

Spanish for Spanish Speakers

Why Start and Maintain an SNS Program?

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Los lenguajes les pertenecen a todos y a nadie en particular. Son de quien los hable y de quien los escuche.

Languages belong to everyone and to no one in particular. They belong to those who speak them and to those who listen.

Octavio Paz, Mexico, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, 1990

The rapid increase in the Hispanic population

in the United States has dramatically affected our nation's schools and colleges. Census reports show evidence of this growth during the last 10 years. Whereas the 1990 Census reported 22.4 million Hispanics, the 2000 Census shows a Hispanic population of 35.3 million, or 12% of the total U. S. population -- a 58% increase in 10 years.

Most Hispanics, or Latinos, live in California and Texas, but Arizona, Florida, Illinois, New Jersey, and New York have Hispanic populations of 1 million or more. Some counties in non-traditional Hispanic states (e.g., Georgia and North Carolina) have Hispanic populations now (U.S. Census Bureau, 2001).

These statistics mirror what many Spanish teachers see in their classes -- a growth in the number of students who are already proficient to some extent in Spanish and have strong connections to the Hispanic/Latino culture. Because these students come from many different areas -- Central America, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and South America -- they speak many different varieties of Spanish, including dialects that are considered non-standard. Schools, school districts, and universities need to tailor their Spanish programs to meet the needs of native Spanish speakers as well as those of native English speakers.

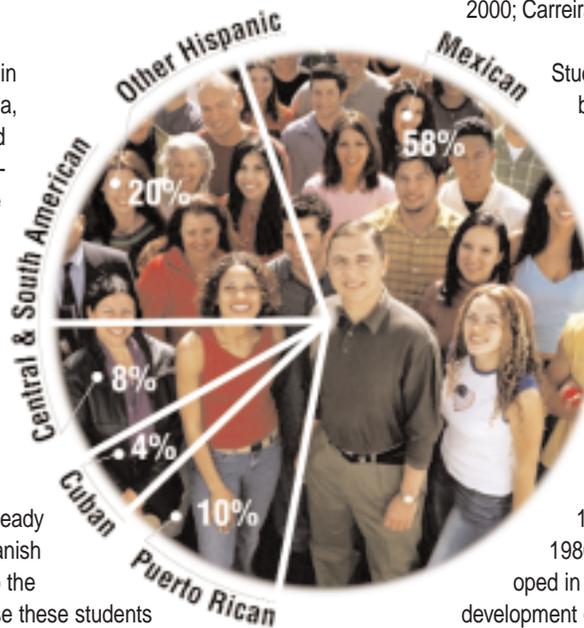
Benefits of Speaking Spanish

The ability to speak more than one language is an asset in a global society. Spanish is the second most widely used language in the United States and is increasingly important for business, trade, schools, government agencies, the legal system, the media, advertising, the Internet, politics, and the private sector (Brecht & Rivers, 2000; Carreira & Armengol, 2001).

Students who have grown up speaking both Spanish and English often have linguistic, cognitive, and cultural advantages over monolingual speakers of either language, and they may be better prepared to face the challenges of a multilingual and multicultural world.

Studies have shown that bilingualism and biliteracy increase the cognitive abilities of students (Bialystock & Hakuta, 1994; Cummins, 1989; Hakuta, 1986). Academic language skills developed in the first language can facilitate the development of the second language, especially at advanced literacy levels (Cummins & Danesi, 1990; Faltis & Wolfe, 1999; Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002; Verhoeven 1991).

Despite the advantages of speaking both Spanish and English, many Spanish-speaking students have limited opportunities to use Spanish for academic purposes or to read and write Spanish.



The chart above shows the origin of the Hispanic/Latino population according to the latest U.S. Census Bureau findings. Source: U.S. Census Bureau, May 2001



Characteristics of Spanish-Speaking Students

Spanish teachers need to understand their Spanish-speaking students' cultural backgrounds, Spanish language abilities, and attitudes toward speaking Spanish in order to reinforce their rich heritage and help them keep learning the language. The following are important student characteristics to keep in mind:

- The Spanish proficiency levels of Spanish speakers may vary widely according to when, where, how intensively, and in what contexts they have used Spanish; their prior schooling in Spanish, including formal academic study; their length of residence in the United States; and their attitudes toward use of Spanish. (See Merino, Trueba, & Samaniego, 1993; Valdés, 1997.)
- The variety of Spanish that students speak will vary depending on the country that they or their family members have come from and the places that they live in the United States. (See Roca, 1997, 2000.)
- Spanish-speaking students in U.S. schools often have a limited range of contexts in which to use Spanish, and they use English in most formal and academic interactions. Their use of Spanish needs to be expanded to include academic and professional contexts and purposes. Students' skills also need to be expanded to include more effective oral communication; reading; writing for academic, professional, and literary purposes; expanded vocabulary; and use of different discourse styles and registers in different situations. (See Schleppegrell & Colombi, 2002; Valdés, 1997.)
- Many Spanish-speaking students code-switch (i.e., they mix English and Spanish in conversation and borrow words from one language when speaking the other). The Spanish that they speak is not "bad Spanish." Code switching is a natural practice when two languages are in close contact, and in some contexts it is appropriate. (See Roca & Colombi, in press; Zentella, 1997.)

Key Features of Spanish Programs for Spanish Speakers

The need for Spanish programs designed specifically for Spanish-speaking students is significant, as shown in a recent survey (Ingold, Rivers, Tesser, & Ashby, 2002). Pre-K–12 teachers, college instructors, and program administrators who want to develop a Spanish for Spanish speakers (SNS) program or improve one that is already in place should consider the following:

- Because Spanish speakers have different characteristics and needs from English speakers learning Spanish as a second language, separate courses should be designed specifically for them whenever possible, particularly at beginning levels of instruction.
- SNS courses and programs should be articulated so that students can move smoothly from one level to the next.
- SNS courses should be responsive to the specific needs of the students involved. Some students may already use oral Spanish in familiar contexts but need to develop their academic Spanish and reading and writing skills. Other students may be exposed to Spanish in broadcast and print media but have limited opportunities to speak it in daily interactions. Courses for these students should develop their communicative skills first and then their academic language skills, including reading and writing.
- Teachers in SNS programs and classes should be specially trained, in pre-service and in-service education, to understand and address the language and cultural issues that they will face in their classes.
- Teachers should have access to curricula, materials, and assessments designed specifically for Spanish-speaking students.



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Additional Resources

American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese. (2000). *Professional development series handbook for teachers K-16: Vol. 1. Spanish for native speakers*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt College. Available: Thomson Custom Publishing, 1-800-355-9983. (See <http://www.heinle.com> under Professional Resources/AATSP Annual Volumes.)

The Center for Applied Linguistics Web Site (<http://www.cal.org/ericcll/sns>) contains online publications and a guide to resources for SNS teachers and researchers—organizations, print publications, newsletters, electronic discussion lists, and curricula.

The Project REACH Web Site (<http://www.nflc.org/reach>) contains instructional resources for teachers and students of Spanish as a heritage language; an annotated list of textbooks used in K-12 and university SNS courses; links to dictionaries and other reference materials; spelling, grammar, and accent practice exercises; and links to related sites.