Linking Service-Learning Opportunities and Domestic Immersion Experiences in US Latino Communities: A Case Study of the *En Nuestra Lengua* Project

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Accepted May 5, 2012 for publication in *Hispania*

**Abstract:**
We report on the service-learning component of a Spanish-language Saturday school in Ann Arbor, Michigan, for elementary-aged Spanish heritage learners and also examine the newly-forming Latino community served by this innovative program. The US Spanish-speaking population is growing throughout the country, resulting in greatly increased numbers of English language learners who enter the school system as heritage Spanish speakers. The current study provides compelling data that first language (L1) Spanish literacy support can be very beneficial for these students as they acquire English literacy. Such efforts also provide numerous experiential- and service-learning opportunities for native Spanish speakers, as well as for intermediate and advanced second language (L2) Spanish learners in this study. Both L1 and L2 service-learners benefit from the Spanish immersion environment of the Saturday program outlined. Moreover, our case-study findings show that heritage students in the program and their largely immigrant parents are forming part of a diverse community that values bilingualism, Spanish literacy, and academic achievement.

**Keywords:** Learner communities, immersion learning, heritage language learners, service-learning, community-based learning, Spanish

1. Introduction and background

Second language (L2) learning in higher education has long included an international study abroad component, and research suggests that these ‘real-world’ experiences benefit L2 students who have certain skills in place (Linck, Kroll, and Sunderman 2009), notably increasing their L2 linguistic and cultural competence over their counterparts who do not study abroad (Freed 1995; Freed, Segalowitz, and Dewey 2004; Tokowicz, and Kroll 2004; Sunderman, and Kroll 2009).

Given the United States’ growing Hispanic demographic, intensive domestic immersion programs within native Spanish-speaking communities now present an attractive alternative to traditional international study abroad for motivated L2 learners of Spanish in the United States. As Barreneche (2011) observes in this journal, these changing demographics present an opportunity for civic engagement through service-learning, with students rooted in the wider US community bringing their linguistic, educational, and cultural expertise to Hispanic communities with needs arising from the migration or immigration experience.

Student civic engagement and learning can take place through volunteerism to address community-defined needs. However, what typically distinguishes service-
learning from other forms of extra-curricular community involvement is the documentation and formal evaluation of learning in an academic context (Bringle and Hatcher, 1995). In recent decades, educators have regularly implemented service-learning programs as part of Spanish language curricula, particularly in regions or cities with a history of Hispanic communities such as California, Florida, and the US Southwest, as chronicled by Tilley-Lubbs, Raschio, López, and Jorge (2005); and edited volumes by Hellebrandt and Varona (1999), Hellebrandt, Arries, and Varona (2004) and Wurr and Hellebrandt (2007).

The emerging pattern of growth in the US Latino population offers new prospects for service-learning, due primarily to the different community needs arising from these recent changes. Sectors of the country such as the Midwest, Northeast and Southeast, where traditionally there has not been a significant Hispanic presence, are currently experiencing a rapid expansion, as documented by the 2010 US Census (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, and Albert 2011). Additionally, the majority of the growth now attested for the Latino population is a result of United States-born children of immigrants or migrants rather than from the continued arrival of immigrants themselves.

Because of these new dynamics in the Latino population as well as other factors, much remains to be done to develop effective instructional programs for Hispanic students who enter school with Spanish as their dominant language, and with little or no skill in speaking English. Statistical trends indicate that this group will continue to be the largest growing demographic in US schools for several decades to come (American Community Survey 2008, Pew Hispanic Center 2009). A question for current researchers and educators is how to institute sustainable yet high quality programs that prevent limited English proficiency students from being “predictably” at risk of low academic performance. An abundance of research indicates that accessing the child’s first language (L1) knowledge best facilitates literacy development in the second language, particularly where learners are dominant in the L1 and have adequate motivation (Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa 1976; Cummins 1978, 1981; Verhoeven 1994; Pardo and Tinajero 2000; August, Calderón, and Carlo 2000; Slavin and Calderón 2001; August and Shanahan 2006; Pollard-Durodola and Simmons 2009, among others).

The reality of the present educational climate, however, is such that schools may not be able to provide students with any instruction in L1 Spanish, whether through bilingual education specifically for native speakers of Spanish, or dual bilingual programs for both L1 and L2 Spanish speakers. Regardless of a local community’s policy or stance on immigration, the fact is that 70% of English language learner students are native-born US Latinos (Tomás Rivera Policy Institute 2010). Given that current demand for elementary school Spanish instruction for L1 speakers exceeds capacity, new solutions are called for in order to address this important need.

As an effort to develop a sustainable model for US communities experiencing new and explosive growth in the Hispanic population, the “En Nuestra Lengua (ENL) Literacy and Culture” project was initiated in May 2010. The initial run of the project was intended as a demonstration of the viability (i.e., proof-of-concept) of a Saturday-school Spanish language and literacy program for heritage language students of Spanish. We use the term “heritage language learner” to refer to a child who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or at least understands the language, and who is to some degree functionally bilingual in that language and in
English (Valdés 1997). Saturday/Sunday-school models promoting language education have been successful in other cultural contexts for Jewish, Japanese and Chinese students (Wang 1996; Chao 1997). This L1 language immersion format is rarely implemented for US Latino communities: we note that Carreira and Rodríguez (2011) find only two such academic programs in Los Angeles. ENL should therefore be viewed as a novel resource among the available interventions for Spanish-speaking children. Coupled with the Saturday schedule, the ENL program’s service learning component is especially innovative.

The linguistic and literacy results in the ENL program to-date not only supply evidence for the Saturday Spanish-school concept, they also strongly align with previous research findings of using L1 knowledge to ‘jumpstart’ L2 achievement. The ENL pilot project accommodated 40 HL students of Spanish in grades K-3, in 90-minute classes on Saturday mornings. The activities are based in a centrally located public elementary school in Ann Arbor, Michigan that many of the students attend during the week. Over the 7-week period, the number of total student participants for the pilot was approximately 50, as an additional class was provided for pre-K 3- and 4-year old siblings of the older school-age children. All students received textbooks and other reading materials in Spanish at no cost to the parents. The program has grown (though still at a small scale), with approximately 85 students in the 2011-2012 academic year, and 2½-hour Saturday class sessions throughout the school year.

Concurrent with the children’s language instruction, a parent information group is held to support Spanish-speaking caregivers in their interactions with the American public school system, and to provide a forum for other relevant topics. This strategy is in keeping with evidence from Gándara and Contreras (2010) suggesting that early intervention for Hispanic children needs to move beyond the classroom, involving the homes, helping parents to understand the demands of school, and providing guidance on how home practices can align with the goals of school. Parents also participate weekly in carrying out cultural presentations on Latin America and Spain, reading stories and singing to groups of children. *En Nuestra Lengua* is institutionally housed within the University of Michigan, a large public research university (2010 Basic Carnegie Classification of RU/VH) where the two project directors are members of the faculty. The project is also embedded within both the local elementary educational community and the growing local Latino community. These connections present a natural opportunity of combining scholarly investigation, student instruction and achievement, and support to the community through service-learning. The foci of the present report are (1) the service-learning aspects of the *En Nuestra Lengua* project and (2) the emergent community which the project serves. One of the strengths of the project is how the intersections between the university communities (faculty and students from nearby Eastern Michigan University, Michigan State University, and Wayne State University have been involved as well) and the local Latino community are leveraged to maximize learning and academic scholarship.

2. Service-learning in the *En Nuestra Lengua* Project

The ENL project is a collective effort, with numerous people coming together to contribute their valuable knowledge and time. One of ENL’s guiding principles is the use
of native or highly proficient (near-native) speakers of Spanish as the lead classroom instructors. Adherence to this principle has been critical for maintaining an appropriate classroom dynamic in which the young heritage language students, who are also native speakers, respect and view their teachers as ‘authorities’ and/or models of spoken and written Spanish. In order to maintain the authenticity of this classroom atmosphere, all less-than-fully competent Spanish speakers who wish to support the ENL project are very much welcomed, yet opportunities are provided specifically for them based on their L2 Spanish proficiency level. Since the ENL Saturday school implements a “Spanish Only” policy, every occasion to interact with native speakers is of high quality and provides L2 learners with that crucial ‘n + 1’ (Krashen and Terrell 1983), in terms of the Spanish immersion environment. Advanced L2 students participate as teachers’ aides, Spanish reading level evaluators of lower elementary heritage language students or research assistants. Intermediate L2 students also participate as English reading level evaluators, a vital function for the research objectives of the project.

Every semester since the ENL’s inception in May 2010, L2 Spanish students from the University of Michigan have participated in the project as service-learners under Bringle and Hatcher’s (1995) definition of service-learning as “a course-based educational, credit-bearing experience…[with] formal documentation and evaluation of academic learning (112).” Here are some salient examples. (a) One student collected reading level data as part of an independent study Spanish course supervised by the project directors. The final product was a paper in the target language based on interviews that the student conducted in the Saturday class of six and seven-year old students. (b) A graduate student visited the ENL program in fulfillment of course requirements for a bilingual education seminar taught by the project directors’ colleague. (c) Through the university’s Undergraduate Research Opportunity Program (UROP), which matches undergraduates with faculty research projects, students encode ENL evaluation and survey data for project documentation. Students in this program present their research findings at a yearly university-wide symposium.

Several more L2 Spanish learners have participated in ENL under a slightly broader conception of experiential-learning that is not necessarily course-based, however their duties include formal documentation and/or evaluation of learning in an academic context. Three students, as research assistants supervised by the project directors, assessed Spanish reading levels and collected classroom observational data of younger heritage language students. Additional students, including a graduate student in Linguistics, an undergraduate student in Education, and four undergraduate research assistants from a bilingual research laboratory (directed by a colleague in the Department of Psychology) performed English reading level assessments.

The ENL project seeks out and presents unique service-learning opportunities for native speakers to use Spanish in contexts in which they may not have had significant experience in speaking or writing. University and high school students, native and heritage Spanish speakers have participated in the following roles: lead classroom instructors (six graduate students), Spanish reading level evaluators (three graduate and two undergraduate students), and teacher’s aides (twelve high school and five undergraduate students). The university students come from a variety of relevant disciplines, including Cognitive Psychology, Education, Romance Linguistics, Anthropology and Speech-Language Pathology. While not all students’ participation has
been course-based, all of the classroom instructors and reading level evaluators produce teaching reflections and assessment data that document their learning, with some of that work resulting in scholarship with these students as co-authors. For instance, two of the instructors co-taught a science unit during the winter and spring 2011 as part of a course-project. They subsequently developed a scholarly manuscript from an extended investigation on the role of ethnic identity in motivation in academic achievement in science among elementary school-aged Latinos (Satterfield, Morales, and Benkí, in preparation). Another student, selected from the University of Arizona, participated in ENL through support from the Summer Research Opportunity Program and presented his findings at a regional symposium at Ohio State University in the summer of 2011 (Guzmán, Satterfield, and Benkí 2011).

This participation of young adult and adolescent L1 Spanish-speakers as service-learners is a key feature of the ENL project on several levels. In addition to their intrinsic contributions as instructors, language evaluators, and classroom aides, these L1 speakers themselves derive benefits from their ENL experience. First, as mentioned at the outset of this section, native or near-native speakers are essential for providing appropriate linguistic and cultural models for the ENL elementary school participants. Second, these service-learners are positive academic role models in general for the young students as well, having achieved academic success as bilinguals. Third, as service-learners who are supervised by--and at times collaborate with--the project directors, they provide a measure of authenticity of the ENL project as an organization with Hispanics represented in all of the key positions, therefore ensuring that the project remains consistently attentive to the needs of the Latino community, as determined by this particular community of Latinos. This type of authenticity is critical for obtaining and retaining the support of the parents and the community, as it demonstrates that ENL serves the community. Community members grow to have a voice in the functioning of ENL, consistent with Sigmon’s (1979) Principle 1 of service-learning, that “[t]hose being served control the service(s) provided (9).” Thus, the parents are more likely to be directly involved in various aspects of the program. This step cannot be overlooked. Through involvement in ENL, many parents learn to navigate the U.S. educational system, first by serving as role models in their children’s Saturday classes in Spanish and then by assuming a similar role in the child’s weekday English-language school. As the parents become more empowered, they ensure that the En Nuestra Lengua project continues to reflect and respond to the needs of this specific community, on their terms.

3. The emergent community of En Nuestra Lengua

As early as the initial 7-week spring 2010 pilot, the ENL research team observed that parents who had not known each other prior to the project were ‘connecting’ in substantive ways. Following an October 2011 discussion on parent-teacher conferences in U.S. schools, the parents requested (quite appropriately) parent-teacher conferences with the ENL teachers. Clearly, a community was forming around Latino elementary students and their Spanish literacy. As a point of departure for other potential heritage language learning programs, we describe that emergent community, using data from selected questions in a December 2010 survey (text in Appendix A), a September 2011
brief questionnaire (text in Appendix B), interviews with parents and one instructor, and class observations in March 2011.

A paper survey was circulated in June 2010, and a follow-up survey was circulated in December 2010 at the end of the ENL fall 2010 term. The purpose of both surveys was to gather interim feedback on how the ENL project was functioning, as well as to collect information on family background, language attitudes, and home language practice. Receiving input on the program’s strengths and weaknesses has allowed the ENL directors and instructors to make adjustments to the curriculum and to provide support for the various needs expressed by participating families. The December 2010 survey was four pages long with 35 questions, many of which were adapted from Luna’s (2009) survey of language and cultural attitudes of families of Mexican origin in Indianapolis. Out of respect for community needs and preferences, one parent from each family unit completed a single anonymous survey. In December 2010, thirty-one families were participating in the ENL Saturday school. Twenty-eight families completed and returned surveys. Where appropriate, responses were recoded on a numeric scale from 5 to 1 and the means are reported here, for example questions on frequency of behaviors (e.g., 5=Siempre/Todos los días, 4=Casi siempre/2-3 veces a la semana, 3=A veces/Una vez a la semana, 2=Casi nunca/Una vez al mes, 1=Nunca/Unas veces al año), or the importance of certain cultural constructs (e.g., 5=Muy importante/necesario, 4=Importante/Necesario, 3=Me da igual, 2=Poco importante/necesario, 1=Nada importante/necesario).

The students took part in language evaluations in September 2011. These assessments served to organize the classes for the fall Saturday sessions, and to assess the children’s proficiency in Spanish and English. While parents waited for their children to complete the evaluations, an anonymous questionnaire was circulated in order to gather additional family feedback and preferences. Specific questions were presented concerning expectations, discussion topics for parents, and class scheduling. Fifty percent of the thirty-six participating families returned completed questionnaires.

In our presentation of this diverse community of parents, children and ENL staff, the focus is on the parental attitudes and decisions, since the parents are the primary decision-makers regarding participation in ENL. We follow McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) working definition for “sense of community,” as a framework for understanding the structure of that community. Their frequently cited definition consists of four elements: (1) membership, consisting of boundaries, emotional safety, sense of belonging, personal investment, and a common symbol system; (2) influence, the feeling that the group is important for its members, who conform to group norms, while simultaneously influencing the group; (3) integration and fulfillment of needs, that membership and participation brings fulfillment of the needs of members; and (4) shared emotional connection composed of shared events, history, contact, and/or high-quality interactions among the members. This definition does not require community members to be in the same place geographically; however in this context, geographical proximity is one unifying factor of the community members and enables other aspects of community building.

Each of these four elements is in a constant state of interaction and co-construction; just as the members of the communities that they describe, the constructs
are not independent or static. In the following paragraphs, we elucidate, through the data, the structure of the ENL community through the regular Saturday classes.

3.1 Membership

The most readily apparent element of membership is the shared symbol system, or Spanish language, that plays a primary role in determining association with this community. Families from various socioeconomic, national, and educational backgrounds share the common interest of raising bilingual children. This is the primary reason for sending their children to the ENL Saturday school. All of the teachers are native Spanish speakers and all the children are acquiring Spanish as (one of, for some children) their first language(s). All of the adults speak Spanish, including the parents, volunteers, and other staff. The predominance of Spanish is evident in the Spanish website, the “Spanish-only” zone during Saturday meetings, and the near-exclusive reliance on native speakers as teachers in the program. Indeed, for survey question 16, ‘¿Habla español en casa?’, the mean response of 4.61 for the twenty-eight respondents in December 2010 is about halfway between “Siempre” and “Casi siempre.” The response to question 15, ‘¿Habla español en contextos sociales (fiestas, reuniones, en la calle, tiendas)?’, was only slightly less at 4.16.

A less visible element of membership is related to emotional safety. The concept of feeling safe in the ENL community surfaces during an interview with Gloria (pseudonym), an instructor of the Saturday kindergarten-level Spanish class. Early in the conversation, she claims that ENL is “a safe place to speak Spanish”. As the interview progresses, she expands on this idea of safety:

… I’ve heard a lot, since I started with ENL, the word safe. I don't know if there is discrimination, or something, but they use a lot the word. ENL says this is a safe place for you to speak Spanish. You can do it here, and it’s right. It’s good, it’s not bad.

The dichotomy between good and bad implies that there are times when Spanish speakers experience negative reactions to their language. In contrast with the home and ENL Saturday classes, respondents reported in question 14, ‘¿Habla español en la escuela de su hijo?,” that they spoke Spanish much less often in their child’s daily school, with the mean response of 2.65 about halfway between ‘Casi nunca’ and ‘A veces.’ When asked why they speak English with their children (question 23), the most frequent reason (64% of respondents) was ‘Porque hay otras personas presentes que no saben español.’ Thus, it seems likely that some parents do not feel comfortable speaking Spanish in their children’s school. It is also noteworthy that the second most frequent response (29%) was ‘Nunca habla inglés con ellos,’ where parents always use Spanish with their children in any context.

The September 2011 questionnaire provides additional information about how parents view the program as a safe place. Requests for ‘un taller para ayudar a los niños contra <<bullying>>’ and conversations about ‘<<bullies>> en el hogar y en la escuela’ indicate that families view ENL as a community center where struggles from other parts of life can be discussed and reconciled. The words of Hélot and De Mejia
(2008) provide some insight regarding the need for a safe place where Spanish interactions are perceived as good and valuable:

While bilingualism in internationally prestigious languages is generally considered worthy of investment of considerable sums of money, as it provides access to highly ‘visible’ socially accepted forms of bilingualism, leading to the possibility of employment in the global marketplace, bilingualism in minority languages leads, in many cases, to an ‘invisible’ form of bilingualism in which the native language is undervalued and associated with underdevelopment, poverty and backwardness (1).

3.2 Influence

A dialogic relationship exists between groups and their members. In other words, groups influence the people who belong while people constantly reshape the group’s identity. Conformity to group norms is displayed by members following ENL routines and obligations, beginning with a song at the beginning of each Saturday session. Everyone present, including students, teachers, aides, and parents gather at the stairs in the lobby of the school and sing ‘Buenos Días Amiguitos’ before classes begin. Within the classrooms, all ENL students are expected to speak only Spanish and to observe appropriate classroom behavior. Parents are expected to ensure that their children arrive on time with their class materials, to take a turn in providing the snack for their child(ren)’s class, and to take a turn in leading an activity during the snack time, such as reading a book or presenting on a cultural aspect of their home country or town. Additionally, during the week, parents are expected to ensure that their children complete their daily homework assignments. For their part, parents have consistently fulfilled their obligations in terms of providing a snack and volunteering for a parent-led activity, with some organizational guidance from the project’s Community Liaison.

During the class session, at times the youngsters themselves enforce conformity to the Spanish-only rule during the Saturday classes. In one particular instance, a girl student started tattling on a classmate, “¡Él estaba hablando en inglés!” This excerpt indicates the boy’s non-conformity and the girl’s desire to correct his behavior. Speaking Spanish during the lessons is both a requirement and a core value of the adults who choose to have their children participate in the program. This value is influencing certain students as represented by the girl’s corrective action toward her classmate.

In the other direction, parents feel empowered to suggest changes consistent with the Spanish literacy mission of ENL, whether through a formal anonymous survey or questionnaire, through a face-to-face conversation with the project directors, or through the project’s Community Liaison. In turn, the project staff must be responsive to the parental preferences in order to maintain a relationship of trust. An excellent example of parent-initiated influence within ENL occurred even before the first Saturday class. Originally, the project directors planned for the classes in the initial spring 2010 term to take place in the evening during the weekday. When the Community Liaison polled the initial group of families for their preferred weeknight or afternoon, they expressed a strong preference for Saturday mornings, and the project staff changed plans accordingly. This scheduling change turned out to be enormously successful, in enabling the Spanish
classes to take place within an actual school during morning hours, instead of in some non-academic community location at the end of a long work or school day.

The importance of a designated liaison, a paid administrative position in the ENL project, cannot be emphasized enough for successful communication between the project staff and the community. ENL’s liaison is herself an immigrant from Latin America, has two Spanish-speaking children in high school who volunteer as ENL classroom aides, and is well respected within the wider local Latino community with which she has many ties. The above-mentioned shift to Saturday mornings is just one of a number of changes that have occurred as a result of feedback relayed by the Community Liaison.

3.3 Integration and Fulfillment of Needs

The third element of sense of community is integration and fulfillment of needs. As the families of ENL have their needs fulfilled with respect to Spanish language development of their children—a shared value with the rest of the community—their membership within that community is reinforced, in Macmillan and Chavis’s (1986) terminology.

Regardless of their country of origin, duration of residence in the U.S., education level, and occupation, parents enroll their youngsters in the ENL program for similar reasons. In terms of shared values and needs, there is broad agreement among the parents’ responses to question 20 in the December 2010 survey, ‘¿Por qué habla español con ellos?’ Responses (a) ‘Porque desea mantener el español’ and (f) ‘Porque considera importante el bilingüismo,’ were both chosen by 89% of respondents, and nearly as many chose response (b) ‘Porque desea mantener la cultura de su país’ (79%), and response (d) ‘Con el objetivo de que se aprendan el español’ (68%). These responses indicate that Spanish competence, cultural competence, and bilingualism are valued by a broad consensus of the parents. Responses (c) ‘Para que se consideren latinos/hispanos/paisanos’ (50%), (g) ‘Porque desea que sus hijos puedan regresar a su país’ (28%), received less support. Only one participant selected response (e) ‘Porque no sabe inglés,’ indicating that, for the most part, parents are choosing to speak Spanish with their children, and are not doing so because of their own linguistic constraints. This general convergence of needs signals that families are coming together, across social strata, to gain support from an organization that fulfills their shared desire to develop bilingualism and biculturalism for their children. These common needs supersede social differences that might otherwise separate participating families in the larger geographic community.

Parents’ expectations for their children’s participation as measured by the September 2011 questionnaire are consistent with the December 2010 survey results. Respondents indicated that they expect their children to read and write in Spanish (100%), to spend time with other Latino/Hispanic children (100%), to learn about Latino culture and our countries (94%), and be bilingual (89%). Only half expected participation to support their children’s general academic development (50%). Other expectations that were written by parents on the questionnaire emphasized the high value placed on bicultural competence, such as the following:

Que conozca y aprenda a sentirse orgulloso de sus países
Que aprendan de la importancia del deporte y la comida típica de nuestra cultura
Que mantiene su identidad de los dos países

Parental involvement during Saturday lessons supports the need to develop bicultural competence. When parents are active in the classroom, they observe first-hand how their children are maintaining and developing their cultural and ethnic identity. In one class, a volunteer mother came to teach a short geography lesson with a globe. The children gathered around the globe and started looking for and naming countries in which their relatives reside.

T: ¿De dónde son sus abuelos?
S1: ¡Ecuador!
S2: ¡México!
S3: ¡España!

The excitement with which the students were responding provided evidence that the ENL program was meeting some of the expectations expressed by parents above. Because the parent volunteers come from several different Spanish-speaking countries, the students have ample opportunities to learn about various cultures and how they relate to life in the United States. It is possible that hearing about similarities and differences across cultures, particularly in relation to language variation and cultural awareness.

The daily homework assignments are essential for the young students’ regular practice of Spanish literacy skills during the week, and also provide an opportunity for parents to observe those skills developing in parallel with English literacy. In question 30 of the survey, parents report helping their children with ENL homework at an average frequency of 3.71 on the 5-point scale, slightly less often than ‘2-3 veces a la semana.’

In addition to observing their own children develop Spanish literacy, parents also witness gains made by the project as a whole through reports of average progress on reading level assessments. As described in section 2, the Illinois Snapshots of Early Literacy (Barr, Blachowicz, Buhle, Chaney, Ivy, and Suárez-Silva 2004; Barr, Sullivan, Buhle, Blachowicz, and Chaney 2004), a K-2 normed literacy assessment, is administered twice a year in both English and Spanish. Figures 1 and 2, which were circulated with the September 2011 questionnaire, illustrate the progress made by the kindergarten (Alacranes) and 1st grade (Jaguares) classes in Spanish and English, respectively, during the 2010-2011 academic year.
Figure 1. 2010 Fall and 2011 Spring Spanish ISEL composite scores with standard error bars. The published fall and spring median scores for the grades K and 1 Spanish ISEL assessment are shown for reference.
3.4 Shared Emotional Connection

According to McMillan and Chavis (1986), “the interactions of members in shared events and the specific attributes of the events may facilitate or inhibit the strength of the community (13).” This conclusion stems from the idea that the more time people spend together doing things that matter, the more likely they are to become close. While regular positive interactions foster a sense of community, a shared crisis that the members overcome and experience in a similar way can also generate a sense of community, under the shared valent hypothesis (McMillan and Chavis 1986: 14).

Meeting regularly, on Saturdays for three hours provides all members of the ENL community to develop that emotional connection in positive ways. The time is spent with people with similar backgrounds, sharing frustrations about the school system, exchanging suggestions for maintaining Spanish as the primary home language, and contributing to the ENL curriculum with snacks and presentation. Observations and written comments in the survey and questionnaire indicate that both heritage language students and parents have positive experiences on Saturdays. Towards the end of a lesson during a Saturday classroom observation, Gloria (the teacher) decided that the students needed to get out of their seats and move around, after they had sat quietly during a presentation. She announced that they were going to play “El Corazón de la
Piña” (the heart of the pineapple). As she made this announcement, the children jumped out of their seats with excitement. The expressions on the children’s faces represented joy, enthusiasm, and playful nature of this inclusive game. All of the children happily participated.

Selected comments from the parents in the survey (“¿Qué le gusta más de ENL?”) provide direct evidence for these shared positive experiences developing a sense of community through participation in ENL:

a. Que nuestros hijos aprendan y que nosotros formemos una comunidad Latina.

b. La comunidad tan profesional.

c. La comunidad, el reconocer que hay Heritage speaker con necesidades diferentes que otro niños.

d. La comunidad. Es tan unique que esta comunidad. Me gusta hablar con otros padres para enseñar español a mis hijos.

e. La formación de una comunidad Latina/hispanohablante

f. La oportunidad de aprender junta con otros niños que hablan español para mejorar y aprender el idioma. También para que no sea solo en casa que escucha el idioma.

g. Que los niños estén aprendiendo el idioma y siempre están animados, el entusiasmo de los profesores.

h. Antes de venir a ENL conocía muy poca gente de habla hispana; así que ha sido muy beneficioso para nuestra familia. Mil gracias por proveer esta gran oportunidad!

i. El poder tener un lugar de encuentro para nuestra comunidad que nuestro hijos se sienten identificando con nuestro idioma y cultura. Y de paso puedan aprender el español de una forma mas académica.

These comments suggest that the community is not merely a subset of the local Hispanic community; instead, a new community of families maintaining Spanish has emerged (comments a, c, e). Furthermore, the community includes members who previously may not have any social connection to other Latinos locally (comment h), or as Gloria observed, includes a mix of Hispanics from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds who would otherwise not interact as community members with a common purpose:

They are 5 years old, and their parents are so important to this program. It's a safe place to speak Spanish. That's what they say. And it's people from all kinds of people. You see children who's parents are super PhD. They read in front of the other children. This mixing of families is beautiful.

The presence of academics at various levels within the program, as made clear in Gloria’s comment, has been an important factor in the project’s success. Connecting to the local university communities has been a major means of recruiting instructors and other personnel, whether they are paid or service-learners. In addition to attracting students, faculty and volunteers for ENL, the proximity to an academic community has influenced the financial viability of the community program.
The funding of ENL is likely related to its relatively high diversity in educational and socioeconomic background for a Saturday-based academic program. To date, ENL has not charged any tuition or fees. This no-fee model is in contrast with the approach of the two weekend-based Spanish heritage language programs in the Los Angeles area that Carreira and Rodriguez (2011) were able to document, Grupo Educa and La Escuela Argentina de Los Angeles (LEALA). Both of these programs charge a significant tuition fee. While the ENL parental surveys have not investigated the extent to which a tuition fee would be a barrier to participation for some families, tuition fees comparable to those charged by the aforementioned programs would likely present a significant hardship for some families.

Instead of charging tuition, the program has relied on a mix of small university research grants, foundation grants, and private donations to fund its budget of modest instructor salaries, textbooks, supplies, and facility charges. Implementation of a sustainable ENL-style program in other communities, particularly those without access to university research grant funding, may require a tuition fee. Such a tuition fee could be implemented in various ways to minimize the impact on participation, and may even help to ensure fidelity in terms of attendance and homework completion. However, it is important to recognize the potential of such a fee affecting the diversity of participants.

Finally, it is worth observing that the experience of immigration, shared by many parents, likely contributes to sense of community, despite the negative aspects of that experience, such as learning English, work documentation issues, or distance from family. To the extent that the families are overcoming at least some of those difficulties, in part through ENL, strengthens their emotional bonds.

4. Conclusion

In the current study, we provide compelling data in support of Spanish programs for elementary-aged Spanish heritage language speakers in the U.S. We argue that such projects are critical for the maintenance of Spanish as L1 within rapidly growing domestic Hispanic communities.

These programs also provide a pipeline for students of L2 Spanish through service- and experiential-learning opportunities that are increasingly in demand by L2 students, L2 teachers, and needed in Latino communities. The immersion context of a Spanish heritage language program offers experiences that are complementary to those available in international study-abroad programs. It is true that study-abroad programs offer a greater variety of interactive contexts in Spanish for a greater proportion of each day. However, there are a number of unique aspects to the experience offered by time spent as a service-learner in a US Spanish heritage language program. First, the US context of heritage language programs (or other domestic immersion experience) provides cultural and linguistic experiences with Spanish speakers who are residents of the United States. Such experiences are important given that L2 students likely will use their Spanish in a domestic context. Furthermore, there is increasing international recognition of the United States as a principal country where Spanish is spoken (Lipski 2008). Those Americans who use Spanish abroad (Latino or not) will be expected to have some level of cultural and linguistic competence with US Spanish.
We highlight the *En Nuestra Lengua* Saturday-school approach as a viable service-learning and educational vehicle, where L1 Spanish students are brought together across different schools, diverse races, cultures and socio-economic backgrounds. Parents representing numerous Latin American Spanish-speaking countries as well as Spain unite for a common goal of supporting their children’s education. The project recruits Hispanic youth from local Ann Arbor High Schools to serve in the K-3 Saturday classrooms, as well as both L1 and L2 non-native Spanish-speaking young adults from the local university student communities who assist in all facets of the project. By following McMillan and Chavis’s (1986) descriptive framework for the structure of a community, we begin to analyze the varied relations and connections between the diverse ENL stakeholders in terms of membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and shared emotional connection. Based on this analysis we concisely illustrate how the multiple and often fluid intergenerational, interethnic, intercultural contacts are actually positive forces for building a new community. Future studies will be useful for monitoring the elements of the sense of community within the program and how the maintenance of these elements continue to serve this Spanish program’s participants, families, those affiliated with local universities, as well as the local community at large.

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

An initial draft of this paper was submitted by the first author in partial fulfillment of requirements for a graduate seminar taught by Dr. Elizabeth Moje in the School of Education at the University of Michigan. The authors are indebted to the rest of the ENL team, including the evaluators Catalina Arángó, María Arredondo, Lais Duarte, Georgia Ennis, Jacob McCloud, Fernando Pacheco, Candice Scott, Paola Veloso, Jacob Zunamon, the instructors Alejandro Balbín, Elizabeth Barrios, Alejandra Benítez, Maren Benn, Francisca Canales, José Miguel Friz, Myrna Gómez, Liliana Lara, Gina Matorano, Elena Ramos, Yvonne Sánchez, Maria Paz Schuster, Kristine Schutz, Wendy Tashian, Dolly Tittle, the community liaison Sandra Núñez, the undergraduate and area high school student assistants, and the staff at Bach School. Most of all, we are grateful for the participation and efforts of the students and families. This research was supported by the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation and the following units at the University of Michigan: Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program, the Office of the Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs, the School of Education, the Center for Educational Outreach, and the National Center for Institutional Diversity.

**NOTES**

1We use the terms Hispanic and Latina/o interchangeably, following usage in the United States by both members of the community as well as scholars of that community. It is worth observing that while both terms have similar meanings in English, the term latino in Spanish refers specifically to Latin Americans, and excludes Spaniards.

2We report on class formation, curricula, and results of the program elsewhere in Benkí and Satterfield (Under review), Satterfield and Benkí (In preparation), and Satterfield,
Sánchez, Morales, and Benki (In preparation). The ENL program’s website is <http://www.umich.edu/~tsatter/ENL/>.

WORKS CITED


**Appendix A**

December 2010 En Nuestra Lengua Survey

Encuesta de opiniones y actitudes
Fecha: 11 diciembre 2010

El objetivo de esta encuesta anónima es conocer su opinión sobre varios aspectos relacionados con el uso del español, sobre todo en el contexto del programa de alfabetismo y cultura para los niños hispanohablantes de nuestra comunidad. En el equipo de “En Nuestra Lengua” estamos muy interesados en conocer su experiencia. Sus respuestas son estrictamente confidenciales. Usted decide si desea completar o no esta encuesta anónima. Cualquier comentario o sugerencia que Ud. haga será tenida en cuenta para proponer acciones de mejora para la próxima etapa del programa.

**Parte I. Por favor provee la siguiente información biográfica.**


2. Sexo: M □ F □

3. Nacionalidad o país de origen: __________________________

4. Años en los EEUU: _________

5. Nacionalidad o país de origen de su pareja: _________________________

6. Número de hijos: ____________

7. Nivel de educación logrado en su país de origen:
8. Nivel de educación logrado en los EEUU:
Primaria ☐ Secundaria ☐ Preparatoria/ Colegio ☐ Universidad ☐ Graduado ☐

9. Nivel de educación de su pareja logrado en su país de origen:
Primaria ☐ Secundaria ☐ Preparatoria/ Colegio ☐ Universidad ☐ Graduado ☐

10. Nivel de educación de su pareja logrado en los EEUU:
Primaria ☐ Secundaria ☐ Preparatoria/ Colegio ☐ Universidad ☐ Graduado ☐

Parte II. Las siguientes preguntas se refieren a su uso de lengua. No hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas. Por favor, marque el cuadro que más claramente indica su respuesta.

9. ¿Cuán bien habla español?
Lengua nativa ☐ Muy bien, pero con acento no nativo ☐ Bien ☐ Poco bien ☐ Nada bien ☐

10. ¿Cuán bien habla inglés?
Lengua nativa ☐ Muy bien, pero con acento no nativo ☐ Bien ☐ Poco bien ☐ Nada bien ☐

11. ¿Hay otros idiomas importantes en su vida? No ☐ Sí ☐ Idiomas: ______________________

12. ¿Cuán bien los habla?
Lengua nativa ☐ Muy bien, pero con acento no nativo ☐ Bien ☐ Poco bien ☐ Nada bien ☐

13. ¿Habla español en el trabajo?
Siempre ☐ Casi siempre ☐ A veces ☐ Casi nunca ☐ Nunca ☐

14. ¿Habla español en la escuela de su hijo?
Siempre ☐ Casi siempre ☐ A veces ☐ Casi nunca ☐ Nunca ☐

15. ¿Habla español en contextos sociales (fiestas, reuniones, en la calle, tiendas)?
Siempre ☐ Casi siempre ☐ A veces ☐ Casi nunca ☐ Nunca ☐

16. ¿Habla español en la casa?
Siempre ☐ Casi siempre ☐ A veces ☐ Casi nunca ☐ Nunca ☐

17. ¿Hay adultos en su hogar que no hablan el español?
No ☐ Sí ☐ ¿Cuántos? ______________________

18. ¿Hay adultos en su hogar que no hablan el inglés?
No ☐ Sí ☐ ¿Cuántos? ______________________

Parte III. Las siguientes preguntas se refieren a su uso de lengua específicamente con sus hijos. No hay respuestas correctas o incorrectas. Por favor, marque el cuadro que más claramente indica su respuesta.
19. ¿Habla español con sus hijos?
   Siempre [ ]  Casi siempre [ ]  A veces [ ]  Casi nunca [ ]  Nunca [ ]

20. ¿Por qué habla español con ellos? Escoja todas las opciones que aplican.
   a. [ ] Porque desea mantener el español
   b. [ ] Porque desea mantener la cultura de su país
   c. [ ] Para que se consideren latino/hispanos/paisanos
   d. [ ] Con el objetivo de que se aprendan el español
   e. [ ] Porque no sabe inglés
   f. [ ] Porque considera importante el bilingüismo
   g. [ ] Porque desea que sus hijos puedan regresar a su país
   h. [ ] Otra: ____________________________________________

21. ¿Corrige errores gramaticales o de pronunciación en el español de sus hijos?
   Siempre [ ]  Casi siempre [ ]  A veces [ ]  Casi nunca [ ]  Nunca [ ]

22. ¿Como corrige estos errores? Escoja todas las opciones que aplican.
   a. [ ] Nunca corrige los errores
   b. [ ] Usando reglas de gramática
   c. [ ] Dando ejemplos de elementos impresos
   d. [ ] Repitiendo la frase con la forma correcta
   e. [ ] Explicando "porque así se hace"
   f. [ ] Otra: ____________________________________________

23. ¿Por qué habla inglés con sus hijos? Escoja todas las opciones que aplican.
   a. [ ] Nunca habla inglés con ellos
   b. [ ] Porque desea que aprendan inglés más rápido
   c. [ ] Para que se consideren estadounidenses
   d. [ ] Porque es un requisito/sugerencia de la escuela de sus hijos
   e. [ ] Porque ellos se quejan de no comprender el español
   f. [ ] Porque hay otras personas presentes que no saben español
   g. [ ] Otra: ____________________________________________

24. Cuando sus hijos hablan o responden en inglés, ¿les pide que hablen español?
   Siempre [ ]  Casi siempre [ ]  A veces [ ]  Casi nunca [ ]  Nunca [ ]

25. ¿Considera necesario mantener la cultura latina/hispana/paisana?
   Muy importante [ ]  Importante [ ]  Me da igual [ ]  Poco [ ]  Nada [ ]
   importante

26. ¿Considera necesario el mantenimiento de la lengua para mantener la cultura?
   Muy necesario [ ]  Necesario [ ]  Me da igual [ ]  Poco [ ]  Nada [ ]
   necesario

27. ¿Es importante que sus hijos sean completamente bilingües en español e inglés?
   Muy importante [ ]  Importante [ ]  Me da igual [ ]  Poco [ ]  Nada [ ]
   importante
28. ¿Piensa que es importante que sus hijos se consideren latinos/hispanos/paisanos?
Muy importante ❑ Importante ❑ Me da igual ❑ Poco ❑ Nada ❑
importante importante

29. ¿Con qué frecuencia ayuda usted a sus hijos con sus tareas de la escuela diaria (no del programa En Nuestra Lengua), por cualquiera razón?
Todos los días ❑ 2-3 veces a la semana ❑ Una vez a la semana ❑ Una vez al mes ❑ Unas veces al año ❑

30. ¿Con qué frecuencia ayuda usted a sus hijos con sus tareas del programa En Nuestra Lengua, por cualquiera razón?
Todos los días ❑ 2-3 veces a la semana ❑ Una vez a la semana ❑ Una vez al mes ❑ Unas veces al año ❑

31. ¿Por qué no puede ayudarles a sus hijos con la tarea tanto como quiera?
Escoja todas las opciones que aplican.
   a. ❑ No hace falta ayudarles más
   b. ❑ Porque está muy ocupado
   c. ❑ Porque ellos están muy ocupados
   d. ❑ Porque no pueda hablar o escribir bien el inglés
   e. ❑ Porque prefiere no hablar inglés con ellos
   f. ❑ Otra: __________________________________________

32. ¿Con qué frecuencia lee usted con sus hijos en español?
Todos los días ❑ 2-3 veces a la semana ❑ Una vez a la semana ❑ Una vez al mes ❑ Unas veces al año ❑

33. ¿Con qué frecuencia lee usted con sus hijos en inglés?
Todos los días ❑ 2-3 veces a la semana ❑ Una vez a la semana ❑ Una vez al mes ❑ Unas veces al año ❑

34. Si Ud. pudiera cambiar algo del programa de En Nuestra Lengua para mejorararlo ¿qué cambiaría?

35. ¿Qué le gusta más de En Nuestra Lengua?
Appendix B
September 2011 En Nuestra Lengua Questionnaire
EN NUESTRA LENGUA
Cuestionario
Fecha: 17 septiembre 2011

El objetivo de este cuestionario anónimo es conocer su opinión sobre varios aspectos del proyecto “En Nuestra Lengua”. Sus respuestas son estrictamente confidenciales. Usted decide si desea completar o no esta encuesta anónima. Cualquier comentario o sugerencia que Ud. haga será tenida en cuenta para proponer acciones de mejora para la próxima etapa del programa.

1. ¿Cuáles son sus expectativas para su hijo/a en el programa de ENL en este año? 
   Marque todas que aplican.
   ❑ Que lea y escriba en español
   ❑ Que sea bilingüe
   ❑ Que pasa tiempo con otros niños latinos/hispanos
   ❑ Que mejore sus destrezas en general de alfabetismo
   ❑ Que aprenda de la cultura latina y la de nuestro(s) país(es).
   ❑ Otra expectativa: _____________________________________________

   __________________________________________________________________

2. Etapa de primavera: Las etapas de otoño 2011 y primavera 2012 van por 9 semanas, 2.5 horas cada sábado. Planeamos una etapa de primavera 2012 (abreviada entre 4 y 6 semanas, y quizás con un día escolar más corto. Nota: el último día de escuela en las escuelas públicas de Ann Arbor es el 15 de junio. Indica su preferencia para las siguientes opciones
   Cinco semanas de 2.5 horas cada sábado, 5 de mayo hasta 9 de junio.
   Preferida ❑  Me da igual ❑  No preferida ❑
   Cinco semanas de 1.5 horas cada sábado, 5 de mayo hasta 9 de junio.
   Preferida ❑  Me da igual ❑  No preferida ❑
   Cuatro semanas de 2.5 horas cada sábado, 5 de mayo hasta 26 de mayo.
   Preferida ❑  Me da igual ❑  No preferida ❑
   Cuatro semanas de 1.5 horas cada sábado, 5 de mayo hasta 26 de mayo.
   Preferida ❑  Me da igual ❑  No preferida ❑

3. ¿Cuáles temas le interesan para las conversaciones entre los padres?

4. ¿Cuáles de las conversaciones del año pasado eran más útiles o interesantes?
   ◊ Cómo apoyar la lectura en español de su hijo/a
   ◊ Expectativas para padres en las escuelas de los EEUU
   ◊ Visitas de los abogados de inmigración

   Otras conversaciones: _____________________________________________

5. ¿Tiene sugerencias para oradores invitados?

6. Cualquier sugerencia o comentario para el equipo de ENL