

Enhancing Second Language Acquisition in the Elementary Classroom

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Overview**

Wittgenstein expressed the idea that "The limits of my language mean the limits of my world." Globalization and immigration create the need for a modern world characterized by the acceptance of cultural and linguistic diversity. I had the opportunity to study abroad in Spain. This experience helped me realize and understand more clearly the necessity of preparing the next generation to live in a multilingual society. According to Met (2008), who served as Acting Supervisor of the National Foreign Language Center and a supervisor of foreign language instruction for school districts, "Globalization has led to unprecedented interest in expanding foreign language in U.S. schools, particularly at grade levels where traditionally it has not been an option" (p. 35). The elementary school in which I am placed for my student teaching offers Spanish as one of its four electives. The students attend Spanish class once every four days. Met (2008) indicates that Foreign Language Experience (FLEX) programs in which students do not receive foreign language instruction multiple times per week do not promote usable levels of language proficiency (p. 45).

### **Thesis**

Students who have the opportunity to learn another language in elementary school are not only shown to score higher on standardized tests in math and English language arts, but will also increase their fluency through daily exposure to a world language in a variety of avenues in the classroom, through availability of literature in the second language, and through partnering with students of a different grade level to explore the language together. In my classroom, I will accomplish this by conducting transitions in

Spanish, providing certain directions in Spanish, labeling the classroom with Spanish vocabulary, read books in Spanish, and incorporating Spanish activities during our buddy time with the first graders and during garden time.

### **Nature of the Problem**

This study looks to answer several questions in order to determine effective methods for increasing competence and confidence in students learning and utilizing a world language at the elementary level. Spanish is the world language that is taught at the school where I will be student teaching, and will therefore be the focus language of my research. The following questions will be addressed throughout the research period:

- How does one measure or define effectiveness?
- Why is it important to teach a world language in elementary school?
- Does acquisition of a second language enhance the learning of the curriculum?
- In what ways are students willing to use their Spanish language skills?
- What is the students' attitude toward learning and using the Spanish language?
- What are the benefits of daily exposure to the Spanish language?
- How does the mainstream classroom teacher modeling the use of Spanish in instruction, in transition times, and in general conversation affect the students' willingness to communicate verbally in the Spanish language?
- Does availability of children's literature in Spanish in the classroom change students' perception and willingness to explore this world language?

- Does partnering fifth and first grade students with activities in Spanish increase competence and confidence in both fifth and first graders in using this world language?

### **Rationale of the Study**

Met (2008) asserts that “As No Child Left Behind has become a familiar refrain in our schools, few have noticed that the United States is already far behind the rest of the world in preparing our students for their responsibilities as global citizens” (p. 36). This author also indicates that even in a global society, the United States remains one of the only predominantly monolingual countries in the world. Globalization and an increasing diversity in the United States make it essential for our nation to educate global citizens. Elliot (1996) affirms that people who are multilingual and open to learning about other cultures will be more successful in the globalized world (p. 35-37). In addition, there are cognitive advantages to teaching a foreign language to elementary school students. Research indicates that “...studies of early foreign language learning have shown that students may outperform comparison groups on measures of reading and math” (Met, 2008, p. 36).

Immersion programs, in which students receive instruction in the target language half of the day, foster the highest language proficiency skills (Met, 2008, p. 36). However, many school districts employ Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) or Foreign Language Experience (FLEX) models in which students attend a language class at least once a week (Met, 2008, p. 45). Due to the fact that the elementary school at which I am placed does not provide Spanish class every day, I hope to explore different techniques which increase the competence and confidence in students

acquiring and utilizing other languages. My goal is to determine a method which can be implemented in the regular classroom to cultivate the students' Spanish skills so that they can attain a usable level of language proficiency.

### **Key Terms & Definitions**

In this study, the following terms will be defined as:

*Effectiveness and effective methods* are techniques used to increase language proficiency which produce measurable results. These results will include increased oral and written competency in Spanish and increased willingness to use Spanish outside of Spanish class.

*Language proficiency* is the ability to successfully read, write, and speak in Spanish.

*Second language acquisition* is the process in which students learn a language in the elementary school other than English.

*Language production* is the use of the Spanish language to communicate in spoken form and in written form.

*Written production* is the use of the Spanish language to communicate in written form.

*Oral production* is the use of the Spanish language to communicate orally with spoken words.

A *buddy system* is a program in which younger students are paired with older students.

At the school in which I am completing my student teaching, my fifth grade class partners with a first grade class. I plan to implement Spanish activities during their time together in an effort to increase language production in both populations.

*Daily exposure* to the Spanish language will be utilized as a method to increase the students' level of proficiency. Daily exposure includes the teacher modeling the use of Spanish in instruction, in transition times, and in general conversation throughout the day,

availability of children's literature in Spanish in the classroom, and providing fifth and first grade students with educational activities in Spanish to complete together.

*FLES*, Foreign Language in the Elementary School, is a term for programs in which the students attend language class for a certain number of minutes per week (Met, 2008, p. 45). Experts recommend that students receive at least seventy-five minutes per week of foreign language instruction.

*FLEX*, Foreign Language Experience, is a term for programs which meet as infrequently as thirty minutes per week (Met, 2008, p. 45). This method does not usually promote usable levels of language proficiency.

*The receptive-expressive gap* is the difference between the number of words the students are able to understand in Spanish and the number of Spanish words students are able to mentally retrieve and verbalize (Gibson, Kimbrough Oller, Jarmulowicz & Ethington, 2012, p. 103).

A *world language* is a language that is spoken in many countries throughout the world. The district in which I am placed refers to foreign languages as world languages. The world language that will be the focus of my study is Spanish.

### **Delimitations**

I will conduct this research throughout the first semester of school and will be working with fifth grade students. The school I am placed at includes Spanish class as one of the electives. Therefore, the second language studied in this project will be Spanish. I plan on utilizing current educational, neurological, and linguistic research. Possible obstacles I may encounter include the varying levels of proficiency in Spanish the students possess, accurately measuring the students' growth in Spanish production

skills, and the limited time I will be provided to develop the students' proficiency in Spanish due to the school's new focus on standards-based grades. I may also be limited with how much time the fifth graders can spend with their first grade buddies working together on various Spanish activities and how open the students will be to engage in the activities.

### **Procedures**

Before I begin student teaching, I will use the resources at Tutt Library to conduct research about current educational, neurological, and linguistic research about teaching a foreign language in elementary school. During the first month of school, I will assess the students' level of Spanish language proficiency. In October, I will begin increasing exposure and utilization of Spanish on a daily basis by introducing Spanish books into the classroom library, giving directions in Spanish, engaging in conversational Spanish, using buddy time for Spanish activities, and using vocabulary in Spanish and English. From October to December, I will conduct formal and informal assessments of students' willingness and ability to communicate in Spanish both in spoken and written language. These assessments include before and after surveys, observations of the students and rubrics and guidelines for measuring growth in Spanish class and in the regular classroom.

### **Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

In Chapter Two, I will discuss and organize the relevant educational, neurological, and linguistic research related to learning a second language in the elementary classroom. I will utilize this literature review to determine the benefits of teaching a foreign language in elementary school and effective methods for teaching foreign language. This research will provide the specific ideas that I will use as the basis of my project. In Chapter Three,



I will design a model which includes effective strategies of increasing oral and written production in a foreign language based on the research. This chapter will include a sequence of ten activities and strategies designed to increase oral and written communication in Spanish and to improve the mind-set and attitude of the fifth grade students toward Spanish. Chapter Four will provide the process in which I will collect data, my reflection on my project, and next steps for further implementation. I want to determine if the strategies I implement in the classroom increase competence and confidence in students learning and utilizing a world language in all its forms.

## **Chapter 2: Review and Analysis of the Literature**

Wandruszka is quoted in Apeltauer (1993) as expressing the idea that “Being human among humans means living in a state of ever incomplete multilingualism” (p. 273). Teaching a foreign language to young students is not a new subject of debate in our education system. Archbold (1973/1974) indicates that “...a mandated program of state-wide instruction for millions of children was first attempted in California” (p. 1). The author explains that in 1961 the California State Legislature passed the Casey Bill, which called for foreign language instruction for sixth grade students. This bill took effect during the 1965-1966 school year. Thirty years later, teaching a foreign language would become the national standard. Canales (2010) asserts that the Foreign Language Education Project of 1996 greatly impacted the teaching of foreign languages in the United States (p.73).

Even though globalization has catalyzed an increase in the number of foreign language programs integrated in early childhood education, recent research illustrates that “Six percent fewer elementary schools and 17% fewer middle schools are teaching

foreign languages than a decade ago, citing budget cuts, a shortage of teachers, and constraints from NCLB due to math and reading testing priorities” (Taylor, 2009, p.7). The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act has led to schools aligning their curriculum to national standards and the standardized tests. In addition, many teachers are forced to “teach to the test” due to the emphasis placed on the performance of students on the standardized tests. Schools are focusing more on math and reading at the expense of other subjects, such as foreign language instruction. Met (2008) affirms that while the No Child Left Behind Act has received a lot of attention, few realize that the United States is failing to prepare students as global citizens. This author adds that the English only United States is behind because “...bilingualism and multilingualism are more the norm than the exception throughout the rest of the world” (p. 36). This author also declares that students need to learn how to build bridges across linguistic and cultural barriers due to the increasing diversity in the United States. In agreement with Met, Elliot (1996) maintains that “...people who speak a foreign language and who know something about foreign cultures will be better equipped to prosper in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than those who don’t” (p. 35-37).

Not only will students who learn a foreign language be better equipped to participate in the global community, but the research also shows that these children have a cognitive advantage and outperform their peers in other subjects (Stewart, 2005). Many educators are skeptical about taking time out of their already busy days to provide foreign language instruction for students. In this era of standardized testing, all curriculums must align with standards and be proven to improve student performance. The common misconception is that any subject that takes away time from math and literacy will

negatively impact the students' achievement on high-stakes tests. However, research indicates that foreign language instruction provides children with a cognitive edge over their peers. The article "Dual-language Options Put Omaha Schools in Vanguard" (2007) notes that "Achievement results presented to the Omaha school board recently indicate that elementary students who are learning in both Spanish and English are scoring better in reading and math than their schoolmates who are taught only in English" (p.10).

Foreign language instruction should be an integral part of any child's education. In addition, it is essential that students begin learning another language at a young age. Met (2008) articulates that "Research studies have noted the cognitive correlations of early bilingualism; studies of early foreign language learning have shown that students may outperform comparison groups on measures of reading and math" (p. 36). This author responds to the fear of many educators that foreign language instruction takes away critical time from the core subjects and negatively impacts academic performance. Met (1991) affirms that elementary students in foreign language programs perform well on standardized tests "... even when these subjects were taught in another language or when time has been "taken out" of the school day to make time for foreign language instruction" (p. 88). Met (2008) also stresses that students who receive foreign language instruction perform equal to or better than their monolingual peers (p. 45). Students who have the opportunity to learn a world language not only increase their cognitive abilities, but they also attain their multicultural goals of becoming better global citizens. Another advantage of learning another language at a young age is that "Pre-adolescents are more receptive to learning about people of other cultures and may be more likely than older

learners to develop positive cross-cultural attitudes” (Met, 2008, p. 88). This open-mindedness provides students with increased global awareness and understanding.

The structure and amount of foreign language instruction provided also have an immense impact on the level of language proficiency and cognitive development of the students. Met (2008) argues that “The least expensive model, which ironically results in the highest level of language proficiency, is an immersion program, where students spend at least one-half of the school day learning the school curriculum through the target language” (p. 36). Even though immersion programs foster the highest language proficiency skills, many schools choose to implement different foreign language programs, such as Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) or Foreign Language Experience (FLEX) (Met, 2008, p. 45). In FLES programs, students receive foreign language instruction for a certain number of minutes per week. Experts recommend that students receive at least seventy-five minutes per week of foreign language instruction. In FLEX programs, students receive foreign language instruction as infrequently as thirty minutes per week. Met (2008) maintains that “These programs can help students gain exposure to another language and some cultural understanding, but it is unlikely that usable levels of language proficiency can be developed under such time constraints” (p. 45).

In order to develop an effective foreign language program, it is important to have an understanding of the theories about second language acquisition. Krashen (1982), who has a Ph. D. in Linguistics, is a professor of Education at the University of Southern California, and has published over 350 books and papers, explains second language acquisition theories and explores successful practices. This author examines the two

distinct ways that people learn a second language and formulates the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis (p.10). This principle defines language acquisition as a subconscious and informal process, which is similar to the way one learns his or her first language. Krashen (1982) notes that “We are generally not consciously aware of the rules of the languages we have acquired. Instead, we have a "feel" for correctness. Grammatical sentences "sound" right, or "feel" right, and errors feel wrong, even if we do not consciously know what rule was violated” (p.10). In language acquisition, communication is the focus, instead of structure and grammar. The second way one becomes proficient in a second language is through language learning. This conscious process involves explicit and formal learning. The term learning is associated with knowing about the grammar and the rules of a language.

The second theory of second language acquisition that Krashen (1982) discusses is the Monitor hypothesis (p. 15). He asserts that language acquisition is more important than language learning because natural second language learning is more successful than forced or conscious language acquisition (García, 2005, p. 26). This author also indicates that the acquisition system is responsible for initiating speech and for fluency. Krashen (1982) states that “Learning has only one function, and that is as a Monitor, or editor” (p. 15). The monitor plans and corrects second language utterances. In addition, the author attempts to explain how second language acquisition occurs through the Input Hypothesis. This principle directly opposes the most common foreign language pedagogy (Krashen, 1982, p. 21). Foreign language instruction usually involves learning about grammatical structures in order to attain fluency. Krashen (1982) asserts that “The Input Hypothesis says the opposite. It says we acquire by "going for meaning" first, and as a result, we

acquire structure” (p. 21). In my classroom, I will do my best to foster the acquisition of the Spanish language through natural communication. My concentration will not be grammar and syntax because I hope to increase students’ willingness to communicate in Spanish in oral and written form. I will engage the students in natural Spanish conversation and will encourage the use of the Spanish written language as well.

In his book “Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning,” Krashen (1981) investigates the effects of aptitude and attitude on second language acquisition. According to this author, a student’s aptitude can be determined through the use of standardized tests (p. 36). He relates language aptitude to conscious language learning and therefore the monitor system. Krashen (1981) conveys the idea that aptitude “...will not be a strong predictor of second language success in children acquiring a second language” (p. 36). He explains that although aptitude and attitude both impact second language competency, they are not directly related to each other (p.19). Attitude is defined as the affective variables associated with learning a second language. Research indicates that “...the students' "general attitude" was the best predictor of success” (p. 33). A student’s attitude toward the given language and the context in which he or she is learning the language has an enormous influence on the child’s success in developing second language proficiency. Understanding this, I will strive to create an accepting, engaging, interactive, and flexible environment. In order to get my students personally invested in the Spanish language, it is essential that I know who my students are and how they live. By knowing who my students are, I can relate the curriculum to children’s lives. Making material relevant and applicable to students’ worlds is an important

strategy in engaging them. In addition, I will do my best to foster a trusting and cooperative relationship between students, parents, and myself.

Another factor that impacts a children's second language acquisition is their proficiency in their dominant language. Poarch & van Hell's research (2012) "...shows that the language not in use is also activated during language retrieval and influences performance in the target language" (p.420). The way that students process their second language depends on their knowledge of their native language. Understanding my students' level of comprehension of their native language will provide me insight into their strengths and struggles in second language acquisition. In 2000, Cummins introduced the common underlying proficiency concept, which is based off of extensive research (Freeman & Freeman, 2006, p. 9). This principle states that the knowledge we have acquired in one language is accessible in a second language. Therefore, children who are literate in their first language can transfer their reading and writing to their second language. Vokic (2011) affirms that learners of a second language (L2) literate in their first language (L1) "...draw on the skills and knowledge of literacy practices from their L1 and employ them in L2 speech" (p.414). As an educator, it is important that I remember that second language acquisition will not occur overnight. According to Yvonne and David Freeman, four to nine years are needed for the successful development of an academic language (Freeman, and Freeman 10). In addition, the research shows that at least six years of primary language instruction is needed to attain academic proficiency in two languages.

Language acquisition and usage of skills do not develop at the same rate. In my own experience of learning different world languages, such as Spanish, Italian, and

French, I was able to understand the spoken and written form before I was able to express myself orally and in written form. Schwieter & Sunderman (2009) performed a study in which people rated their own abilities in Spanish. Like me, the participants rated themselves the lowest in the category of speaking in Spanish (p. 910). Gibson, Kimbrough, Jarmulowicz, and Ethington (2012) observe that “Bilingual speakers may have difficulty retrieving words in Spanish that they understand” (p. 103). The authors describe this phenomenon as the receptive-expressive gap, which is the difference between the number words that people can understand in a foreign language and the number of words that they can produce orally themselves. The article suggests that people with little or decreased exposure to Spanish have “...difficulty producing Spanish vocabulary, while retaining relative ease of understanding Spanish vocabulary” (Kimbrough, Jarmulowicz, and Ethington, 2012, p.103). One of my goals is to increase the students’ exposure to Spanish in the mainstream classroom and implement strategies and activities in order to increase the children’s comfort level, confidence, and ability to speak in Spanish.

Even though second language acquisition has been researched in depth and standards about teaching a foreign language have been created, a curriculum guide does not exist. Canales (2010) observes that “...the standards do not describe specific course content, nor recommended sequence of study” (p. 74). In order to provide structure to teaching a foreign language, the author provides five goals for instruction. These five goals should be continually integrated throughout the curriculum and are not sequential steps. The first objective for language learners is to be able to communicate in more than one language (p. 77). Students acquiring another language should also strive to learn and



understand more about the cultures which speak the given language. One of the roles of the teacher is to assist his or her students to make connections between the foreign language and other subjects. In addition, it is important that the students make comparisons between different languages and cultures. The final goal that Canales discusses is giving students the opportunity to speak with and connect with multilingual communities in the surrounding area or in another country. As a teacher, it is important to use these five goals as a guide. In my foreign language curriculum, ample opportunity will be provided for the students to communicate with each other and to learn about other cultures. The language will be integrated with the other subjects and the students will be connected with speakers of the language in the local or global community.

Archbold (1973/1974) confirms that geography can "...serve as a vehicle to insure interest and student participation in an elementary foreign language program" (p. 5). Learning about other places and cultures which speak the foreign language is an important step in the second language acquisition process. Geography is one example of a subject that can be integrated with learning a world language. Spanish will be incorporated throughout the day in various subjects and assignments. In addition, it is very important to read and compare children's literature from different countries. Selecting texts in Spanish and English for my students to read will help promote bilingualism in the classroom. By teaching texts produced in distinct parts of the world, teachers can show students new cultures and illustrate that all cultures are equally important. Watkins (1992) argues that the history, the politics, the social issues, and the culture of a country affect the production and reception of children's literature (p. 180). Literature is a product of the culture it is written in. Therefore, books from other

countries can provide students with valuable insight into the lifestyle and the values of a distinct place. It is also essential that children's books promote literacy and imagination, teach new vocabulary and syntax, and support children to reflect on the world's problems. Mario Rey (2000) says that children's literature is a hybrid between pedagogy and literature (p. 31). In addition, children's literature serves to assist the preparation and formation of noble children for the adult world (p. 11).

I will be student-teaching in a fifth grade class which is partnered with first grade buddies. I plan to utilize buddy time for Spanish activities. Rumler and Lewis (2006) conclude that "This type of partnership has proven to be rewarding for all students and for us teachers as we watch our students work, play, and learn together" (p.420). Not only do the older students become teachers and role models for younger students, but also teaching something is a great way to reinforce the content and increase confidence. Buddy time provides me with a way to help my students cultivate a local community of Spanish speakers. However, I also hope to connect the children with Spanish speakers in a different country. Elliot (1996) suggests that "A Key Pal program allows classes to communicate with classes throughout the world via internet" (page 38). If possible, I will use the school's technological resources to provide my students with the opportunity to speak with children in a Spanish-speaking country. Foreign language instruction at the elementary level not only is shown to result in cognitive advantages, but also provides children with the tools to live successfully in a global community.

## **Chapter 3: Application**

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will design and implement a variety of strategies to increase oral and written communication with my fifth grade students in Spanish. The aim of these strategies is to improve the students' attitude toward learning a world language as well. I will begin by using Spanish words of the day. These magic words or phrases are a proactive attempt to help the students listen to all of the directions being given. The Spanish magic words will then be used during transitions or while directions are being given. To help promote using the Spanish language, I will designate a staff member of the day. If the children speak with this person in Spanish, they will receive a star sticker for their RISE cards, which play a part in the elementary school's PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention System). In addition, I will initiate conversations with students in Spanish. I will read and place bilingual stories in the classroom to encourage the students to read Spanish books. We will also compare and contrast various books in Spanish and in English. The students will make signs in Spanish to label our classroom with Spanish vocabulary. The students will also be engaged in Spanish activities with their 1<sup>st</sup> grade buddies. I will teach the students various songs in Spanish to help reinforce basic vocabulary. As a class, we will discuss why it is important to study a world language and the value of being able to speak more than one language. I hope to foster an awareness, understanding, and appreciation of learning another language. I will discuss the short term and long term benefits of learning a second language with the students, including becoming more respectful of people from all cultures, being more able to participate in

the globalized world, and increasing their cognitive capabilities that would enable them to become better lifelong learners.

### **Context**

My student teaching placement is at an elementary school in Colorado Springs in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. There are thirty students in the class. There are fifteen girls and fifteen boys. Eight of the students are new to this elementary school this year. Twenty-six percent of the three-hundred and fifty students qualify for free and reduced lunch. However, the majority of the students at the school come from middle class families. This group of fifth graders performed well above the Colorado state average on last year's TCAPs. This elementary school is usually in the high middle for TCAP test scores in its district. These students scored higher on the beginning of year reading baseline assessment than on the beginning of year math baseline assessment. Throughout the year, the students have consistently performed better on their reading assessments than on their math assessments.

There are two students in the class who have 504 plans. One is a girl has a sensory-processing disorder and the other student is a boy who has a visual-processing disorder. There are no English language learning students in the class. In addition, there are no students with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) in my class. There are several children in this fifth grade class who are on medication for Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Three children in the class have Individualized Learning Plans (ILP) for literacy. The two girls are reading at a third grade reading level. The boy with the ILP for literacy is reading at a first to second grade reading level. These three students receive more intensive reading

instruction from a specialist twenty to thirty minutes a day. Three of the children have Individual Development Plans (IDP) for writing. There are six students who are gifted and talented (TAG) in Language Arts. These six TAG students do not partake in the reading or the writing in the general classroom. Three of these six students are also TAG in math and do not partake in the study of math in the general classroom.

### **Implementation**

1. My cooperating teacher uses a word of the day. The magic word is often used for multi-step directions, such as put away your math spiral, get out your science notebook, and get out pencil and your highlighters. Often, students begin moving and do not listen to all of the directions. To solve this problem, the students are not permitted to move until the magic word is said. Therefore, the magic word is said after all of the directions to ensure the students are paying attention to each step or task they need to complete. The magic word of the day is written on the board. The students use dictionaries to look up the definition of the magic word. They write the definition on a sticky note and place it in a cup on the board. At the end of the day, one sticky note is drawn from the cup. The winner teaches the class what the word means and receives a jolly rancher. Every day, I will use Spanish words or phrases for the magic word of the day. I will use Spanish words to reinforce basic vocabulary for the classroom including, levántense, (stand up), siéntense (sit down), miren la pizarra (look at the board), saquen sus libros (get out your books), guarden sus libros (put your books away), and levanten la mano (raise your hand).
- Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English

- Standard 4: Comparisons to Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture
2. The Spanish magic words of the day are mostly vocabulary that relates to the classroom setting. The Spanish magic words that have been used and taught already will then be used during transitions and for certain directions on a daily basis. Spanish phrases such as levántense, (stand up), siéntense (sit down), miren la pizarra (look at the board), saquen sus libros (get out your books), guarden sus libros (put your books away), and levanten la mano (raise your hand) will be used throughout the day. Every morning I write instructions on the board for the students to follow when they arrive and unpack. I will use some Spanish words in these morning routine instructions. I will also use certain Spanish phrases while giving directions and during transitions. To ensure that all the students understand the instructions in Spanish, I will write the translation in English, have a student provide the meaning, or I will physically model the directions.
- Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English
  - Standard 4: Comparisons to Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture
3. I will initiate conversations with my students in Spanish on a daily basis. These conversations will range from asking how a student is doing to asking a student about an assignment or content area. One's ability to communicate using Spanish can be improved through practice. I will foster and encourage

the students to speak in Spanish outside of Spanish class through modeling and engaging the students in conversations in this world language.

- Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English
- Standard 3: Connections with Other Disciplines and Information Acquisition

4. I will collaborate with the other staff members at the elementary school and choose a magic person of the day. If the students initiate a conversation with this particular person, they will receive a star sticker. Star stickers are rewards that are used to fill RISE cards as part of the elementary school's Positive Behavior Intervention System. This strategy will help promote the students speaking in Spanish throughout the school. The goal is for students to speak in Spanish with many staff members other than myself.

- Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English

5. I will read Spanish and bilingual books to my students. I will also make Spanish and bilingual books available for the students to read in the classroom. As a class, we will compare and contrast children's books from the United States and from Spanish speaking countries. These comparisons will include the similarities and differences in characters, settings, main ideas, and themes. Providing students with the opportunity to listen to and read Spanish children's literature will support and add to their acquisition of the Spanish language. In addition, the Spanish and bilingual books will provide the students with an insight into the lives of people from different countries and cultures.

- Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English
- Standard 2: Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures
- Standard 3: Connections with Other Disciplines and Information Acquisition
- Standard 4: Comparisons to Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

6. I will have the students label the classroom using Spanish vocabulary, including, lápiz (pencil), marcador (marker), hoja de papel (piece of paper), pegamento (glue), regla (ruler), tijeras (scissors), pizarra (whiteboard), mesa (table), silla (chair), escritorio (desk), reloj (clock), puerta (door), ventana (window), computadora (computer), biblioteca (library), and mapa (map). This will reinforce basic vocabulary for students to use in the classroom. These labels will also help the students when I begin giving directions and instructions in Spanish. They will have auditory and visual input to help understand the information they are receiving. It also provides a visual reminder that Spanish should be an integral part of their day.

- Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English
- Standard 4: Comparisons to Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

7. The students will engage in Spanish activities and games with their 1<sup>st</sup> grade buddies, which they meet with most Fridays for thirty minutes. These games will be designed to support the students' acquisition of Spanish. The children will practice what they already know, teach their buddies what they have



learned, and learn new vocabulary. The 5<sup>th</sup> graders will teach their buddies Spanish songs they have learned and basic vocabulary. Games like bingo and Simón dice (Simon says) are interactive games which embrace the Total Physical Response (TPR) pedagogical strategy. Buddies across grade levels benefit all those who are involved. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade students teaching the 1<sup>st</sup> grade students is an exciting way to practice using Spanish. In addition, this provides the 5<sup>th</sup> graders with more confidence when using Spanish. The 1<sup>st</sup> graders have the opportunity to enhance their Spanish-speaking abilities. The 5<sup>th</sup> graders are also excellent role models for these younger students.

- Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English
- Standard 2: Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures
- Standard 3: Connections with Other Disciplines and Information Acquisition
- Standard 4: Comparisons to Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

8. I will teach the students various songs in Spanish. For example:

- “Buenos días (Good morning)

Buenos días (Good morning)

¿Cómo está? (How are you?)

¿Cómo está? (How are you?)

Muy bien gracias (Very well thank you)

Muy bien gracias (Very well thank you)

¿Y usted? (And you?)

¿Y usted? (And you?)

- Cara y cabeza (Face and head)

Cara y cabeza (Face and head)

Boca y nariz (Mouth and nose)

Boca y nariz (Mouth and nose)

Ojos y orejas (Eyes and ears)

Ojos y orejas (Eyes and ears)

Y sonrisa (And smile)

Y sonrisa (And smile)

These songs reinforce Spanish vocabulary. Adding music is a fun and educational way to use and remember the Spanish language.

- Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English

9. I will have the students form a single file line. I will hold up two signs. In my left hand, the sign will say “verdad” (true). The sign in my right hand will say “falso” (false). I will ask the students to respond to statements by stepping to the left or right to indicate if they think what I have said is true or false. For example, I will say “The United States is one of the only countries in which one language is spoken.” Another statement will be “Learning a second language has been shown to increase academic performance in math and reading.” I am hoping that this engaging activity will open the students’ eyes about why it is important to speak a second language. We will then have a class discussion about why someone should learn a second language. We will

also discuss why learning a foreign language is part of the International Baccalaureate (IB) primary years programme curriculum. One of the goals of the International Baccalaureate IB primary years programme is to create internationally-minded citizens who help create a better and more peaceful world through intercultural understanding and respect.

- Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English
- Standard 2: Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures
- Standard 3: Connections with Other Disciplines and Information Acquisition
- Standard 4: Comparisons to Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

10. To help the students understand that learning a foreign language is meaningful, we will discuss the value of speaking a second language. I will have the students participate in a mix, freeze, and mingle activity. When I say mix, the students are to walk around the room silently. After a few moments, I will say freeze and indicate that there will be three students in each group. The students will form groups of three and sit down. When I say mingle, the students will begin discussing why it is valuable to learn a world language like Spanish. Students are not allowed to be with the same children in a group twice. I will have the students mix, freeze, and mingle three times. We will then come together as a group and discuss what the students talked about in their small groups. I will facilitate the discussion and make sure that the students understand that globalization and immigration create the need for a

modern world characterized by the acceptance of cultural and linguistic diversity.

- Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English
- Standard 2: Knowledge and Understanding of Other Cultures
- Standard 3: Connections with Other Disciplines and Information Acquisition
- Standard 4: Comparisons to Develop Insight into the Nature of Language and Culture

### **Concluding Paragraph**

In the following chapter, I will discuss the methods I used to collect data, use the data to evaluate the validity of my thesis statement, and will summarize the findings of my study. I will analyze the data, which includes surveys taken at the beginning and conclusion of this project, anecdotal notes, and the assessment of the students' Spanish fluency in the classroom and in their Spanish specials class. I will offer recommendations for further research and implementation of enhancing second language acquisition in the elementary classroom. In addition, I will indicate how I will utilize the findings of this project in my future classrooms.

## **Chapter Four: Summary and Recommendations**

### **Introduction**

The thesis of this project indicated that students who have the opportunity to learn another language in elementary school are not only shown to score higher on standardized tests in math and English language arts, but will also increase their fluency through daily exposure to a world language in a variety of avenues in the classroom, through availability of literature in the second language, and through partnering with students of a different grade level to explore the language together. I was interested in this topic for many reasons. During my undergraduate years, I majored in Romance Languages, including Spanish, Italian, and French and took many linguistics courses. I have always had an affinity and passion for languages and wish that I could have had the opportunity to be exposed to other languages at a younger age. In addition, I was fortunate to be placed at an elementary school for my student teaching which offers Spanish as one of its four electives. I soon learned that the students attend Spanish class once every four days. From the research and literature review that I had conducted, I knew that several sources including Met (2008) indicate that Foreign Language Experience (FLEX) programs in which students do not receive foreign language instruction multiple times per week do not promote usable levels of language proficiency (p. 45). The goal of this project was to help supplement the Spanish instruction the students receive in Spanish class in order to increase their levels of language proficiency in Spanish.

However, there were several obstacles that I encountered that I had not expected. Based on the literature that I analyzed and reviewed, I had predicted that even after five

years of having Spanish as an elective, my fifth grade students would not have attained Spanish language proficiency or fluency. Unfortunately, the level of the students' Spanish language proficiency was much lower than I had anticipated. Another obstacle was the students' negative attitude towards Spanish class and the Spanish language. In fact, near the beginning of the school year, the Spanish teacher approached my cooperating teacher about how disrespectful our class was. She articulated that the students were making offensive comments about Spanish class, the Spanish language, and the Spanish culture. The Spanish teacher was very hurt by these comments. My cooperating teacher and I were very disheartened by the remarks of our students regarding Spanish. We spoke with our students about the culture of our class and the disappointing events and statements that had been brought to our attention. We discussed the difference between intent and impact and the need for these rude comments to stop, as well as an attitude adjustment. I knew that I needed to alter the concentration of my study. I still did my best to incorporate activities that promoted Spanish language fluency; however, I began to focus more on improving the students' attitudes about the Spanish language.

### **Reflection**

My thesis was partially confirmed. Although the students did not show a significant increase in their written production of the Spanish language, their oral expression and attitude towards Spanish improved. I utilized several methods of assessment to measure the students' level of Spanish proficiency and their attitude toward Spanish. I used many informal assessments. During the project, I used basic vocabulary and directions to determine the level of the students' Spanish language proficiency. I

noted students' level of participation and acceptance of in class Spanish activities. I also made observations about how the students felt about going to Spanish class and spoke with the Spanish teacher about their behavior and attitude in her class. I recorded students' willingness to converse in Spanish with me when I initiated a conversation in Spanish and when students initiated conversations in Spanish themselves. At the end of the first semester, I looked at the students' level of mastery in Spanish class as indicated by their report cards. In addition, I gave the students a survey at the beginning and end of the project.

At the beginning of the project, I used basic vocabulary and high frequency words to gauge the students' level of Spanish language proficiency. Examples of these high frequency words and phrases are as follows.

- Por favor (Please)
- levántense (stand up)
- siéntense (sit down)
- la pizarra (white board)
- el libro (Book)
- levanten la mano (raise your hand)
- Tengo una pregunta (I have a question)
- ¿Cómo se dice...en español? (How do you say... in Spanish?)
- ¿Puedo ir al baño? (May I go to the bathroom?)
- Escuchen (listen)
- Buenos días (good morning)

Only one or two students were able to translate the high frequency words or phrases. However after using basic vocabulary and directions in Spanish and doing various activities with these words, the majority of the students were able to translate and define the high frequency Spanish words.

I was determined to provide the students with more positive experiences with the Spanish language outside of Spanish class to try and improve their attitudes toward the language. During this process, I took note of the willingness of the students to participate in the strategies that I implemented in class. In the beginning, the students were fairly resistant to participate and one could see many eyes roll and could hear groans throughout the class when they were asked to engage in a Spanish activity. For example, the first few times that I chose a Spanish magic word of the day, very few students were willing to look up the definition and translation of the word in English. Quickly, the Spanish-English dictionary became a hot commodity in the classroom as more and more students began looking up the Spanish magic word of the day. Another example is the first time that I attempted to read part of a popular book to the students in Spanish. This experience did not go very well. The students did not have the level of Spanish language proficiency to understand the words and were not willing to try to decipher the meaning or to even listen. Over time, they became more accepting of listening to excerpts of familiar books in Spanish. Although they still did not know the meaning of all of the words, they were willing to listen and they were much less disruptive. Similarly, the first song I taught the students in Spanish and the first game of Simon dice (Simon says) that we played were not well received by the students. However after a few months, the



students began asking to sing songs we had learned in Spanish and to learn new Spanish songs. In addition, they have begun asking if we can play Simon dice more often.

Throughout the course of this project, I also recorded observations about the students' attitudes about going to Spanish class and how they behaved during Spanish class. Near the beginning of the year, the students were very negative about having to go to Spanish class and were often very disrespectful to the teacher. After speaking with the students about the impact of their actions, implementing Spanish strategies in the classroom, and discussing the importance of learning a second language the students seemed less resistant about going to Spanish class. There were less groans as we line up to go to Spanish class. In addition, the negative comments about Spanish class have decreased. The Spanish teacher has not had to bring any rude remarks about the Spanish language and culture to my attention recently. Their behavior in Spanish class has also improved. At the end of every specials class (Spanish, music, art, P.E.), the teacher discusses the students' behavior. They are able to earn a star for respect, responsibility, integrity, safety, and empathy. The teacher explains why the students have or have not earned the five stars. The fifth grade students have been earning more of these stars for their behavior during Spanish class.

As part of my data, I also recorded how willing the students were to communicate with me in Spanish. Every day, I try to initiate simple conversations with the students in Spanish. For example, I will ask "¿Cómo estás?" (How are you?) or "¿Cómo fue tu fin de semana?" (How was your weekend?). Initially, very few of the students were willing to respond to the questions in Spanish at all. Slowly, the students became more comfortable answering the questions. The majority of the students began answering my

inquiries in English. As the weeks passed, I noticed that there were students who were attempting to answer my questions in Spanish. Some of the students even began asking me questions in Spanish. I also noticed an increase of students willing to use high frequency Spanish words and phrases in the classroom without being prompted to do so.

At the end of the first semester, I looked at the students' scores for Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English. This standard indicates that the student comprehends and communicates in the target language and presents on familiar topics using high frequency words and phrases. There are three scores that the students can receive on the Standards-Based Report Card for the Communication in Languages Other Than English Standard, including Meets, Progressing, and Below. A Meets score indicates that the student has proficient understanding and meets grade-level expectations. A Progressing score means the student has a basic understanding and partially meets the grade-level expectations for the standard. A Below score signifies that the student has minimal understanding and does not meet grade-level expectations for the standard. My original goal was for every student in the class to receive a Meets on their report card at the end of the first semester.

As illustrated in Appendix A, I did not reach my goal of having every student earning a Meets score on their report card. However, it is a celebration that there were no students who received a Below score for this standard. There were eleven students who are still progressing and nineteen students who have mastered this standard. The goal associated with Standards-Based Report Cards is that the students should master each standard by the end of the year. Although more than half of the class has already met this standard, there are still eleven students who need to reach the objective for

comprehension and communication in Spanish. Out of the eleven students who received a Progressing score first semester, seven of these students are new to the school this year.

At the beginning and end of this project, I had the students complete a survey which utilized a likert scale, see Appendix B. The students took the pre-test survey on October 29, 2012. On February 8, 2013, the students took the post-test survey. The students were instructed to respond to statements by circling a number, one through five, to reflect their opinion. By circling the number one, the students are indicating that they strongly disagree with the statement. By circling the number five, the students are indicating that they strongly agree with the statement. I gave the students this survey to determine if their attitudes about learning Spanish had improved over the course of the project. I also included statements about going to Spanish class and using Spanish outside of Spanish class. My hope was that after designing and implementing a variety of strategies to increase Spanish language proficiency and to improve the students' attitude toward learning a world language, the students' numerical responses to the Spanish survey would move closer to five, which indicates that they strongly agree with the statement. I chose to focus mostly on statement 1. (I like learning Spanish), statement 2. (I like going to Spanish class), and statement 3. (I like using Spanish outside of Spanish class). For results of the pre-test and post-test Spanish survey, see Appendix C.

There were two students who did not take the pre-assessment survey because they were new to our school near the end of the first semester and therefore they do not have scores entered for the pre-assessment survey. There was only one student who strongly disagreed with statement 1. (I like learning Spanish) on the pre-assessment Spanish survey. On the post-assessment Spanish survey, there were two students who strongly

disagreed with statement 1. There was only one student who strongly disagreed with these statements on both the beginning and end of project Spanish survey. On the first survey, there were six students who strongly disagreed with statement 5. (I like going to Spanish class). On the second survey there were two students who strongly disagreed with statement 5. These two students were the same two who strongly disagreed with statement 1. The other student who strongly disagreed was new to the school at the end of the first semester. Five students strongly disagreed with statement 6. (I like using Spanish outside of Spanish class) on the first survey. Three students strongly disagreed with statement 6 on the post-assessment Spanish survey. Again, two of the students were the same ones who strongly disagreed with statements 1 and 5. These two students are both girls and are TAG (talented and gifted) in language arts. They are not in the classroom the whole day. They are in the room for our mathematics and social studies/science blocks of time. The other student who strongly disagreed was new to the school at the end of the first semester.

By comparing the first and second Spanish survey, I was able to determine what percent of the students' numerical responses increased on the likert scale. My goal was for 80% of the students to show an increase for each statement or remain at a five. For statement 1, 86% of the students' numerical responses increased. I calculated that 75% of the students' numerical responses increased for statement 2. The data illustrates that 61% of the students' numerical responses increased for statement 3 and 4. I determined that 93% of the students' numerical responses increased for statement 5. On statement 6, the students showed an increase of 93% on their numerical responses as well. The data shows that the students' responses were lowest for the statements about reading and

writing in Spanish. I am not surprised that these scores showed the smallest increase because we spent the least amount of time speaking and writing in Spanish. Instead, we focused mostly on speaking in Spanish and improving the students' attitude about learning Spanish, going to Spanish class, and using Spanish outside of Spanish class.

If others were to attempt a similar project or if I would implement it in the future, I would conduct this project for a year. This would allow me to review the students' TCAP scores with the TCAP scores of another class. In addition, I would start implementing my Spanish strategies at the beginning of the year so that they are routines and expectations. We were not able to begin meeting weekly with our first grade buddies until December. I would hope to begin meeting with our buddies closer to the beginning of the year. I would base the strategies that I would choose to implement most often based on the group of students and their unique needs and personalities. After I started the project, I shifted the focus to include not only increasing the Spanish language proficiency of the students, but to also improve the attitude of the students toward Spanish by fostering an awareness, understanding, and appreciation of learning another language. I would implement this new focus from the beginning of the project.

## **Conclusion**

Based on this project, I have many recommendations for future research in this area. I would recommend for this study to be conducted with a different group of students who come in with a positive attitude about learning another language. It would also be interesting to determine how the results would compare and differ if teachers of all elementary grade levels implemented strategies to improve the students' second language proficiency and their attitude toward learning another language. I would

recommend that a similar project is conducted at a bilingual immersion school. In addition, I would also like to see a comparable project conducted at a school with a high percentage of ELL (English language learning) students.

As a future teacher, this project will not only influence the process of the instruction that I undertake, but will also impact the professional growth and development that I will seek. I have seen the value in the strategies that I implemented during this project for increasing oral expression of the Spanish language and improving the students' outlook on learning another language. In the future, regardless of the school that I am working at, I will implement these strategies with the students that I teach. I will continue reading current literature and research on enhancing second language acquisition in the elementary classroom. In addition, I will seek out professional development classes which deal with this topic. In the very near future, I plan to work toward earning my ESL (English as a Second Language) endorsement. This project has helped me to acquire additional resources for my teacher tool box, which I plan to utilize throughout my career.

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Appendix A

Scores on the students' Standards-Based Report Cards for First Semester

	Standard 1: Communication in Languages Other Than English. <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• comprehends and communicates in the target language and presents on familiar topics using high frequency words &amp; phrases</li></ul>
Student 1	Meets
Student 2	Progressing
Student 3	Meets
Student 4	Progressing
Student 5	Meets
Student 6	Progressing
Student 7	Meets
Student 8	Progressing
Student 9	Meets
Student 10	Meets
Student 11	Progressing
Student 12	Meets
Student 13	Progressing
Student 14	Meets
Student 15	Progressing
Student 16	Meets
Student 17	Progressing
Student 18	Meets
Student 19	Meets

Student 20	Meets
Student 21	Progressing
Student 22	Meets
Student 23	Progressing
Student 24	Meets
Student 25	Meets
Student 26	Meets
Student 27	Meets
Student 28	Progressing
Student 29	Meets
Student 30	Meets

Appendix B

## Spanish Survey

Respond to the following statements by circling a number (1-5) on the agreement scale that best reflects your opinion.

**1. I like learning Spanish.**

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

**2. I like speaking in Spanish.**

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

**3. I like reading in Spanish.**

Strongly Disagree.

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

**4. I like writing in Spanish.**

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

**5. I like going to Spanish class.**

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

**6. I like using Spanish outside of Spanish class.**

Strongly Disagree

Strongly Agree

1

2

3

4

5

## Appendix C

### Survey Results

Red=pre-assessment survey answers

Blue=post assessment survey answers

	1.	1.	2.	2.	3.	3.	4.	4.	5.	5.	6.	6.
Student 1	2	4	2	3	2	3	1	4	2	4	2	4
Student 2	2	3	3	3	2	3	1	2	1	5	3	4
Student 3	2	3	1	4	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	3
Student 4	4	2	3	3	2	2	3	2	1	3	4	4
Student 5	2	1	2	1	2	1	2	1	1	1	2	1
Student 6	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	3	3	5	5	5
Student 7	5	5	4	5	3	4	3	5	3	5	4	5
Student 8	5	4	5	5	4	2	4	2	3	4	3	5
Student 9	3	3	3	2	2	2	2	3	2	3	2	3
Student 10	2	5	3	5	3	4	2	5	2	5	1	3
Student 11	4	5	5	4	3	3	3	4	4	5	4	4
Student 12	3	4	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	2	4
Student 13	3	4	2	4	1	3	2	3	2	4	4	5
Student 14	5	5	3	4	2	3	3	4	3	5	4	5
Student 15	2	3	1	3	2	3	2	3	2	3	1	3
Student 16	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	4	3	4	2	4
Student 17	4	5	4	5	4	5	1	3	3	5	4	5
Student 18	4	5	4	5	3	4	3	4	3	5	4	5
Student 19	5	5	5	5	3	4	4	3	5	5	5	5
Student 20	2	3	2	3	2	3	1	3	1	3	3	3
Student 21	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Student 22	2	3	3	3	3	3	3	2	1	3	1	2
Student 23	2	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	4	2	3
Student 24	2	4	3	3	2	2	1	1	2	3	1	4
Student 25	4	5	4	5	4	4	3	4	3	5	3	5
Student 26	4	5	4	5	3	4	3	3	3	5	2	5
Student 27		3		2		1		4		5		1
Student 28	3	3	4	2	2	1	3	1	2	3	2	3
Student 29		4		4		2		3		3		5
Student 30	3	4	2	3	2	1	2	2	2	3	2	3

HCU:

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