, depending on what level they are.

This means that the SFS program helps them grow from an egocentric to a sociocentric perspective of themselves. They demonstrate an appreciation for learning, hard work and commitment to excellence as a benefit to self and others. They have also grown from a simplistic to a complex view of human motivation. By competing in these activities, they display a deeper understanding of human motivations; and understand that monetary compensation is not always the best reward or motivation to compete. Moreover, they have grown from lower order to complex higher order conceptualizations. Through the competitions, students can bring into their action systems new concepts. In sum, the SFS program changes their pessimist view of the world to an optimistic one.

Conclusion

The main purpose of this study was to determine the way the SFS curriculum of Loudoun County PS has impacted the students according to their opinion. Particularly, this study explored how students have changed their perception of themselves, their motivation for learning; improved their language skills and altered their plans for pursuing a college degree. It is also a response to the call of educators to the need of more research about exemplary and effective
SPANISH FOR HERITAGE SPEAKERS
curricula, and about learners’ perspectives in terms of motivation and attitudes. Its ultimate goal is to help reduce or eliminate the Latino students’ academic achievement gap.

The analysis of the data revealed that this unique SFS curriculum has a **positive impact** on their attitudes, self esteem, motivation, language skills and future academic plans. Its rigorous and flexible curriculum meets the social, emotional and intellectual needs of Latino students. They believe in themselves and they realize that they can do anything they want if they work hard, and are perseverant.

This unique program also promotes students’ critical consciousness; and validates their identity. Through the SFS program, the students develop a value support system that helps them challenge racism, sexism, and social injustice from peers, family, and community members. In one of the survey responses sheet, one of the students from SFS III wrote me a note that said:

> “Dra. Nieves, muchísimas gracias por hacernos leer la novela *El alquimista*. Usted no sabe cuánto me han ayudado los diarios reflexivos en este tiempo difícil por el que estoy pasando este año. Todavía conservo la libreta” (Dr. Nieves, thank you so much for making us read the novel *The Alquimist*. You do not know how much the journal reflections we had to write have helped me in the difficult times I am experiencing this year. I still have the composition notebook).

In sum, the SFS program gives them HOPE, they can dream and those dreams can become true.

In addition, the teacher also plays a significant role in this impact. One of the main reasons the students would recommend this program is because the teacher is caring, funny and knowledgeable. It is important to highlight that all the teachers that participated in the study are Latino. It is recommended that this type of program should be taught by a native speaker and a specialist in language arts. The SFS teacher helps the students develop their **self-efficacy**, e.g.
ability to believe in ourselves. If the students believe in themselves, they would be capable of believing they could make a difference in the world! A Latino teacher is a positive role model for Latino students. Research has confirmed that students benefit when they can learn from teachers who look like them, have the same background and have experience similar life circumstances. Unfortunately, according to the National Center of Education Statistics (2007) from 3,898,420 teachers of all schools in the United States, only 7% (272,889) is Latino.

Recruiting more Latino teachers should be part of an overall effort for strengthening the teaching profession and ensure that students are learning from a diverse group of great teachers.

Moreover, research has confirmed that there is a mismatch between school and home, and Latino educators are bridge builders that help close that mismatch.

One limitation of the study is the small number of students that responded. Another limitation is that only Latino teachers accepted to have their students participate. It’s possible the results would have changed if non native speaker teachers that teach the SFS class would have participated.

In summary, The SFS is an exemplary and unique program that evidently helps reduce the Latino students’ achievement gap.
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SPANISH FOR HERITAGE SPEAKERS


Valdés, G. (2012). Afterword: future directions for the field of Spanish as a heritage

Impacto del programa Español para Hispanohablantes en las actitudes, autoestima y futuro académico y profesional de los estudiantes

1. En qué idioma aprendiste a leer y a escribir? __________

2. ¿En qué grado comenzaste la escuela en EU? __________

3. ¿Cuántos niveles de Spanish for Fluent Speakers (SFS) has tomado? __________

4. ¿Has tomado o estás tomando AP Spanish? ___ SI ___ NO

5. Si ya tomaste AP, ¿pasaste el examen? __________ ¿Qué puntuación? __________

6. ¿Cómo te sientes o te sentías en la clase de SFS? ¿Por qué?
   a) extremadamente bien  b) bastante bien  c) un poco bien  d) mal

7. ¿Estás satisfecho con el programa de SFS? ¿Por qué?
   a) extremadamente  b) bastante  c) un poco  d) nada

8. ¿Cuánto te ha ayudado el programa de SFS en tu decisión de ir a la universidad?
   a) extremadamente  b) bastante  c) un poco  d) nada

9. ¿Cuánto recomendarías este programa a tus amigos? ¿Por qué?
10. ¿Cuánto has mejorado las destrezas de hablar, leer y escribir en español?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HABLAR</th>
<th>a) extremadamente</th>
<th>b) bastante</th>
<th>c) un poco</th>
<th>d) nada</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEER</td>
<td>a) extremadamente</td>
<td>b) bastante</td>
<td>c) un poco</td>
<td>d) nada</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ESCRIBIR</td>
<td>a) extremadamente</td>
<td>b) bastante</td>
<td>c) un poco</td>
<td>d) nada</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11. Gracias a SFS, te sientes orgulloso de ser hispano? ¿Por qué?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a) extremadamente</th>
<th>b) bastante</th>
<th>c) un poco</th>
<th>d) nada</th>
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<tbody>
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</table>

12. ¿Por qué has tomado la clase de SFS? Marca con una X todas las que apliquen.

____ Para aprender sobre mi cultura y mis raíces
____ Comunicarme mejor con mi familia y amigos en EU
____ Comunicarme mejor con mi familia y amigos en mi país
____ Porque era obligatorio
____ Mejor profesión o trabajo en el futuro
____ Comunicarme mejor cuando viaje
____ Porque es fácil para mí
____ Mejorar mi promedio académico
____ Estar en una clase de honor
____ Es importante para entrar a la universidad
____ Para obtener créditos universitarios
____ Otra __________________________________________________________

13. Gracias a la clase de SFS, ¿Has mejorado en tus destrezas del lenguaje en inglés?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a) extremadamente</th>
<th>b) bastante</th>
<th>c) un poco</th>
<th>d) nada</th>
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14. ¿Qué piensas sobre la destreza de saber otro idioma como español? Marca todas las que apliquen

_____ es una destreza valorada por otros.
_____ Es muy práctico. (useful)
_____ Es necesario.
_____ Me ha ayudado a hacer amigos.
_____ Es importante porque soy hispano.
_____ Hace la escuela más amena, grata. (enjoyable)
_____ Ha hecho la escuela más difícil.
_____ Ha hecho la escuela menos difícil.
_____ Ha sido una barrera para aprender inglés.
_____ A veces me siento avergonzado de hablar español.
_____ Otra ________________________________

15. ¿Cómo el saber español ha afectado tu experiencia en la escuela? Puedes recordar un incidente en dónde tu idioma nativo te haya ayudado o causado problemas en la escuela? Contesta en un párrafo de cinco oraciones.

_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________

¡GRACIAS POR TUS RESPUESTAS!  Dra. Nieves  Sterling Middle School, Sterling, VA  ©