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Supporting Native Language Literacy and Culture Among Hispanic High School Students

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-Supporting Native Language Literacy and Culture among Hispanic High School Students-

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RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How do I enhance the curriculum to increase the Spanish literacy of my native Spanish-speakers?
2. How do I better integrate cultural activities in the classroom to develop the confidence and pride my students have in their native culture?

RESULT

- Overall themes in journal entries point to increased student engagement and higher regard for cultural topics (including native cultures)
- Reading/Writing activities show slow improvements in spelling and grammar
- Voice recordings demonstrate students using a more formal Spanish and show students as experts on their country of study
- The final essay shows gains in spelling, grammar, effective communication and high level thinking
- Carreira (2007) notes higher level thinking is necessary to work for in SNS classes to help improve Hispanic literacy and lower the Latino achievement gap

Table 1:
Strategies Used, Objectives and Assessments

	Strategies	Objectives (L and C)	Assessment
1.	Autobiography (completed the first day of school)	--See the Spanish writing ability of students to understanding their strengths/ weaknesses	No formal assessment was giving.
2.	Readings (myths, legends, articles)	--Enhance native language reading ability, comprehension and vocabulary	Homework sets, quizzes and projects related to content, concepts and culture
3.	Lectures (open/closed vowels, syllables)	--Enhance literacy by breaking down Spanish words to its simplest form --Learn about pronunciations	Homework and quiz, focusing on concept.
4.	Articles (from a Spanish written newspaper)	--Facilitate awareness of current events in Hispanic cultures --Enhance reading/ writing in native language	Ten sentence summary of articles.
5.	Videos (documentary on Day of the Dead, <i>Macario</i>)	--Learn about cultural traditions of Mexico --Listen to native language speakers to increase comprehension	Video worksheet, quiz and formal essay.
6.	Instructional Games (facts, vocabulary, concepts)	--Provide engaging activities for students to practice --Practice using vocabulary, concepts and cultural knowledge	Participation points were given based on level of participation of individual students
7.	Essay (formal 5-paragraph essay on <i>Macario</i>)	--Demonstrate understanding of the cultural context of movie --Produce a work with few errors	Rubric to grade the essay.

METHODOLOG

- This study took place during the fall of 2009 and lasted 14 weeks
- Participants included urban, Hispanic high school students in grades 9 & 10 who were enrolled in Spanish for Spanish-speakers I
- Initial assessment of students' Spanish level was evaluated by an autobiography students wrote on the first day of school, during their class period
- Throughout the duration of the semester, lessons were designed to enhance students' oral, reading and writing literacy
- Strategies (see Table 1): readings, lectures, article summaries, videos, instructional games and essays
- Several lessons and projects were assigned to increase cultural awareness (Country presentations, newspaper summaries, creation of an altar for Day of the Dead, etc)
- Results came from personal journal entries, assessment grades on various assignments, voice recordings and a final, five-paragraph essay students completed in class at the end of the 14 weeks

CONCLUSION

1. Using a variety of strategies is instrumental in helping Hispanic students learn different aspects of the Spanish language
2. Integration of culture throughout unit plans are great ways to increase the cultural awareness of Hispanic students and demonstrate the value in the Spanish-speaking cultures
3. Further research is needed in this field to determine more specific implications of Hispanics achieving higher literacy