

## Where We've Been; What We've Learned

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There were nearly 25 million foreign-born individuals residing in the United States in 1996, a 25 percent increase since the 1990 United States Census Report (Campbell and Peyton 1998). The majority of this population are from Spanish-speaking countries, followed by members of Asian language groups (Campbell and Peyton 1998). While the United States government views multilingualism as essential to the national interest (Peale 1991; Brecht and Ingold 1998) and recognizes the value of language skills among the nation's citizenry, the educational system historically has not given priority status to the nurturing of the linguistic abilities of its language minority students. Instead, the emphasis has been placed on the development and maintenance of their English language skills often at the expense of their native language skills (Marcos 1999). Students are frequently assigned to classes in English as a Second Language (ESL) or enrolled in remedial English classes to supplement their regularly scheduled instruction in English. If they have any instruction in their heritage language in school, it is most often through enrollment in a foreign language class with stu-

dents learning that language for the first time. The result is that teachers of foreign languages find themselves teaching classes in which an increasing percentage or even a majority of the students are not the traditional foreign language learners that teachers were trained to teach. The approaches that they have employed successfully for years with foreign language learners are no longer adequate or appropriate, and the resulting sense of frustration and inadequacy has become a part of their daily teaching experience. The heritage language learners in their classes experience a similar kind of frustration. Indeed, as the linguistic composition of the United States population continues to change, and as schools continue to experience a significant growth in the population of heritage language learners, it is becoming increasingly evident that the needs of these students are not being adequately addressed.

### **Language Minorities in the United States**

Since the very beginning, people from around the world have immigrated to the United States in hopes of creating a better life for themselves and their families. While the dominance of the English language has never really been in question, issues of language diversity and assimilation have always been a part of the national discussion. As early as 1906, Congress passed a measure requiring anyone seeking American citizenship to be able to speak English (Crawford 1992, p.55). That same year, the House Committee on Immigration and Naturalization asserted that anyone who was unable to speak English after being in the country for five years "must be so deficient in mental capacity, or so careless of the opportunities afforded him...that he would make an undesirable citizen" (quoted in Crawford 1992, p.55).

This was not a new phenomenon. During the 1800s the relationship between the United States government and Native Americans was fraught with serious problems. The Indian Peace Commission of 1868 was charged with the responsibility of finding out why Native Americans were not adhering to policies of manifest destiny that were part of the national agenda. In its findings, the Commission concluded that the source of the difficulty was "in the difference of language" (quoted in Crawford 1992, p.43). Native American children were taken from their homes and shipped to boarding schools where instruction in Native American languages was forbidden by law (Crawford 1992, p.44). That practice was not abolished until the mid-twentieth century.

That sentiment carried on years later. During the 1920s "English only" advocates also linked the continued use of a foreign language with substandard intel-

ligence and an answer to the cause of mental retardation in immigrant children (Portes, Hao 1998, p.270). Even President Theodore Roosevelt stated, "We have room for but one language here, and that is the English language; for we intend to see that the crucible turns people out as Americans, and not dwellers in a polyglot boarding house" (Quoted in Portes, Hao 1998 from Brumberg 1986, p.7) In the 1980s, following another wave of immigration, legal and otherwise, "English Only" measures began appearing on state ballots nationwide, with several passing by large margins (Crawford 1992, p.61). The debate on the role of non-English languages continues.

### **Language Maintenance among Language Minority Groups**

In addressing the issue of minority language maintenance, it is also necessary to look at the roles of the individuals involved in the process of language maintenance. The maintenance of a heritage language cannot be achieved by the heritage language learners alone. The community, teachers, and parents all need to be involved to ensure that the first language is not lost. The heritage language learner's role is most important, as she or he will need to make every effort to maintain his or her first language. However, the community also plays a vital role in helping to maintain language. As a minority language speaker begins to learn English or any other new language, the community must encourage the learners to advance their linguistic skills in the heritage language. The community must also realize that it is the primary contact that a minority language speaker has with its language, and that it ultimately will be responsible for keeping the language alive through its future generations (Valdés 1995, p.310). School teachers also play an important role in a student's maintenance of a home language. They must learn to respect their students' home language and to help their students understand that they may still use their native language while learning English, emphasizing that doing so will not be detrimental to them (Zentella 1986; Soto, Smrekar, Neckovei 1999, p.1). Since students spend most of their day with a teacher, they will sense a teacher's attitude toward their home language.

A prime example of this is Maria Ramirez, named bilingual teacher of the year by NABE (National Association for Bilingual Education), and born to Mexican immigrants (Checkley 1996). Ramirez said, "At school, we were asked to always speak English. We were not encouraged to speak Spanish." She continued, "My language is part of who I am. If you take that away, you don't respect my whole person" (Checkley 1996). Her experiences confirmed for her that a teacher's lack of support communicates that the student is not important



(Checkley 1996). With this in mind, all three groups will need to work together to ensure that the heritage language is not lost.

### **The Teaching of Heritage Language Learners in the United States**

The teaching of heritage languages is not a recent phenomenon. In 1839, many states authorized bilingual education programs in the states, specifically the teaching of German language to children of German heritage in public schools (Crawford 1992, p.46). One hundred years later the country as a whole was confronted with the urgent need to provide adequate education for its larger and more diversified immigrant population. This forced educators, as never before, to deal with issues of language and cultural differences in their schools. In spite of the mounting pressure for sensitivity to language and culture in the schools, it took nearly seven decades before the magnitude of the immigration of Spanish-speakers resulted in schools addressing the issue of teaching Spanish to heritage learners of Spanish (Teschner 1983). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, educators began to rethink their methods of teaching Spanish to their Spanish-speaking students, because it had become evident that the techniques used to teach Spanish to monolingual speakers were not effective in teaching bilingual/heritage speakers (Rodriguez Pino 1997).

Although some progress has been made in addressing the instruction of heritage language learners, a 1997 survey conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics, showed that only 7 percent of secondary schools in the United States offer heritage/native language classes, an increase of a mere 3 percent over a preceding ten years. In colleges and universities, language courses are still designed primarily for English speakers learning a second language (Brecht and Ingold 1998).

Heritage language instruction historically has been handled in three ways. One long-standing tradition that has helped to maintain heritage languages has been for members of the heritage language community to teach the language on weekends or after school. The other is for the language to be taught in school districts by teachers either during school as a part of the regular curriculum, or after school (Valdés 1995, p.303). The community-based programs, often referred to as Saturday Schools, focus on maintaining the heritage language and culture among the youth of the community. The heritage language programs offered by school districts are open to all students with varying levels of proficiency in the language, as well as monolingual students studying the language for the first time

(Valdés 1995, p.303). In still a third program model, dual immersion, monolingual students and heritage language students are placed together in the same class and instruction is offered in both languages. This type of program allows monolingual students to learn a second language while the heritage language students are able to further develop skills in their language (Valdés 1997, p.411). Valdés further points out that some language communities have been unsuccessful in having their language added to school curriculum.

Certain language groups, such as the Chinese, the Koreans, and the Russians, have started their own language programs in both weekend and after school programs (Valdés 1995, p.303; Marcos 1999). Still others, particularly the Spanish-speaking communities have successfully persuaded schools to start courses as early as the elementary grades (Valdés 1995, p.303). The reality, of course, is that evening and weekend courses are seriously limited in what they can accomplish, because they often lack the resources necessary for success, including trained instructors, funding, and curricular materials (Brecht and Ingold 1998).

### **Definition of Heritage Language Learner**

The term "heritage language learner," relatively new in language education research, refers to someone who has had exposure to a non-English language outside the formal education system. It most often refers to someone with a home background in the language, but may refer to anyone who has had in-depth exposure to another language. Other terms used to describe this population include "native speaker," "bilingual," and "home background." While these terms are often used interchangeably, they can have very different interpretations.

Guadalupe Valdés, professor and researcher at Stanford University, stated that "for most people, a native speaker is one who can function in all settings in which other native speakers normally function. Moreover, to be considered fully native, a speaker must be indistinguishable from other native speakers. When interacting with them, other native speakers should assume that he or she acquired the language from infancy" (Valdés 1998, p.153). Claire Kramsch notes that "originally native speakership was viewed as an uncontroversial privilege of birth. Those who were born into a language were considered its native speakers, with grammatical intuitions that non-native speakers did not have" (quoted in Valdés 1998, p.152). Heritage speakers may be classified as individuals who speak their first language, which is not English, in the home, or are foreign-born (Campbell and Peyton 1998). Heritage language learners may also be defined as

individuals who have learned a language other than English somewhere other than in school (Scalera 1997).

The New York City public school system has yet another means of classifying its language minority students. "Literacy" students have no or limited English skills and are generally enrolled in courses in English as a Second Language. The "Native" track is available for heritage speakers of Spanish. These students are generally first- and second-generation speakers of Spanish with varying degrees of proficiency in the heritage language, but who are proficient in English. The Texas Framework for Languages Other Than English (Texas Education Agency, 1997) describes the range of students with "home backgrounds" in languages other than English, including:

- Students who are able to understand oral language, but unable to speak the language beyond single-word answers.
- Students who can speak the language fluently but have little to no experience with the language in its written form.
- Students who have come to the United States from non-English speaking countries. They can understand and speak the language fluently; however, their reading and writing skills may be limited due to a lack of formal education in their countries of origin.
- Fluent bilingual students who understand, speak, read, and write another language very well.

Peale describes native speakers as those who are English dominant with oral proficiency in the language and with "linguistic skills that are beyond those which are typically developed in four years of high school Spanish" (Peale 1991, p.448).

Finally, Valdés developed the following charts (see p. 21 and p. 22) using a Spanish for Native Speakers class to help illustrate the characteristics of heritage language learners, their language development needs and the different abilities brought to the classroom.

### **Achieving Success with Heritage Language Learners**

While there appears to be widespread recognition that heritage language learners are different from the traditional foreign language student, the challenges involved in meeting their needs are also widely recognized. Instruction must serve an extraordinarily diverse group of students, even in programs specifically designed to meet their needs; instructional materials, while improving, are still not as readily available as their more traditional counterparts; teacher prepara-



tion remains an enigma; administrative support is unpredictable; assessment is an open question; and a strong research base is lacking (Roca 1997; Rodriguez Pino 1997; Brecht and Ingold 1998; Campbell and Peyton 1998; Valdés 1999). Nevertheless, there is a growing understanding of the issues that affect the success or failure of heritage language learning. This section will explore current understanding of these issues.

### Teacher Attitudes and Expectations

The role of the teacher in determining the success or failure of students in heritage language classrooms cannot be understated. Despite increasing attention being paid to these issues, the average teacher of heritage language learners is

Table 1. Selected Characteristics of Students who Enroll in SNS Language Courses

Generation	Schooling	Academic Skills in English	Language Characteristics
Newly arrived	Good schooling in Spanish speaking country	English language learners	Fluent speakers of prestige variety of Spanish
	Little schooling in Spanish speaking country		Fluent speakers of colloquial/stigmatized varieties of Spanish
U.S. born and raised	Access to bilingual instruction in U.S.	Good academic skills in English	Fluent speakers of prestige variety of Spanish
		Poor academic skills in English	Fluent speakers of colloquial/stigmatized varieties of Spanish
	Educated exclusively through English	Good academic skills in English	Limited speakers of prestige variety of Spanish
	No academic skills in Spanish	Poor academic skills in English	Limited speakers of colloquial/stigmatized varieties of Spanish Receptive bilinguals

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either a foreign language teacher certified in the heritage language with a fairly high level of proficiency, or a native speaker of the target language who may or may not be a certified language teacher. By and large these teachers are isolated within their schools, and have no obvious means of support other than their own willingness to seek help. As Scalera (1997) notes:

Given the lack of all other types of support, you, as a teacher of heritage language learners, are the single most important element that will determine the success of your students. Your beliefs about how to teach and about the abilities of heritage language learners will have a major impact on the decisions you make in terms of use of class time, what types of assignments you provide, and how and why students are motivated to learn.

Due to past emphasis on the teaching of the "standard" dialect to heritage

Table 2. Student Characteristics and Needs

Student Characteristics	Needs
Newly-arrived immigrant children	Language maintenance Continued development of age-appropriate language competencies Acquisition of prestige variety of the language
Newly-arrived immigrant adolescents/young adults	
High literacy	Language maintenance Continued development of age-appropriate language competencies
Low literacy	Language maintenance Development of literacy skills in first language Continued development of age appropriate language competencies Acquisition of prestige variety of language
Second and third generation bilinguals	Maintenance, retrieval, and/or acquisition of language competencies (e.g., oral productive abilities) Expansion of bilingual range Transfer of literacy skills developed in English to Spanish Acquisition of prestige variety of the language

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language learners, many teachers have viewed, and continue to view, their role as one of correcting the language used by their students; that what students bring with them to the classroom is not valid. This, coupled with the often negative societal attitudes toward these languages and the people who speak them, leads students to see no perceived value in something that is integral to who they are as people (Villa 1996; Valdés 1999).

Lack of understanding of the nature of both societal as well as individual bilingualism has also been a factor in determining teacher attitudes toward heritage language learners (Zentella 1986; Gutierrez 1997; Clair and Adger 1999; Valdés 1999). The nature of languages in contact is such that word borrowing is a norm and leads to enrichment of the language over time. *Anglicismos* are not by nature bad. They are, instead, evidence of the richness of language. By the same token, bilinguals have an internal control over which language to use in which context, and will easily switch between the two languages depending on the topic of conversation. As Gutierrez (1997, p.35) explains:

Teachers need to be made aware that heritage speakers are not simply imperfect speakers of Spanish who have fallen short of the monolingual norm. They are, rather, complex persons who are fundamentally different from monolinguals. Unlike monolingual speakers of Spanish from societies in which Spanish is the sole or primary language, bilingual United States Latinos and Latinas are members of speech communities in which a single language does not meet all their communicative needs.

It is extremely important to remember that the educational system is a political institution and, as such, is not immune, and more often than not reflects, the cultural, political and social struggles of the society at large (Valdés 1999). This can have a profound impact on the heritage language classroom, because those students in particular are often on the losing end of those struggles. Teachers placed in heritage language programs, particularly those who are not native speakers themselves, may feel threatened by the abilities their students do have. They will often use their authority as the teacher to maintain a semblance of an advantage over their students (Scalera 1994; Ariza 1998), creating yet another power struggle in the minds of the students. This power struggle can further erode the motivation of students and their interest in pursuing their language study.

The key to success in the heritage language classroom, then, is for the teacher to respect and value the language and cultural experiences that students bring to the classroom (Valdés 1980; Zentella 1986; Scalera 1994; Colville-Hall, et al. 1995;

Ariza 1998; Clair and Adger 1999). They must understand that there is no "standard" language (Villa 1996), and that what students bring are the building blocks for future growth in the language. Teachers also need to know their students (Ariza 1998). They need to understand not only their linguistic capabilities but also who they are as people, what their backgrounds are and what their interests are. This should be accomplished through real communication with the students, with their parents, and with others in the school community.

Teachers need to be able to reevaluate their role within the classroom (Faltis 1990; Scalera 1997; Ariza 1998). They need to back away from the notion of "teacher as leader" and begin to view themselves as facilitators. They need to be able to adapt to the needs and capabilities of their students, rather than trying to make students fit into preconceived notions of the types of students they should be.

### Student Attitudes and Expectations

Student motivation has long been recognized as a determinant of success in the foreign language classroom, and, as noted above, the motivation of the heritage language students can be greatly influenced by both teacher and societal attitudes toward their home languages. Heritage language learners very often have different reasons for studying the language than their foreign language counterparts. Sometimes, they seek greater understanding of their culture or seek to connect with members of their family (Mazzocco 1996); others see language study as an "easy" way to fulfill a language requirement (Teschner 1983). Still others study it because of family pressure or at the insistence of guidance counselors.

Equally diverse are the societal attitudes that sap the motivation of students. We have already discussed how lack of respect for the language variety spoken by the student can reduce motivation. The status afforded the language within its own culture can also impact on student motivation. This is particularly true in the case of Haitian *Créole*, which is only now beginning to be recognized by Haitians as a legitimate language worthy of study in its own right. Finally, the attitude of parents toward the maintenance of the language can have a tremendous impact on the willingness of students to grow in their language capabilities.

Griego-Jones (1994) found that not only student attitudes toward language development were important, but also their understanding of what biliteracy was and what it could mean to them. It was found that, even in environments that are favorable to language development, if students did not understand the benefits of their dual language capabilities, they would not pursue opportunities to use their heritage language in situations where it was not required. Griego-Jones also

pointed out that "the role that attitude plays in determining human behavior makes it critical that teachers be aware of students' attitudes and use their awareness and knowledge of those attitudes in planning for instruction." Benjamin (1997) reported that bilingual students were most interested in connecting with their culture, and were generally less than enthusiastic about topics and themes that were perceived to have no bearing on their lives. In one case, bilingual Hispanic students in New Mexico generally did not participate in Spanish discussions, despite their proficiency in the language, because the topics revolved almost exclusively around Spain, rather than Mexico, which was their cultural heritage. A similar result was garnered from the author's son, who took a Hispanic literature course in high school, only to be disappointed that discussions in the class revolved around literary genre and style, rather than the issues and experiences being explored in the writings.

A study of Canadian heritage language learners (Feuerverger 1991) revealed equal ambivalence toward further development of their language. The study found that the mere existence of heritage language programs was insufficient motivation for promoting functional reading and writing skills in the language. The three principal contributing factors were: parental education levels, strength of ethnic identity, and perceived administrative support for the program.

#### *Parental Education Levels*

Parents who had not received formal education in their native language were more likely to want their children to abandon their heritage language in favor of English. These parents tended to have greater difficulty in learning English and were, therefore, more likely to impress upon their children the need to learn English at the expense of the heritage language. Without strong parental support, there was little motivation on the part of the children to seek additional skills in the home language.

#### *Ethnic Identity*

The degree to which students felt a part of their ethnic heritage was another strong motivating factor in student success in heritage language programs. Those students who felt a strong connection with their ethnic heritage, either within the local community or in their ethnic homeland, were much more motivated to enroll and do well in heritage language programs than those who felt less connection. It was important, however, that the values of the heritage culture not conflict with their sense of being "Canadian."



### *Administrative Support*

Students felt that there was not very much institutional support for heritage language programs. This was evidenced by a lack of materials and lack of preparation on the part of their teachers, as well as a lack of coherence and direction in the curriculum. They felt that greater organization, development of appropriate materials, and high quality teachers were needed. Despite this perceived lack of support, however, students generally found the existence of heritage language programs a positive experience:

"Learning your ethnic language at school makes you feel like a whole person. You don't have to feel ashamed of your culture; on the contrary, you can feel that you are as good as anyone else. And it hasn't hurt my English or any other subject." [Feuerverger 1991, p.674]

### **Pedagogical Considerations**

This section will focus on three areas of pedagogical considerations: program goals, teaching strategies and materials, and the application of the Standards for Foreign Language Learning to heritage language students.

#### *Program Goals*

There is general consensus that, wherever possible, heritage language learners should be placed in programs that are separate from the traditional foreign language student, at least at the lower levels. The goals of these programs, however, are not as clear, other than the broad goal of improving upon the skills that the students bring to the classroom. As Valdés (1980) points out, "The principal problem teaching the target language to bilingual speakers lies in developing a type of instruction that is, in essence, self-contained, that does not necessarily serve as a feeder course into more advanced courses." Consequently, program goals can be as varied as the students who take them.

Where these programs have existed in the past, they have tended to focus on literacy and the written language. Villa warns that it may be unrealistic to expect mastery of "formal" written language in the relatively short duration of most heritage language classes. Rather, students should strive toward an "'acceptable' prose, one relatively free from 'interference' of the spoken standard" (1996, p.197-198). As discussed in the previous section, many students are motivated to pursue study of their heritage language as a means of connecting with their cultural heritage (Feuerverger 1991; Griego-Jones 1994; Benjamin 1997; Scalera 1997). The teaching of language through culture has been a focus of traditional foreign

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language classrooms in recent years, and it appears to hold a great deal of promise for the heritage language classroom as well. Finally, many programs focus on the expansion of the linguistic registers available to heritage language learners by focusing on more "formal" language. As was also pointed out previously, programs must be careful not to denigrate the language variety spoken by the student as part of this process.

### *Teaching Strategies and Materials*

If we use the factors that affect student motivation as a starting point, the implications for teaching strategies and materials is clear. Instruction for heritage language learners must be connected to the student. It must start where the student is and move forward, and it must be relevant. Teachers must strive to make students feel safe to experiment with their developing language skills without fear.

The skills that students bring with them to the heritage language classroom should be incorporated into instruction wherever possible. Villa (1996) advocates using the language varieties of students as a starting point for building additional skills. Successful teachers often point out the benefit of using the linguistic diversity of the heritage classroom as a learning tool for both teachers and students.

Rodriguez Pino (1997) argues for the use of community resources in the classroom in order to connect students with their communities. Newspapers, television, and other resources from the heritage language communities can make excellent classroom materials. The use of oral history projects, the use of the literature of immigrant groups, and thematic approaches to instruction are all valuable ways of bringing the culture of their heritage alive for these students.

Collaborative and cooperative learning activities are strongly endorsed for use in heritage language classrooms (Durán 1994; Rodriguez Pino 1997). This is especially true given the heterogeneous nature of most such classrooms.

There is very little mention in the literature of situations where there are both heritage and traditional foreign language students in the same classroom. Yet, this is the case for most teachers of heritage language learners. Mazzocco (1996) reports on a self-instructional language program that serves the needs of both heritage and foreign language learners. She notes that they were able to use the same content for both groups of students. She had students work with two sets of tasks. The heritage students generally did more advanced tasks related to the course content than those assigned to the foreign language student. For example, non-heritage students of Hindi learned standard grammatical structures and vocabulary and met in weekly conversation groups to practice what they had

studied. The heritage learners did the same thing, but in their weekly groups, they were also able to discuss the variations found between the standard language they were learning and the variety of the language with which they had grown up. Similarly, videotapes of the target country's news broadcasts can be used by both groups. It was apparent that the foreign language students will need some time to decipher one or two topics, while the heritage learner will be able to gain much more substantive information and undertake more difficult assignments related to the tape.

### *Standards and the Heritage Language Learner*

The national foreign language standards released in 1995 were designed to be applicable to all foreign language learners, including those for whom the foreign language was, in fact, a heritage language. The framework for communicative competence defined within the standards provides a means of recognizing the skills that heritage language learners bring to their studies (generally interpersonal communication skills) and a mechanism for focusing on the skills that need further work (general presentational skills). Furthermore, the inclusion of the Culture, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities standards offers teachers options for expanding the curriculum of heritage languages beyond language itself to language use in real world contexts. However, there were no specific guidelines as to how the standards might be used in the design of a heritage language program.

In 1999, the foreign language standards were reissued, this time with separate sections for each of nine language classifications: Chinese, Classics, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian, and Spanish. In the standards for several of these languages, the issue of heritage language learners is addressed. The Chinese standards include sample progress indicators targeting the heritage learner, such as this one for Standard 2.1:

Students discuss and analyze patterns of behavior as observed in segments of movies, videos, news broadcasts, and articles of newspapers or magazines of Chinese culture. [Standards 1999:130]

The Russian standards (National Standards 1999, p.416-418) devotes three pages to a discussion of meeting the needs of heritage learners in the foreign language classroom. The essay raises many of the same issues discussed here. It further points out that, while the needs of heritage and foreign language learners may vary in terms of vocabulary and grammar, they very often come together



again with the introduction of cultural topics. The differing needs of each group can also be used as a learning tool in addressing the standards of the fourth goal area: Comparisons.

*Standards for Learning Spanish* offers a learning scenario for heritage language programs. In this scenario (National Standards 1999, p.469-470), students watched a video interview with Rigoberto Manchú and, following a series of class discussions and an internet research project, they prepared responses to the interview. These included the video's key points and their students' reactions to it, as well as the new knowledge they had gleaned from it.

As with the standards and traditional foreign language programs, only implementation efforts will determine the degree to which the standards will be relevant to heritage language learners.

### Implications for Teacher Preparation

What does the research tell us, then, about the preparation of the teacher of the heritage language learner, given the discussions above? Zentella (1986) prescribes a variety of coursework and other experiences that prospective teachers of heritage language learners should undertake, including:

- Be cognizant of the different varieties of the language they are teaching.
- Participate in the activities of nearby language minority communities.
- Expand or refresh knowledge of that culture (or cultures) of the language(s) they are teaching.

She further notes that:

- Courses in foreign language methodology must include training on teaching language to native speakers, with emphasis on pedagogical issues involved in language maintenance.
- Faculty members involved in this training should experience the classroom situations their students will be facing.

Teacher attitudes have proven to be a clear determinant of success in the foreign language classroom. However, Colville-Hall, MacDonald, and Smolen (1995) acknowledge that "[l]ittle research has been conducted on how to change teachers' attitudes and behavior towards minority groups," an area that could directly impact student success in heritage language programs. They recommend providing prospective teachers with direct contact with minority groups and presentation of information through a variety of instructional formats, including films, community involvement, guest speakers, and visitations. Clair and Adger (1999) further note that:

Teachers need to understand basic constructs of bilingualism and second language development, the nature of language proficiency, the role of the first language and culture in learning, and the demands that mainstream education places on culturally diverse students. Teachers need to continually reassess what schooling means in the context of a pluralist society; the relationship between teachers and learners; and attitudes and beliefs about language, culture, and race.

Finally, teachers of heritage language learners should have access to strategies, including small group work and cooperative learning, that enable them to work more effectively with students of varying ability levels. They must be aware of the language resources in their communities and know how to access them for use in the classroom. They should have an understanding of the role of standards in guiding their programs, and they need to have a thorough understanding of who their students are and the ability to recognize the skills students bring with them to their classrooms.

### Assessment

Assessment of heritage language learners can be divided into two primary areas of concerns: proper placement into language programs and progress made as a result of instruction. The arena of placement appears to garner the most concern and controversy, perhaps because charting progress in language acquisition is a more familiar topic to most language educators. Both areas, however, have a paucity of research that should be of major concern to those involved in this field.

#### *Assessment for Purposes of Placement*

The concerns regarding placement of heritage language learners appears to be centered around the need to be able to determine which students have enough language background to move beyond the traditional foreign language instructional sequence. Where specialized programs do not exist, this may mean moving students to more advanced foreign language classes. Where heritage programs do exist, the issue is more one of determining who is a "heritage" speaker and who is not.

Teschner (1983) describes an assessment tool used at the University of Texas in El Paso for separating heritage speakers from non-heritage speakers. Embedded in the instrument are "native speaker identifiers" that only a native speaker of the language would understand. When the responses to those test items were analyzed, it was determined that anyone who was able to identify eleven or more of the fourteen identifiers was a native speaker and was consequently placed in an instruction-

al sequence for native speakers. Those students who could identify no more than four of the identifiers were overwhelmingly Anglo with no or limited second language abilities. Using this tool, 75 percent of all students could be placed definitively in either the heritage or traditional language course sequence. The remaining 25 percent of the students, those in the middle, were generally allowed to place out of the first semester course of either sequence, with some students switching sequences in order to accommodate differing instructional needs.

Others (Peale 1991) call for identification of these students by what they are able to do with the language. He describes the baseline for entry into Spanish for Spanish Speakers courses in California as those who:

are able to use Spanish to satisfy nearly all of their social and physical needs. They can express their needs for care and comfort, persuade, suggest, describe and talk about past, present, and future events. They have learned to pronounce and recognize the sounds, to construct and interpret phrases, sentences and conversations, and they have acquired an extensive vocabulary. They may not as yet have learned to read or write in Spanish nor have they necessarily learned how to think and talk about matters that lie beyond their limited world experiences.

A second factor in determining the need for a heritage language program is the advanced nature of the students' linguistic skills. On most tests, they show that they have skills that surpass what is typically developed in four years of high school Spanish classes. The tools for determining this benchmark are not discussed. The state's "Draft Foreign Language Curriculum Framework, K-12" calls for the assessment of student interpersonal, presentational, and interpretive communicative abilities in both spoken and written modes, for proper placement in heritage language programs. While not specifying particular instruments to be used, the document does note that special measures may need to be developed, as some students' abilities are well beyond the scope of instruments designed for use with traditional foreign language students.

The use of the *ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines* and the Oral Proficiency Interview has been questioned as an assessment tool for this population (Valdés, 1989), because it was designed for use with non-native speakers. Heritage learners do not fit neatly into the hierarchy of language development identified in the Guidelines: "They bring with them functional competencies at a number of levels: and, in some domains, they surpass what is expected of superior students." It does not appear that such a tool would provide adequate information as to the type or focus of instruction that would be most beneficial to the heritage lan-



guage learner. Finally, there is also concern with the use of the "educated native speaker" as the norm, which has the potential to lead to the denigration of a rating based on the variety of the language spoken. This problem is all too common in the education of heritage language learners.

### **Assessing Progress in Heritage Language Classrooms**

Reflecting current trends in classroom assessment in general, advocates of heritage language programs call for approaches that help identify progress over time, such as the use of portfolios and dialogue journals (Roca 1992; Rodriguez Pino 1997). These types of assessments can be of particular benefit in the heritage language classroom because of the heterogeneous nature of the students enrolled in these programs. Because the portfolio enables the collection of samples throughout an instructional term, it is possible to look at progress from the starting point of each student and track where progress has been made and where additional work is needed. There is no single, ideal norm against which all students are measured regardless of their starting points. Whatever assessment instrument is used, it is important that the assessment measures reflect what goes on in the classroom.

In addition to assessing progress in language abilities, some researchers (Griego-Jones 1994) have suggested that monitoring student attitudes toward developing their linguistic skills should also be assessed because of the impact of those attitudes on language acquisition. In a study designed to assess progress in writing skills in a two-way bilingual classroom, Griego-Jones found that, even in an environment that was extremely supportive of second language development, students by and large preferred to use English if given a choice, even when their first language was not English. This argues for inclusion of specific instruction on the benefits of maintaining and improving heritage language skills, as well as assessing students' attitudes on an ongoing basis in order to offset any negative feelings that may exist.

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