Spanish for K-8 Heritage Speakers:
A Standards-Based Curriculum Project

Kim Potowski
The University of Illinois at Chicago

Jorge Berne, Amy Clark, Amy Hammerand
Chicago Public Schools

Abstract: This article describes a K–8 Spanish curriculum for heritage speakers, including the theoretical underpinnings of the need for a heritage Spanish curriculum at the elementary school level, the local and national standards that were consulted for its creation, and possible future directions for K–8 language programs. Specific examples of scenarios from the curriculum are included.

Keywords: curriculum, FLES, heritage speakers

1. Background

In the United States, 20% of all school-aged children spoke a language other than English at home in 2005, a figure which has more than doubled from 9% in 1979 (National Center for Educational Statistics). Typically, a child with limited English skills is enrolled in a bilingual education program, which primarily consists of pullout classes in English as a Second Language (ESL). In some schools, pullout ESL classes are combined with native-language classes. In the native-language classes, a portion of instruction is provided in the children’s first language (in our case, Spanish) to help them keep up in school subjects like math and social studies while they learn English. However, the goal of these programs is rapid transition into mainstream, all-English classrooms as soon as possible, usually within two to three years; there is usually no goal of native-language maintenance. The city of Chicago serves most of its 60,000 English-learning students (80% of whom are Hispanic) with a three-year transitional bilingual-education program of this nature, as do most public school systems in the nation.

Upon arriving to high school, then, the vast majority of heritage Spanish speakers1 in the United States have never studied Spanish formally at advanced levels. Their Spanish vocabulary is often restricted to home and community topics and may not extend to academic subjects. Except in rare cases, such students have not developed age-appropriate levels of literacy in Spanish. Even those students who benefited from native-language classes during elementary school received such instruction only from first through third grade, meaning that their contact with academic Spanish ceased at the age of nine. It is difficult for students to develop appropriate levels of Spanish for academic or professional purposes under these conditions.

Foreign Languages in the Elementary Schools (Grades K–8)

Bilingual elementary-school programs like the ones just described target students who must learn English as a second language. Such programs do not challenge the mainstream United States assumption of monolingualism in English for the majority of the population, in that they do not require English-speaking students to learn another language. Some elementary schools,
however, do offer foreign-language classes to English-speaking children. Examples of such programs are called Foreign Language in the Elementary Schools (FLES) programs. Schools with FLES programs teach languages such as Chinese, French, or Spanish to K–8 students. FLES classes usually last 30 to 50 minutes per day and are offered three to four times per week. These programs were developed based on research in second-language acquisition indicating that the earlier language study begins, the greater proficiency can be attained. Specifically, ages five through twelve have been identified as a critical period for phonological and syntactical development. Currently, 31% of U.S. elementary schools offer FLES programs, and there are at least 34 schools in the Chicago Public Schools’ system that offer FLES instruction.

An interesting thing happens at elementary schools that have large Latino populations: the FLES Spanish courses are filled with heritage Spanish-speaking children. Since these children already possess communicative competence in Spanish—even if they are actually dominant in English—such students typically reap few benefits from a traditional FLES curriculum designed for children who know no Spanish at all. This situation provides an excellent opportunity to offer Latino children a rich, challenging, age-appropriate language arts curriculum in Spanish, designed specifically for heritage speakers. To date, however, such a curriculum has not been created that fits within a FLES structure. This is the focus of the current project.

Spanish for Heritage Speakers (Grades 9–16)

The area of inquiry dedicated to Spanish heritage speakers, usually called Spanish for Native Speakers (SNS), has experienced an unprecedented boom in research, policy, and funding since its inception in the 1970s, particularly since the 1999 and 2001 National Conferences on Heritage Languages. Many high schools and universities across the nation now offer specialized SNS courses, which take into account the strengths and needs of heritage speakers. However, relatively little has been published on SNS at the elementary school level. This is due in part to reasons put forth earlier: most elementary-school programs, even those that offer a few years of native-language instruction, focus principally on students’ English development, not on native-language maintenance.

Recent research on heritage speakers, which has informed SNS curricula in grades 9–16, explores two principal phenomena. One is attrition, which refers to the process by which a grammatical structure that was once fully acquired was subsequently lost. This process typically follows the “Last In, First Out” principle: more complex structures that are among the last to be acquired are the first structures to attrite. The other phenomenon, called incomplete acquisition, refers to the fact that Latino children’s Spanish acquisition was truncated during early childhood when they began all-English schooling, and certain grammatical forms were never acquired. It is impossible to distinguish attrition phenomena from incomplete acquisition phenomena without extensive longitudinal work. In addition, a third phenomenon is the fact that debilitated Spanish systems are more likely to exhibit influence from English. While minority language borrowing from, and mixing with, a majority language is a completely natural practice, one that linguists around the world study with great interest and no intent to eradicate, a K–8 heritage-Spanish curriculum can promote a truly bilingual citizenry by solidifying Spanish language use and development during children’s early school years.

K–8 Spanish for Native Speakers

To repeat a central point, Spanish FLES programs that are offered at schools with large Latino populations become de facto K–8 heritage-language programs. Given that almost 40% of Chicago Public Schools students are Latino, there are abundant opportunities to turn traditional FLES courses into K–8 SNS courses, creating a model for other large urban areas to implement similar SNS programs. However, in the same way that teaching native-English language arts is different from teaching ESL, a radically different curricular model is necessary to turn a FLES
Spanish for K-8 Heritage Speakers

Spanish course into an SNS course. In fact, a well-designed SNS curriculum should look more like a native language-arts class, such as those studied by monolingual children in Latin America or Spain, than like a typical foreign-language class taught in the United States (Potowski and Carreira 2004).

The World Languages Unit at the Chicago Public Schools, under a federal Foreign Language Assistance Program grant, brought together a group of twelve K–8 teachers to write a curriculum for K–8 SNS. The curriculum-writing team represented a cross-section of the Spanish-speaking world, including Mexico, Puerto Rico, Spain, and the United States. This article summarizes the resources and standards we consulted in developing this curriculum and presents several examples of learning scenarios, in the hope that the curriculum will be adopted or replicated by other school districts, and that educators working in other heritage languages might develop similar curricula for their K–8 students.

Overview of the Development of the Curriculum

We decided that our curriculum should look more like native-language arts than like foreign-language courses (Potowski and Carreira 2004). Therefore, in consulting national and local standards, we sought to blend English Language-Arts standards, Foreign-Language standards, and Content Area standards whenever possible. That is, we wanted to incorporate content area into language arts into foreign language, such that our “foreign-language” classes would clearly be seen as contributing to the mission of the “main” classroom teachers. Section 2 describes in greater detail the standards we consulted for our project.

Shortly after beginning our project, however, we discovered that New York State had produced a set of standards that were neither for English language arts nor for foreign language: They were actually native/heritage language arts standards (The University of the State of New York and New York State Education Department, Office of Bilingual Education, 2004, hereafter USNY 2004). In New York State, school districts must implement a bilingual-education program with both native-language and English-language support if there are 20 or more ELL children in one building who speak the same native minority-language, and in 2001, approximately 40% of New York’s ELL children were enrolled in bilingual programs with native-language support, while the remaining 60% received ESL services only (USNY 2004: 3). In other words, there is a very large and growing population of ELL children in that state who speak a total of at least 160 different languages (USNY 1997). The New York native-language arts standards form part of a set of three documents, including a set of ESL standards and a resource guide for teachers. These educators understood that in order to support English-language learning, the development of children’s native-language skills was a critical tool. The native-language arts standards, which drew heavily on the state’s native English language-arts standards, are divided into four grade-level groups: Kindergarten and first grade, second through fourth grades, fifth through eighth grades, and ninth through twelfth grades. They also contain useful performance indicators for each standard, and a chapter devoted to “learning experiences” that displays classroom scenarios that enact the standards. We read the New York State native-language arts standards carefully, but since our project focused on Spanish language and culture only, we also looked for standards with greater detail in these areas.

Next, very fortuitously for our project, several members of our team were invited by the Illinois Resource Center to collaborate with the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (hereafter WIDA) group, best known for developing ESL standards, in the creation of Spanish language-arts standards. The Milwaukee Public Schools had already done some work in this area by consulting the Wisconsin State Standards for English Language Arts as a framework, and adding modifications that would be appropriate for Spanish Language Arts, including literature, culture and language. Our participation in this two-day event, and the document that resulted (WIDA 2006), were critical in our development of this curriculum.

Finally, we sought professional development from educators in Mexico and Spain on how
native-Spanish language-arts are taught in those countries. Several concepts from Mexico’s Secretaria de Educación Pública, including how to address regional variation and levels of formality, were particularly useful to us. However, in neither country did we find explicit cultural elements in the curriculums that we consulted. This is likely due to the fact that, in a relatively monolingual area, culture is usually implicit and pervasive, not receiving overt attention because all stakeholders (teachers, students, administrators, parents) share a very similar set of cultural assumptions. Thus, we had to look elsewhere for cultural elements. The sources we consulted are explored in Section 2, along with the several different sets of standards that are addressed by this curriculum. Section 3 discusses the overall format of the curriculum, and Section 4 will describe in greater detail several learning scenarios that we have selected (and that appear in the Appendix).

2. Standards and Content Areas Addressed by This Curriculum

The development of any curriculum or teaching practice rests upon a series of pedagogical assumptions, theories, and standards. In order to develop a coherent and cohesive curriculum that was fully articulated throughout the grades, we consulted three main sources: national and local standards; recent publications by the AATSP about teaching foreign languages to children; and the College Board Advanced Placement materials.

First, we were well aware of the national standards, commonly referred to as the “Five C’s” (ACTFL 1999). The statement of philosophy in that document addresses heritage speakers by indicating that “children who come to school from non-English backgrounds should also have opportunities to develop further proficiencies in their first language” (2). Looking at the five C’s, most school-age heritage speakers in Chicago are second generation—that is, born to immigrant parents—and therefore communicate interpersonally at very proficient levels in Spanish. Many live in communities where Hispanic cultures are enacted consistently. As bilingual and bicultural individuals, they usually recognize and acknowledge life between two cultures, frequently establishing connections and comparisons in their daily lives. Which, then, of the five C’s do these students need help with? Developing their presentational communication skills was one of our goals. Our curriculum exposes students to Spanish as a vehicle of formal communication, pushing them to become highly proficient in listening, speaking, reading and writing in formal contexts and situations. As for culture and communities, we wanted students to explore the three cultural dimensions suggested by Aparicio (1997): autocultural, intracultural and intercultural. Autocultural refers to the knowledge of their own culture. Intracultural refers to connections with other Latino cultures in the United States and around the world. Intercultural refers to relationships among Latino groups and other ethnic groups in the United States and Latin America. As for connections and comparisons, we believe that, through our curriculum, students can develop the necessary connections that provide even deeper insights into the mechanisms of Spanish-speaking cultures, both in the United States and around the world.

After the national standards, as Illinois educators we must follow the standards dictated by the Illinois State Board of Education (www.isbe.net). ISBE promotes the teaching of world languages through content, most especially when working with heritage speakers. In the development of our curriculum, we envisioned it as a true support and enhancement to the core subjects of the curriculum. To this end, in addition to the Illinois standards for foreign language, we consulted state standards for language arts, science, and social studies. Educators in other states and/or working in other heritage languages may find it useful, when developing heritage-speaker curricula, to consult their state’s standards in these areas. Therefore, even though the curriculum follows ISBE foreign-language standards, it can be implemented successfully in any Spanish-speaking context or country. Finally, as mentioned in the previous section, the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) group published a set of Spanish native-language arts standards (WIDA 2006) which we incorporated into our curriculum.

A second crucial element in the development of our curriculum was a series of recent publications. First among these was the AATSP book series Professional Development Series...
Spanish for K-8 Heritage Speakers

Handbook for Teachers K–16 (2001). Volume 1 in particular addresses the teaching of SNS and offered us a number of specific SNS concepts we wanted to address in our curriculum. These include: motivation and self-esteem; dealing with errors; standard vs. non-standard language; linguistic diversity; cultural diversity; mixed classes; spelling; language expansion, oral and written; metalinguistic skills; and contextualized grammar. In fact, every scenario lists the AATSP concepts that it addresses.

The other primary publication we consulted in developing this curriculum was Curtain and Dahlberg (2004). First, these authors emphasize the need to balance curricula equally in terms of three components: language, content and culture. From the very beginning, the team agreed on the importance of giving our curriculum an emphasis on cultural concepts throughout the grades. In particular, we hope to help students better understand the concept of culture by reflecting on their own and others’ vital experiences. Another key concept gleaned from Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) was that assessment of learning must be “frequent, regular and ongoing in a manner that is consistent with targeted standards, program goals and teaching strategies” (14). Hence, the assessments recommended at the end of each scenario reflect this belief and include checklists, home assessment systems, various types of rubrics, teacher observation sheets, peer assessment, comprehension checks, and portfolios.

We adopted the concept of “big ideas” (Curtain and Dahlberg 2004), a sequence of thematic ideas which would spiral from grade to grade. Those yearly big ideas are supported in turn by four different questions, which correspond to the four different quarters in a school year. Finally, we were reminded that grammar should be “presented through and for usage rather than analysis; grammar for its own sake is not the object of instruction” (11). Therefore, in addition to the curriculum spiraling in content, it also spirals linguistically. There is a continuum of language structure and use items and skills which evolves from the first grade in kindergarten to the very last day in eighth grade. Far from being the primary motivating force behind the scenarios, which are always thematic and content-based, grammar and usage points do find themselves at the heart of each scenario.

A third central series of publications that inspired our work and are present throughout the scenarios were the College Board Advanced Placement exams for Spanish language and Spanish literature (College Board 2005). Ideally, all elementary school students who receive our curriculum will have the opportunity during their high-school years to take the Advanced Placement exams for Spanish language and Spanish literature. Overall, we found that a good deal of AP exam content can be adjusted for elementary-school heritage speakers. Therefore, we focused on incorporating different strategies and content necessary to succeed in these two exams by adjusting them to the different grade levels. For the AP Language, the curriculum enables students to become more proficient in formal environments, including following conversations between educated, formal Spanish speakers, drawing conclusions and making generalizations, distinguishing between fact and opinion, and writing for a variety of audiences and purposes. As for the AP Spanish Literature test, we wanted students to become familiar with the identification of literary genres, the recognition of a variety of form and meaning literary figures, and the identification of characters, action, atmosphere, tone and topic in a literary fragment.

3. Curriculum Format

The curriculum was originally designed to fit a typical Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) program. FLES classes usually meet three to five times a week, for thirty to fifty minutes per day. Programs with fewer contact hours will need to select the activities through which the language arts objectives will most likely be met, in particular those through which students will most likely use authentic language in culturally relevant ways.

There are two mapping devices underpinning the curriculum: a Spanish language-arts (SLA) scope and sequence, and a thematic scope and sequence. The SLA scope and sequence com-
prizes four areas that correspond with the WIDA Spanish language-arts standards (2006): 1) Language Structure and Use, 2) Writing, 3) Reading and Literature, and 4) Oral Language. As students develop and revisit skills and concepts throughout each scenario and grade, a clear spiral is evident. In each of the primary grades, children are forming and building upon a foundation of Spanish literacy by developing and practicing many of the same habits, concepts and skills, all in different ways and through varied contexts. In addition to content and skill spirals within each grade, there is also vertical spiraling among all grades. For example, the skills of making inferences and analyzing texts and messages are learned, practiced and revisited throughout the curriculum in challenging and authentic ways and at developmentally appropriate levels. The result of layering these two scopes and sequences creates a distinctive texture which students are empowered to use as they explore language and investigate the rich and diverse cultures of the Spanish-speaking world.

Now, moving from the level of the linguistic and thematic scope and sequence documents, the next level of detail is the basic unit of the curriculum: the learning scenario. Because lesson plans are most effective and alive when left in the capable hands of creative teachers who have a keen ear to the heartbeat of their community of learners, we chose to use the narrative scenario as the vehicle for the curriculum. In the nascent stages of the project, we studied a range of curricula and read and discussed extensively various ways in which we could interweave the acquisition of Spanish language-arts skills and concepts through the study and analysis of culture. We envisioned something both accessible and dynamic for teachers, a curriculum that would empower teachers and students to add their unique voices to the learning process. Spinelli and Grundstrom Nerenz (2004) introduced us to the concept of a learning scenario. This immediately resonated with our vision: a practical and effective vehicle through which we could move “away from learning about language and toward learning to use language in culturally appropriate ways” (1). “Extended thematic units” was a phrase with which we all identified. Our ideas and discussions around the authentic use of Spanish, generating and using language in order to discover and explore, to know and understand, to agree and disagree, to deepen one’s understanding of oneself, of one’s community and of one’s place in the world, all coalesced in our interpretation of the learning scenario. Consequently, scenarios are not lesson plans. They are similar to thematic language-arts units of study that need to be unpacked by teachers and brought to life through collaborative communities using language in multiple and authentic ways.

There are three examples of learning scenarios from this curriculum in the Appendix. Two things appear at the beginning of each scenario: the WIDA Spanish Language-Arts standards met by that scenario, and the learning objective of the scenario. Occasionally, additional Spanish Language-Arts objectives that we felt were addressed by the scenario are added to the WIDA standards. As explained in a previous section, the WIDA standards outline what the students will be developing, applying and revisiting. The scenario objective provides a brief synopsis of how the objectives will be met.

Initially, each scenario was constructed around Spanish language arts objectives that were clearly developed and applied through the exploration of cultures of the Spanish-speaking world. As we began writing, however, we realized we needed to revisit various resources we had initially studied in order to embed the cultural elements in ways that would generate sincere reflection and dialogue about culture. With this in mind, we revisited Volumes III and IV of the AATSP handbook series (2001). In particular, the chapter by Galloway (2001) armed us with clear goals regarding the integration of culture and language arts. We set language flexibility as a priority. The shifting of registers according to contexts, for example, was clearly a significant skill, but Bennett’s model pushed us to consider ways in which our curriculum could aspire to cultivate an ability to reflect on language use and the inherent power of language. We understood that this could only be achieved when one is fully integrated into a language and into a culture. Although true cultural integration would most likely not happen in the classroom, we set cultural integration as an ideal for our scenarios.
Spanish for K-8 Heritage Speakers

Consequently, cultural analysis is woven through each scenario at an age-appropriate level. This ultimately develops students who are able to look at and discuss issues and events from multiple perspectives. Students not only develop the ability to listen and respond to new ideas, to defend their own suppositions and to disagree with those of others, they also learn to be culturally flexible, to approach new situations and consider new information from different points of view (Galloway 2001). At an early primary level, this may be as deceptively simple as illustrating and talking about one’s family, home and community, listening to peers as they do the same, responding to each other’s illustrations and ideas, and finally creating a whole-group synthesis of classroom identity; whereas in the middle grades, students might analyze the concept of “hero” from multiple perspectives within the global Latino community, among other communities, debate and critique heroes in popular culture, compare and contrast pop culture heroes with historical and indigenous ones, and ultimately identify and reflect on heroes in their own lives and communities, thus reshaping their definition of “hero” and recognizing heroic characteristics as context specific. These examples of cultural analysis illustrate one of the ways in which this curriculum cultivates reflection and debate regarding diverse cultural perspectives.

Assessments are described at the end of each scenario. They occur in both on-going and performance-based ways, through the multiple and carefully scaffolded activities. Assessments are directly related to both the SLA objectives and the cultural objectives of the curriculum. They are designed to allow students to demonstrate their progress and learning in concrete and practical ways, as well as through multiple contexts. They are also designed so that teachers can monitor progress more individually. In addition, the scenarios often encourage student voice in the development of assessments, thus developing both student meta-cognition and self-monitoring of language use.

Certainly one of the essential foundations of any challenging curriculum is the use of authentic, rich literature that engages learners in self-discovery, in making connections, and in analysis of community and world. The bibliographer of our curriculum team has traveled and investigated extensively in order to locate authentic children’s and young adult literature in Spanish that reflect and support the curricular goals. Each scenario features relevant literature in the form of an individual bibliography specifically designed around the SLA skills and concepts and cultural themes of that scenario. The bibliography, like the scenarios, not only reflects a commitment to cultural and geographic diversity among the Spanish-speaking world, it also engages learners in the exploration of the indigenous roots of Spanish vocabulary. The bibliography features various bilingual texts—in Spanish and Nahuatl, for example—and numerous legends, myths, and folktales that are grounded in indigenous culture. This rich and valuable integration of indigenous literature forms a critical part of the cultural spiral and makes this bibliography particularly unique.

Finally, each scenario includes a brief description of possible related activities that students and teachers can explore. This is especially helpful for teachers who have a wide range of levels within a single classroom, as well as for teachers who meet with their students for longer periods of time or more frequently.

4. Scenario Examples

Before we began writing the scenarios, we divided our team into three grade clusters: K–second grade, third–fifth grade, and sixth–eighth grade. Each cluster worked independently but also kept in close communication such that we could develop a spiral of themes and skills all the way from kindergarten through eighth grade. The goal was a seamless, cohesive curriculum that would continue to build on previously acquired skills at grade-appropriate levels. At the same time, we wanted to ensure flexibility within the scenarios such that teachers could use the curriculum successfully from different entrance points. Each cluster created a thematic scope and sequence that was divided into four “big ideas” (Table 1). There is one big idea for each of the four quarters of the school year that guides the content of all scenarios. The big ideas have been
translated from their original Spanish to reach a wider audience.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade level</th>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Four “big ideas” (one per quarter)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| K          | Our worlds                   | What is the world I live in like?  
What does one need to live in our world?  
How do we coexist with nature?  
What are children like in other parts of the world? |
| 1          | My place in the world        | What is my community like?  
My land through the lens of art  
Spanish-speaking lands through the lens of science  
Spanish-speaking lands throughout time |
| 2          | Building bridges             | Connections between my land and myself  
Bridges between the past and my present  
How are the different Spanish-speaking communities connected?  
Links between the Spanish-speaking communities and the global community |
| 3          | What is culture?             | What is culture?  
Analyzing a cultural artifact: corn  
Analyzing a cultural artifact: music  
Analyzing a cultural artifact: visual and performing arts |
| 4          | My culture                   | Exploring my culture  
How is culture reflected where I live?  
Two cultures meet: An exploration of immigration. Developing an environmental culture |
| 5          | Cultural changes over time   | Tainos  
Aztecs  
Incas  
Civil Rights movements |
| 6          | Our heroes                   | Breaking barriers: Our American heroes  
Heroic acts  
Family heroes: We are products of our cultures  
Dear heroes: Heroes of 9/11/01 and 3/11/04 |
| 7          | Crossing borders             | Spanish: A language without borders  
A foot on each side: The pleasure of being myself  
Invisible borders: Social classes  
Beyond borders: Growing in tolerance |
| 8          | Novel travels                | The border between family and friends  
The border between fiction and reality  
The border between freedom and silence  
The border between fact and opinion: A media study |

**Table 1**

“Big Ideas” for Each Year

In the K–second grade cluster, the big ideas for each grade take into account the unique developmental needs of this age group, which is just beginning to encounter print literature for the first time. Children at this age also explore the world outside their homes and families for the first time. The scope of themes for this cluster starts with the specific at the kindergarten level (Who am I?). It then gradually moves out of the home and into a more global vision by second grade as children become aware of the world outside their immediate context, the family. Finally, in second grade, the scenarios encourage students to connect their knowledge from the previous two years and to extend themselves beyond the study of Spanish speaking countries into the rest of the world.

In the third–fifth grade cluster, students continue to explore the bridges between themselves, their families, their community members, their heritage countries, other Spanish-speaking countries, and the rest of the world, but in these years, it proves developmentally appropriate to formally introduce the term and concept of culture. In third grade, students become cultural detectives as they learn to identify the differences between natural and cultural phenomena. Students continue this thematic spiral by analyzing their own culture under the theme of “My culture” in fourth grade. Finally, in fifth grade, students conclude their explicit study of culture
under the banner of “Cultural Changes Over Time,” which helps students navigate through the big ideas of Taínos, Aztecs, Incas, and Civil Rights movements.

In the sixth–eighth grade cluster, students continue to make connections with previous learning, but this team wrote the scenarios for these grades specifically with the needs of adolescent learners in mind, including the need to develop a positive self-image and fascination with the unusual, extremes, challenges, and heroes (Curtain and Dahlberg 20–22). The team consulted other sources in order to learn about these distinct needs as well as the tastes and interests of middle school students, particularly Beane (1993). Some of the themes that Beane identifies as apt for adolescent study are transitions, identities, interdependence, wellness, social structures, independence, justice, and conflict resolutions, because they blend early adolescent concerns such as their quest to understand and develop their emerging identities with social concerns such as living in a globally interdependent yet culturally diverse world (Beane 1993: 61). This cluster also took into account the requirements for students to succeed in high-school SNS programs as well as Advanced Placement Spanish programs that students might encounter later in their studies. In these three years, students explore the metaphorical concept of “borders and frontiers.”

In the writing of the curriculum, certain themes sang out repeatedly, particularly those of traditions, family, culturally authentic heroes, and history. Instead of relegating each of these themes to a specific cluster in an attempt to avoid repetition, we considered the reappearance of these themes in each cluster as a strength that would demonstrate students’ abilities to revisit common threads at increasing levels of sophistication. The following examples illustrate the vertical thematic and linguistic spirals so essential to the cohesiveness of this curriculum. The full-length versions of the scenarios described here can be found in the appendix to this article.

In the first-grade scenario “Los héroes de mi familia,” students delve into the concept of heroism beyond their Saturday morning cartoons. Students enter the study of heroes through the familiar lenses of the home, pondering unsung heroes from their very own families. First, they explore the meaning of the word “hero” through reading, writing, word, and oral-language workshops. A key strategy at this grade level includes teaching literacy through words with which students already are familiar. Thus, upon being asked to list words associated with a hero, the same words that the students offer will later be used to practice letter-sound correspondence. They will also be used to make words through component syllables in order to better sound out words when reading. These words will also appear on the class’s word wall. Key vocabulary that incorporates family words will also be used for such mini-lessons. Students will also use familiar sentences from the brainstorm to practice writing in their journals. In terms of reading skills, first graders will explore the genre of biography through teacher read-alouds, as well as practice the skill of making predictions. Students will help identify the elements of a biography, and with the help of their family, use these elements in order to write a biography of a hero in their families. This writing workshop will serve to practice the capitalization of proper nouns as well as the beginning of sentences.

Families also make numerous appearances in intermediate scenarios. In fourth grade, students become more descriptive writers through the “Family Pictures” scenario. They explore the meaning of family traditions through listening to a teacher read aloud of Carmen Lomas Garza’s book Family Pictures, Cuadros de Familia, which has a series of richly illustrated vignettes describing Mexican-American traditions. Students will analyze the vignettes for author’s purpose and relate how the illustrations connect to the writing. They will also analyze the types of descriptive writing the author used. After listening to the vignettes, students will independently read other vignettes, filling out graphic organizers answering the “5 W’s” in Spanish: ¿Quién?, ¿Qué?, ¿Dónde?, ¿Cuándo? and ¿Por qué? Students will then use the book as a model for writing in narratives and illustrating their own cherished family memories and traditions. While writing, the teacher will highlight the skill of using past tense verbs to relate memories. Students will use graphic organizers for pre-writing activities, and then use the writing process to further develop their pieces into final products. Students will then orally share their writing. Students will finally
ask themselves: “What did I learn about my culture through my own family memories?”

Finally, in sixth grade, students combine the theme of heroes and families yet once again. In first grade, students examined family heroes primarily because their lived experiences at that age do not extend far beyond the home. Now, in sixth grade, students will examine family heroes in order to reconnect with the familiar and avoid succumbing to the superficial, media-fed images that surround them of heroes for adolescents. Through reflection upon a dynamic, class-created, year-long-developed definition of the word “hero,” students will examine whether they still think, five years later, that their family members are heroes in the scenario: “Familiar heroes: Family is important!” In this scenario, learners will travel through the entire writing process from pre-writing activities that use a picture book to ignite students’ creative juices, to post-writing art activities. Students will listen to a read-aloud of Playing Loteria/El Juego de la Loteria by René Colato Laínez and Jill Arenas, which depicts how a simple activity such as spending time with a family member can change one’s life in a positive manner. Learners will determine whether or not the character of la abuelita was a hero in the little boy’s life. Participants will then identify a Hispanic person in their families or community who is a hero to them, and explain in a pre-writing activity why that person is a hero. Next, the teacher will teach students how to use an outline to organize their ideas. After learners sketch an outline, they will create a rough draft, peer-edit that rough draft with the support of teachers, and proceed to a final draft. Finally, students will create a portrait of their Hispanic “familiar” heroes.

While all three of these scenarios touched on families, heroes, and sometimes both, they certainly were not repetitions of each other. Each scenario sought to reinforce existing skills, help students make connections with prior and background knowledge, as well as build upon this knowledge in order to generate new knowledge appropriate for that grade level. While the first-grade scenario sought to introduce students to letter-sound development in order to aid students with their first encounters reading print, the fourth-grade scenario helped learners to consciously process family traditions often taken for granted and consider their importance to culture. Further on, sixth-graders revisited the same themes but through writing an expository essay, a skill that will become increasingly useful as students proceed to high school. Even though the curriculum’s structure is a vertical spiral thematically and linguistically from kindergarten through eighth grade, as stated before, it is not necessary for teachers to follow the curriculum from start to finish. The scenarios are kernels themselves, and can serve individual teachers just as well as adopting the curriculum school-wide. The scenarios have been developed in order to be tailored to individual needs.

5. Concluding Remarks

A well-designed K–8 Spanish for heritage speakers curriculum has exciting ramifications. It offers great potential for the development and maintenance of heritage speakers’ Spanish during their early schooling years, the period which many researchers argue is most beneficial for language learning. The literacy and content development promoted by this curriculum is expected to transfer to students’ English literacy as well as to their overall academic skills (Bribois 1995; Escamilla 1993; Garcia and Padilla 1985; Hulstijn 1991). A third idea that is supported by research findings is that a well-executed K–8 SNS curriculum may increase the high-school graduation rate of Hispanic students. Ramirez et al. (1991) and Thomas and Collier (2002) showed that native-language-maintenance programs resulted in greater academic growth than did early exit programs and ESL-only programs, in which students finished well below national norms. In addition, this curriculum contains specific language-based experiences that aim to prepare students to succeed on Advanced Placement Spanish Language and Literature exams, which grant college credit and may serve as an incentive to completing high school. Future research that follows these children into high school may bear out this prediction. In fact, a curricular SNS articulation with high schools would be a welcome next step.

In addition to FLES programs, teachers in bilingual-education programs with a native-lan-
Spanish for K-8 Heritage Speakers

Although it was written specifically for teaching in Spanish, it is adaptable to other heritage languages as well. The learning scenarios offer enough resources, materials and opportunities to be adjusted to the needs of many different groups and teaching situations. Moreover, many of the scenarios have been piloted in classrooms, such that the final product reflects adjustments based on interaction with students in the Chicago Public Schools. The final curriculum document will be free and available to the public in PDF format at the website of the Chicago Public Schools’ Office of Language and Cultural Education (www.olce.org).

Given the wide range of educators who find themselves teaching Spanish as a native language in our nation’s public schools, there is a need for professional development in heritage-language teaching. It is well known that teaching a heritage language is vastly different from teaching a foreign language (see for example Potowski and Carreira 2004). To this end, it may be fruitful for national groups such as the Heritage Languages Initiative, the National Heritage Language Resource Center, the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese, and the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Languages to assist state-based groups that seek to create endorsements in heritage-language teaching.

In addition to the multiple sets of standards and publications we consulted, we would like to conclude by mentioning the joys and challenges that have informed our experiences as teachers of Spanish for native speakers, our constant faith in the value of this curricular project, and our desire to provide Spanish-speaking communities with the opportunity to have their language and culture validated from the earliest levels of schooling.

NOTES

1 The term “heritage speaker” refers to individuals who grow up in households where a minority language is spoken, yet they are schooled in the country’s majority language (Valdés 1997). Such individuals usually end up functionally bilingual, but dominant in the majority language in which they were schooled. In our case, although children of Spanish-speaking immigrants usually maintain communicative competence in their family’s heritage language, they often do not develop age-appropriate levels of literacy, vocabulary, and grammatical systems in it.

2 Colleagues who participated in this project are Margaret Kania, Eva Martínez, María Paz Martínez, Maribel Ouiellé-Silva, Elisa Rivera, Cristina Suárez, and Mary Beth Werner. The project director was Mark Armendariz. A portion of this work was presented at the AATSP meeting in Salamanca, Spain, in July 2006.

WORKS CITED


Spanish for K-8 Heritage Speakers

Appendix

Three Sample Scenarios—First, Fourth, and Sixth Grade

First Grade, Quarter 1

Big Idea: ¿Cómo es mi comunidad? Guiding Thought: Mi familia y yo

Los héroes de mi familia

Learning Scenario Objective: Por medio de la lectura de libros, discusiones y presentaciones, los estudiantes comprenderán el significado de la palabra héroe y las diferentes representaciones de los héroes o heroínas en su cultura y en otras. Los estudiantes se familiarizarán con el término biografía como un género literario y explorarán e identificarán los componentes de una biografía al describir a un héroe que se haya identificado en su familia. Al mismo tiempo, los estudiantes organizarán y clasificarán información para la biografía en un organizador gráfico. También, los estudiantes activarán sus conocimientos previos y aprenderán a hacer predicciones para acrecentar su comprensión lectora de libros leídos en voz alta por la maestra. Los estudiantes participarán en la composición de textos en colaboración con otros niños para entender la función de los espacios entre las palabras al participar en la escritura colectiva de oraciones que describan a sus familias. Los estudiantes se familiarizarán con las partes del libro. Los estudiantes continuarán su práctica de asociar las letras con sus sonidos y se familiarizarán con palabras de uso común.

SLA Objectives

Develop letter-sound correspondence when writing sentences (WIDA 1.A.1b; 2.B.1a)

1. Develop letter-sound correspondence when reading and singing repetitive songs.
2. Read games, songs and chants in choral reading with fluency and understanding. (WIDA 1.D.1c; 1.D.1e)
3. Use and apply reading strategies to improve comprehension of texts about family identity and family history (using prior knowledge) and establish purposes for reading. (WIDA 1.A.1d, 3.A.1d)
4. Create visuals to showcase biography about a family hero (WIDA 2.A.1e)
5. Identify biography as a literary genre (WIDA 1.A.1e)

Areas: (1) Reading and literature, (2) writing

Suggested Time Frame: Una semana

Learning Scenario: Los talleres de lectoescritura continuarán e incluirán estas actividades:

Por medio de la lectura de distintos libros que describan a diferentes héroes, la maestra encaminará a los estudiantes a descubrir y explorar el significado de la palabra héroe. Después de terminar de leer el primer libro, los estudiantes participarán en una lluvia de ideas sobre la palabra héroe. La maestra anotará estas ideas en un cartel para ser leidas en voz alta por los estudiantes al final de la discusión. Se leerán más libros en el transcurso de la unidad y se pedirá a los estudiantes que narren otra vez el contenido del libro por medio de la dramatización con títulos proporcionados por la maestra.

Dos de los propósitos más importantes de este estudio son el de encaminar a los niños a crear su propia definición de la palabra héroe y ayudarlos a reconocer que los héroes no son únicamente los famosos o aquellos presentados en la televisión.

La maestra presentará dos biografías, la de un héroe local, en este caso la vida de una enfermera y la de uno de sus familiares. La maestra leerá esta biografía en voz alta y por medio de una discusión, los estudiantes identificarán las características de una biografía y se enlistarán en un cartel. Este cartel se usará como referencia para los padres y alumnos. La maestra enviará una nota a casa pidiendo a los padres que ayuden a sus hijos a identificar a un héroe en su familia. En esta nota se incluirá la lista de características de una biografía para ayudar a los padres a entender la información sobre el héroe identificado.

Los estudiantes crearán un libro que presentará la biografía de su héroe y lo mostrará a la clase. Este libro formará parte de la biblioteca del salón y será incluido en la sección de las biografías.

El taller del lenguaje oral

Es este periodo, el mensaje del día continuará con noticias relacionadas con la familia. Los alumnos decidirán qué oraciones creadas por ellos sobre su familia formarán parte del mensaje del día. Estas oraciones serán creadas por los alumnos y se escribirán por medio de la estrategia de enseñanza escritura interactiva en donde se deletea cada palabra y se alargan los sonidos de las letras para que los estudiantes los identifiquen usando el
El taller de palabras
La maestra escribirá las palabras que los estudiantes identificaron para describir a un héroe en tarjetas. También escribirá las silabas iniciales de cada palabra en tarjetas y las colocará en una pequeña caja para que los estudiantes, en el futuro, usen este modelo independientemente al leer o al escribir cierta palabra. Al mismo tiempo, los estudiantes incluirán estas palabras en su banco de palabras. La maestra guiará a los estudiantes a conocer y practicar los sonidos y silabas que las letras forman con las vocales por medio de canciones (por ejemplo: Bán-dula, Cancionero) que usan frases repetitivas e ilustran los sonidos de las letras. Cada mañana de la semana, el estudio de las letras y sus sonidos será en torno al estudio de la familia y se hará por medio de la lectura de canciones que presentan el sonido de las letras. También la maestra preparará un conjunto de estas palabras en tarjetas laminadas recortadas en silabas para que los estudiantes traten de ponerlas en orden con la ayuda de un compañero o independientemente.

Los estudiantes manipularán y crearán letras y palabras con distintos materiales.

El taller de lectura
La maestra continuará leyendo libros sobre héroes para profundizar el entendimiento de los alumnos y para modelar las estrategias de lectura: activación de conocimientos previos y predicción por medio de la estrategia de enseñanza “pensar en voz alta.” Antes de cada lectura, la maestra presentará las partes del libro y modelará pensando en voz alta cómo usar los conocimientos previos para entender mejor el contenido de un libro así como la utilidad y formación de predicciones.

El taller de escritura
Los estudiantes usarán su diario para escribir oraciones sobre la información aprendida sobre los héroes. La maestra recordará a los estudiantes cómo agarrar el lápiz, cómo empezar las letras de arriba hacia abajo y cómo alargar los sonidos de las letras para leerlas y escribirlas. También la maestra recordará a los estudiantes cómo usar la pared de palabras al escribir en su diario.

Se pedirá a los estudiantes que escribían con libertad ideas o conceptos aprendidos en la lectura de libros y en las diferentes actividades realizadas en torno al tema de los héroes de la familia. En este período los estudiantes trabajaran en la creación del libro sobre el héroe de su familia.

Possible Assessments:
Este escenario ofrece práctica concreta en la correspondencia entre letra y sonido. Se sugieren notas anecdoticas de cada estudiante que registren esta información.

* Desarrollo en la correspondencia entre letra y sonidos al escribir y leer oraciones.
* Uso de la escritura ambiental (abecedario, banco de palabras).
* Uso de estrategias de lectura para mejorar la comprensión lectora.
* Estas notas anecdoticas deben ser usadas con notas con el propósito de monitorear el progreso y planear la instrucción de acuerdo a las necesidades de los estudiantes.

Suggested Activities:
A través de las lecturas y discusiones, y de la escritura guiada, interactiva e independiente:

* Hacer entrevistas con familiares y/u otras personas en la escuela o comunidad (puede ser alumnos mayores en el programa de español) acerca de quiénes son sus héroes y por qué.
* Comparar y hacer contrastes entre los héroes familiares del grupo.
* Comparar y hacer contrastes entre los héroes familiares del grupo y los héroes que se encuentran en la cultura popular.
* Formar un muro de palabras y describan los héroes.
* Compara y hacer contrastes entre una heroína estereotípica y una heroína más “feminista” (por ejemplo: Leer un cuento tradicional de La Cenicienta y el libro La princesa Smartypants (Cole and Thomas 1992); también hacer predicciones acerca de lo que sucederá antes de y durante la lectura.
Objectives:

* Give detailed descriptions (2B1d)
* Exchange information and express ideas both orally and in writing (4B1a)
* Give an oral presentation (3B1a)
* Comprehend and apply information acquired orally or in reading (1C2c)

Areas: Reading and Literature, Writing, Oral Language

Suggested Time Frame: 3 weeks

Learning Scenario Objective: Students will learn how to write descriptive paragraphs and represent them pictorially, based on their family traditions.

In order to introduce storytelling and detailed writing, the teacher will read the story *Family Pictures, Cuadros de familia* by Carmen Lomas Garza. After the students have listened to the story, the teacher will assign a different page of the text to each student. She will discuss how each page can stand on its own as one of the memories of the author. Students will then fill in the graphic organizer titled “las memorias.”

Students will work in small groups to complete additional rows of the graphic organizer with excerpts from *En mi familia*. If possible, have multiple copies of the book available for students. It is important at this point for students to be reading the text with small groups to practice using comprehension strategies with text. After students have had opportunities to discuss *En mi familia* and *Cuadros de familia* with their groups, the teacher should facilitate a class discussion. Some important questions are:

- What did you learn about the author?
- ¿Qué aprendieron de la autora?
- ¿Para qué piensan que ella escribió cerca de estos cuadros?

What are some descriptive words she uses?
¿Cuáles son algunas de las palabras descriptivas que ella usa?

How do the pictures help support these memories?
¿Cómo ayudan los cuadros a explicar estos recuerdos?

What do we learn about her culture through these memories?
¿Qué aprendemos de su cultura a través de estos cuadros?

In what ways does she show that these events were important to her?
¿Cómo muestra la autora que estos sucesos fueron importantes en su vida?

At this point, the teacher should review past-tense verb use, highlighting important past-tense accents and possible stem changes when appropriate. Then students will use a second graphic organizer to highlight some of their own family memories. They will use the graphic organizer as a prewriting activity, then they will use the ideas on their graphic organizers to create four separate written pieces. The teacher can choose if she would like these pieces to be created one at a time and taken through the writing process or if the four pieces would all go through the writing process at the same time. Through teacher and peer conferencing the pieces would be revised to add details. Also during this conferencing, editing will take place with special focus on past-tense verb use/accents. As students move towards publishing their pieces, they should collect artifacts or photos, or create drawings to support each of their memories.

Students will then prepare to share their memories with their class. Students will practice reading their pieces and prepare their visuals. Each student can share one of his or her memories with the rest of the class. If time permits, this can continue until all of their four memories have been shared. The teacher should then display the students’ work alongside their visuals so that the students may refer back to them. A similar discussion can then be had using the same questions as before. Finally ask the students to do a quick reflection: What
Hispania 91 March 2008

did I learn about my culture by looking at my own family memories?

Possible Assessments:
* Writing Rubric (Teacher-selected writing rubric)
* Assessment of graphic organizers for story comprehension
* Anecdotal notes
* Presentation checklist (Appendix)

Possible Related Activities:
* Read Magic Windows and create “papel picado”
* Have students bring in photos of family members and retell the memories though all family members’ perspectives
* Interview family members about their childhood memories and create a family “scrapbook”

Suggested Resources:
In My Family, En mi familia, Carmen Lomas Garza, et al.
Family Pictures, Cuadros de familia, Carmen Lomas Garza, et al.
Family, Familia. Diane Gonzales Bertrand, Guillermo Jorge Manuel José, Mem Fox
Making Magic Windows: Creating Papel Picado/Cut-Paper Art with Carmen Lomas Garza
Homenaje a Tenochtitlan: An Installation for Day of the Dead by Carmen Lomas Garza
Hair/Pelitos by Sandra Cisneros
Just Like Me: Stories and Self-Portraits by Fourteen Artists, Harriet Rohmer (Hardcover)

Sixth Grade, Quarter 3 Big Idea: Nosotros: Productos de nuestra cultura

Guiding Thought: Familiar Heroes

Familiar Heroes: Family is Important!

Learning Scenario Objective:
The students will use the writing process (pre-writing, outline, draft, re-draft, final draft) to compose original personal essays about the important Hispanics in their lives.

Suggested Time Frame: 4 weeks

Descriptors:
1. Students will respond to the story El Juego de la Loteria from personal, cultural, creative, and critical points of view. WIDA 1C3f
2. Students will write in order to reflect the important values in their families and communities. WIDA 2A3g
3. Students will edit and revise a personal essay in Spanish using processes of revision that take into account teacher and peer feedback. WIDA 2B3g
4. Students will begin to recognize and correct common errors made by native speakers of Spanish in writing. WIDA 4A3e

Areas: (1) Reading and Literature; (2) Writing; (4) Language Use and Structure

Learning Scenario: Part I
Students will create an essay about somebody Hispanic who has had an impact on them or on their community and then create an artistic portrait of the person written about in the essay. In order to inspire creative writing in the students, the teacher will read them a bilingual picture book called Playing Loteria/El Juego de la Lotería by René Colato Lainz about a little boy who doesn’t speak much Spanish and goes to visit his grandma in Mexico. He teaches her English, and she teaches him Spanish through the use of the Mexican game, la Lotería. It is important to the purpose of the book that both the English and Spanish parts are read. The teacher should elect someone to read the English part of the story, preferably a non-native speaker of Spanish (this corresponds to the plot). After reading the story, the teacher should lead a discussion with the students of how the little boy felt that even though he was Mexican, he did not speak Spanish. The teacher might ask: Do all Hispanics speak Spanish? Do all Hispanics that speak Spanish speak Spanish in the same way?
Spanish for K-8 Heritage Speakers

In preparation for their essay, students will write in Spanish at least two ways in which la abuela had an impact on the narrator’s life. The teacher may take this moment to remind students about their ongoing discussion about heroes. The teacher should ask students if they think la abuela is a hero to the little boy and why. The teacher should ask students who the every-day heroes are in their lives and what makes each of these people a hero. They can discuss the ways their parents, siblings, teachers, etc. are heroes.

Students can also discuss how they, themselves, can be heroes. Students will identify somebody Hispanic in their lives (not a celebrity but a family member, friend, or a community leader such as a teacher) that has had a significant impact on their life. They must make a list of at least two reasons why or occasions in which that person has had an impact on their life or community. The teacher should also do this task so that he/she may use it as a model for the next part of the scenario.

Part II:

The teacher will use the list-of-reasons assignment to teach students how to write a well-organized personal essay. Before writing a rough draft, the teacher will slowly go over how to write an outline. The essay should have 4 paragraphs that correspond to the four Roman numerals in the outline: I. Introduction, II. First Reason, III. Second Reason, IV. Conclusion.

In the introduction, the students will present their very important Hispanic person, give information about who that person is (personality, fascinating facts), and state two specific reasons that person is important to them. The teacher should be careful to model that students are to avoid sentences like: “My mom is important to me because she loves me.” The student should give CONCRETE, SPECIFIC examples. In the second paragraph, the student should elaborate on the first reason their person is important to them, again giving specific examples. In the third paragraph, the student should explain their second reason. In the last (fourth) paragraph, the student should conclude their essay.

Depending on students’ familiarity with the parts of an essay and the parts of an outline, the teacher may pace this scenario. A good pace, it seems, for sixth graders, is to complete one section of the outline per period. The more guided the writing process is, the better written will be the students’ essays. The teacher should be careful to model each section of the outline.

Part III:

The students will write their first draft of their essay. The teacher will model for students how s/he has turned the first section (I. Introduction) of the outline into a paragraph and so forth. The students will convert their outlines into paragraphs. Teachers are to emphasize well-organized and coherent essays.

After students have completed their rough drafts with teacher guidance, they will peer review each other’s rough drafts using a peer-review rubric provided by the teacher and their “Common Errors” sheet. After the students have reviewed each other’s work, the teacher may then make additional comments on the rough draft.

The students will use their peers’ comments as well as their teacher’s to create a final draft of their essay. Finally, students will create an artistic portrait of their important Hispanic person using various art materials such as crayons and watercolors.

Possible Assessments:

The teacher should assess every step of the essay: the pre-writing activity (identifying a Hispanic person important in their lives with reasons), the outline, the rough draft, the peer reviews, the final draft, and the final portrait. The teacher should use a rubric to evaluate the final draft.

Possible Related Activities:

1. The students could learn about the origins of Lotería and actually play the game.
2. The students could share their “familiar heroes” in an oral reading of their essays.

Suggested Resource: