

10-1-2004

Taking Spanish-Speaking Countries to the County Through School Enrichment Programs

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Recommended Citation

Scheer, S. D., Wulford, G., Robinson, D. W., & Conrad, J. (2004). Taking Spanish-Speaking Countries to the County Through School Enrichment Programs. *The Journal of Extension*, 42(5), Article 21. <https://tigerprints.clemson.edu/joe/vol42/iss5/21>

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October 2004 // Volume 42 // Number 5 // Ideas at Work // 5IAW2



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Taking Spanish-Speaking Countries to the County Through School Enrichment Programs

Abstract

Many youth today do not have an opportunity to explore the Spanish language and culture. This article shares and explains how a new 4-H school enrichment program can bring the Spanish culture and language to children in elementary schools. A curriculum activity example is given, along with the results of an evaluation conducted with the children who participated in the program. This program provides Extension systems the opportunity to bring foreign language and culture to youth who would otherwise not have an opportunity for this type of experience.

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Introduction

Research indicates that children who have studied a foreign language perform better on standardized tests and excel in basic skills of English, math, and social studies compared to other children who have not participated in such programs (Armstrong & Rodgers, 1997; Rafferty, 1986). Also, Spanish immersion for elementary-school children has English-language benefits (Cunningham & Graham, 2000). Many youth today do not have an opportunity to explore a foreign language and culture (Spanish) due to a lack of programming or funding. This article shares and explains how a new 4-H school enrichment program is bringing the Spanish culture and language to children in an elementary school.

Program Description

The program was designed as a Spanish language and culture experience for grades 1 through 4. A stipended volunteer provided support and implementation of the 4-H curriculum with the regular classroom teacher. The more background the volunteer has in Spanish language and culture, the more successful the program will be.

The benefits for incorporating Spanish language and culture activities with 4-H Youth Development were four fold:

1. 4-H is recognized for its school enrichment curriculum and has an established delivery system,
2. 4-H is the leader in informal education,
3. 4-H and Extension systems can provide volunteers and resources that schools cannot, and
4. 4-H has access to research-based information within the land-grant university system and develops educational materials from that information.

The Spanish language and cultural program complements existing 4-H programs for 5 to 8 year-olds, often called "4-H Cloverbuds," "4-H Cloverkids," or "4-H Prep," depending on the state. The program includes an integrated curriculum, classroom activities and lesson plans, audio/visual aids, and a resource list. The curriculum is flexible in utilization, whether in a formal classroom setting; after-school program; home schooling; business and industry where there are immigrant populations; day-care settings; 4-H clubs; and other community youth groups.

The objectives of the program were to:

1. Develop Stage One proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing as described in the 1996 Ohio Model Competency-Based Foreign Languages Program;
2. Develop support for a fully integrated, grade-level appropriate foreign language and cultural program;
3. Serve as a model program for other districts not offering foreign language and cultural education to elementary students.

Program Overview

The 58 activity pieces included in the curriculum are organized to help children progress from exchanging simple greetings to describing themselves and their families. Ideally, the program is designed for an elementary-level foreign language program that meets two - three times per week for about 30 minutes each gathering. Some of the activities focus on specific cultural aspects of Mexico, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Costa Rica. These may be used at appropriate times to coincide with holidays such as Cinco de Mayo or Carnaval.

The ultimate goal is to provide children from all areas of the state with a basis for understanding some of the cultures of the Spanish-speaking world and for communicating with people in Spanish-speaking communities.

Sample Curriculum Activity

Following is an example of one of the 58 curriculum activities. English translation is given in parentheses after Spanish notations.

Theme: Greetings, Introductions, and Good-byes.

Objectives:

1. Children will be able to greet the activity leaders and each other.
2. Children will ask and answer "¿Cómo te llamas?" (What is your name?) appropriately.
3. Children will say good-bye to the teacher and each other.

Talking About the Topic:

Tell children that all people have ways to meet and greet each other. Ask how they do so with friends, family, and their leader. Ask what happens if a new person shows up. Ask how they say good-bye. Tell children they will be learning how Spanish-speaking people meet, greet each other, and say good-bye.

Begin with This Activity:

Materials:

De Colores (Of Colors) book & CD

Greet children with "Buenos dias, niños" (Good morning children) or "Buenas tardes, niños" (Good afternoon children). Use gestures to call for imitation of "Buenos dias" (Good morning) or "Buenas tardes (Good afternoon), señor/señora/señorita"

(Mr./Mrs./Miss). Sing "Buenos dias" (Good morning) song from *De Colores (Of Colors)*. You will start each lesson with this song. Do not worry this first day about teaching it for mastery to students.

Follow with This Activity:

Materials:

- Name tag for leader (wear around your neck)
- Nametags for children (photocopy nametag sheet, cut down the middle, and have children fold so that nametags will sit in front of them)
- Marker for making nametags

Follow These Steps:

- Point to your name tag and say, "Me llamo _____. ¿Cómo te llamas?" (My name is _____. What is your name?) Call on specific children. Continue to repeat "Me llamo ____" (My name is _____) until you have a child who responds with his or her name. Reinforce with "Se llama ____" (His or her name is _____). Continue to ask them their names, using "Me llamo" (My name is) each time. Eventually the children will begin using the expression in addition to their names. If they do not, have them repeat the whole sentence, using hand gestures as needed. As each child gives their name, give a nametag and marker to write their names on it.
- When all children have a name tag, go back quickly through all the children asking, "¿Cómo te llamas?" (What is your name?). Encourage them to use the whole phrase "Me llamo ____" (My name is _____) by having the first few repeat it as necessary.
- Conclude with having each child ask each other "¿Cómo te llamas?" (What is your name?) and respond.

Close with This Activity:

Materials:

Diez Deditos (Ten Little Fingers) book and CD

Follow These Steps:

Ask the children what they learned today in English. Take up nametags for the next meeting and use them until you know their names.

Conclude with This Step:

Sing goodbye song, "Adios, amigos" (Goodbye, friends) in *Diez Deditos (Ten Little Fingers)* to them. Say "Adios, niños" (Goodbye, children) and using hand motions, have the children respond, "Adios, señor/señora/señorita" (Goodbye, Mr./Mrs./Miss).

Evaluating Performance:

- Greet each child and have them respond.
- Ask each child "¿Cómo te llamas?" (What is your name?) and have each respond.
- Say good-bye to each child and have each respond.

Program Delivery

The program has primarily been conducted in a rural Ohio elementary school with kindergarten, first, second, and third grade children. The program was offered to all children and had a total of 118 participants. A stipended volunteer visited each classroom three times a week for 30 minutes. The curriculum was designed to reinforce age-appropriate competencies being taught by regular classroom teachers to prepare students for the Ohio proficiency test.

Evaluations

To determine how the children responded to the program, an age-appropriate survey was conducted. The children were asked to put an "X" on a smiley face (YES), sad face (NO), or neutral face (SO SO) in response to three questions that were read aloud to them and repeated at least twice. Question 1 - Do you like your Spanish class. Question 2 - Is Spanish class fun? Question 3 - Do you want to learn more Spanish? The findings according to the total sample and by grade level are given in Table 1 (evaluation conducted by co-author, Debbie Wilburn Robinson).

Table 1.
Children's Perceptions of School Enrichment Spanish-Related Activities

	"Yes"	"No"	"So So"
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	f %	f %	f %
Do you like Spanish class?			
Total (n=118)	78 (66%)	23 (20%)	17 (14%)
Kindergarten (n=23)	11 (48%)	7 (30%)	5 (22%)
First Grade (n=16)	10 (62%)	3 (19%)	3 (19%)
First-Second Combined (n=27)	13 (48%)	11 (41%)	3 (11%)
Second Grade (n = 17)	16 (94%)	1 (6%)	0 (0%)
Third Grade (n = 35)	28 (80%)	1 (3%)	6 (17%)
Is Spanish Class Fun?			
Total (n = 118)	72 (61%)	27 (23%)	19 (16%)
Kindergarten (n = 23)	8 (35%)	9 (39%)	6 (26%)
First Grade (n = 16)	9 (56%)	3 (19%)	4 (25%)
First-Second Combined (n = 27)	12 (44%)	13 (48%)	2 (8%)
Second Grade (n = 17)	13 (76%)	1 (6%)	3 (18%)
Third Grade (n = 35)	30 (86%)	1 (3%)	4 (11%)
Do you want to learn more Spanish?			
Total (n = 118)	72 (61%)	26 (22%)	20 (17%)
Kindergarten (n = 23)	13 (56%)	7 (30%)	3 (14%)
First Grade (n = 16)	8 (50%)	4 (25%)	4 (25%)
First-Second Combined (n = 27)	13 (48%)	13 (48%)	1 (1%)
Second Grade (n = 17)	14 (82%)	1 (6%)	2 (12%)
Third Grade (n = 35)	24 (69%)	1 (3%)	10 (28%)
Note: f = frequency and % = percent			

The evaluation data revealed that overall the children perceived their experiences to be positive

for learning about and experiencing the Spanish language and Spanish-speaking cultures. According to grade level, children in higher grades (2nd and 3rd), for all three questions, responded more positively toward the program as compared to children in K, 1st, or 1st/2nd combined.

Implications and Conclusions

The findings support the implementation of this Spanish language and culture program. It provides Extension systems the opportunity to bring foreign language and culture to youth who would otherwise not have an opportunity for this type of experience. Additional benefits would involve service learning activities in which program participants may sing foreign language songs to elderly residents in nursing homes, collect food for food pantries, and display projects about the Spanish language and culture in their communities and schools. In conclusion, beginning language and culture study in the elementary years capitalizes on children's developmental readiness for language learning and allows for the extended time necessary for developing language proficiency and cultural understanding.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks are extended to Hilary Raymond and Carmen Chacon as the lead curriculum writers and for grant support of this program through OSU CARES (Community Access to Resources and Educational Services), a jointly funded effort of University Outreach & Engagement and Ohio State University Extension. In addition, support was received from the school parent-teacher organization.

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