We are pleased to publish the first in a series of quarterly newsletters dedicated to the issues of heritage language (HL) teaching. Each newsletter will include a discussion of a topic that informs the teaching of dedicated HL or mixed HL/non-HL classes. In addition, each issue will include a focus on a successful HL teaching program; this issue includes Alegria Ribadeneira’s article on a program at Colorado State University – Pueblo.

Maria Carreira, Co-Director, NHLRC (CSULB/UCLA), and Claire Chik, Assistant Director, NHLRC, are the newsletter’s creators and editors and have written the lead article in this first issue. In the future, the newsletter will include a blog that we hope you’ll contribute to. Our goal is to provide connections and create a community of HL teachers. Please think of contributing articles or short comments about the challenges you face and successes you’ve experienced.

Sincerely,
Olga Kagan
Director, NHLRC

IN THIS ISSUE:
Identity: The Driving Force behind Heritage Language Learning
Maria Carreira (UCLA & CSULB) and Claire Chik (UCLA)

Colorado State University - Pueblo: Building a Program to Serve all Students
Alegria Ribadeneira (Colorado State University - Pueblo)

ANNOUNCEMENT
2014 STARTALK/NHLRC Teacher Workshop 
June 23-27, 2014
This workshop is designed to address issues at the heart of heritage language teaching, including the differences between teaching L2 and HL learners, differentiated instruction, learner strategies, assessment, and more. Workshop participants will create and present a final group project for their language.

NEXT ISSUE:
Research on HL learners’ linguistic knowledge: Implications for teaching
What drives heritage language speakers to study their home language? A study based on a survey of college heritage language learners (HLLs) by the National Heritage Language Resource Center (NHLRC)’s Maria Carreira and Olga Kagan (2009) identifies three main reasons. In order of importance, these learners study their heritage language (HL) (1) to understand themselves through their cultural and linguistic heritage, (2) to communicate with family and friends in the U.S., and (3) to fulfill a language requirement.

The first two reasons bring to mind Nancy Hornberger and Shuhan Wang’s (2008) definition of HLLs as individuals who “have familial or ancestral ties to a particular language and who exert their agency in determining whether or not they are HLLs of that HL and HC [heritage culture]” (p. 27).

This definition reminds us of the centrality of affects issues – particularly those surrounding identity, belonging, and connections to the HL and HC – in HL learning. Indeed, according to Agnes He (2006), identity is “the centerpiece rather than the background of HL development” (p. 7).

A comment by a survey respondent from Carreira and Kagan’s (2009) study further elucidates this point:

*In high school I was one of very few Latinos. My friend and I were called the “Mexican kids”. This was always funny to me because my Dad’s family always told me I was American. In school I was labeled Mexican, but to the Mexicans, I am an American. I am part of each, but not fully accepted by either. In high school, I was considered Mexican because I spoke Spanish but I was considered “Pocho” by my Dad’s family because my Spanish was not up to their standard. It’s this weird duality in which you are stuck in the middle. Latinos are often told that they are not Americans but also that they are not connected to their heritage. You take pride in both cultures and learn to deal with the rejection. You may never be fully embraced by either side. That’s why you seek out other people like yourself. Socializing with people who share a common experience helps you deal with this experience (p. 51).*

This insightful comment offers a vision of the HL classroom as a place for developing essential skills that fulfill the promise of bilingualism and biculturalism, as well as meeting the accompanying challenges. Interactions with other HLLs emerge as a particularly important tool for dealing with this process (see Phinney et al, 2001; García-Bedolla, 2003), and the HL classroom provides a venue for such interactions.
Interactions with family and community members are also important, given HLLs’ second reason for studying their HL. Another comment from the survey speaks to this point:

*Knowledge of my heritage language has helped me outside of school in that I’ve been able to communicate and connect with my family and the greater Ethiopian community… Knowledge of my heritage language has also helped me at church in that I have been able to understand parts of and follow along in the sermons (which are partly held in Amharic). Perhaps the most important thing to note about knowing my heritage language is that it has allowed me to communicate with my family (especially because many older relatives, like my grandmothers, speak very little to no English at all).*

These and other comments also speak to the different dimensions of an individual’s identity. Block (2007) identifies seven such dimensions: (1) Ethnic identity, which includes shared history, beliefs, religious practices, etc.; (2) Racial identity, based on racial phenotypes; (3) National identity, which is associated with the nation-state; (4) Migrant identity, relating to ways of living in a new country; (5) Gender identity, which speaks to socially constructed notions of femininity and masculinity; (6) Social class identity, which includes income level, occupation, and education; and (7) Language identity, encompassing the relationship between communication and sense of self. As explained in the next section, these categories provide a useful framework for HL curriculum design.

**Implications for teaching**

Definitions of HLLs such as Hornberger and Wang’s (2008), which focus on affiliation and identity, contrast with so-called narrow definitions of HLLs, which hinge on linguistic knowledge. Speaking to the latter type of definition, Guadalupe Valdés (2001) notes:

> Foreign language educators use the term to refer to a language student 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 bilingual in that language and in English (p. 38).

Together, these definitions lay out two orientations for HL teaching, one involving issues of language, and the other issues of affect such as finding identity, belonging, and dealing with rejection. The discussion that follows looks at issues of affect alone. Language issues and issues at the intersection of both language and affect will be taken up in future newsletters.

Three strategies prove helpful for addressing issues of affect.

1. **Selecting engaging and meaningful materials**

Materials (readings, movies, songs, art, etc.) relating to issues of language and culture and those that discuss the immigrant experience of the HL group are ideally suited for HL learners. Prime examples of such materials include the movie “Bend it Like Beckham,” which explores the clash of British and Indian cultures...
surrounding gender roles, and the short story “My Name” by Chicana writer Sandra Cisneros (1984), where a young narrator discusses the difficulties of having a Spanish first name in an English-speaking school and compares herself to her grandmother, after whom she was named. This story and follow-up activities (for use in English language arts classes) are widely available online, including at http://questgarden.com/97/18/1/100308162905/process.htm, and can easily be adapted for HL teaching.

The magic of these materials resides in the fact that they lend themselves to addressing the issues in Hornberger and Wang’s definition, as well as those in the featured student comments and Block’s (2007) dimensions of identity. In keeping with this view, activities for a movie like “Bend it Like Beckham” may involve role-playing parents and children negotiating a compromise to the central problem of the story. Alternatively, students could interview their own parents and other adults as to their views on the matter and prepare a short report for the class.

With “My Name,” students can make a presentation or write a short piece about their own name, following Cisneros’ model. They can also survey family members and other HL speakers to understand the naming practices of the HL community in the US. Such practices can be compared to the traditional naming practices from the HL country.

Because “My Name” touches upon the grandmother’s marriage, it also lends itself to discussing beliefs and practices surrounding marriage and, more generally, gender identity in the US and in the HL country. With these kinds of discussions there is the danger that one culture will be idealized at the expense of the other. As such, it is important for teachers to challenge simplistic characterizations. A good activity is to ask students to examine their own views and expectations for marriage and male-female relations as a product of their biculturalism.

Other themes that lend themselves well to use with HL learners include:

- Notions of wellbeing, health, and disease
- Relationship to animals, particularly pets
- Relationship to nature
- Death and mourning
- Expressions of politeness, affection, and civility
- Practices of childhood, such as birthday parties, sleepovers, family get-togethers
- Respect and honor, as applied to both the individual and family unit
- Gift giving

(For examples of materials that could be exploited to discuss topics in this list, see “Activities Materials” on the NHLRC website http://web.international.ucla.edu/nhlrc/events/conference/2nd/workshop)
(2) Adapting existing materials

What about teachers who have a fixed curriculum and pre-selected materials and do not have the option of selecting their own materials? In this case, it is important to adapt existing materials to meet the needs of HL learners. Different materials call for different fixes.

(a) Materials written for native speakers: Some materials have appealing themes but lack an explicit connection to the affective issues that matter most to HL learners. This is a common problem with materials written for native speakers living in the country in which the HL is spoken (as opposed to HL speakers living in the US). The trick with such materials is to weave the missing issues into the follow-up activities.

An Armenian story with some similarities to “My Name” serves by way of example. The story features Nvart, a girl who doesn’t like her name but after considering its historical roots and learning that it was the name of her grandmother, she begins to like it. Follow-up activities in an HL class might include discussing the relationship between names and ethnic identity, debating the pros and cons of having an ethnic name in the US, asking students to rate their own name in terms of how well it reflects who they are, or asking them to complete a prompt like: If I could rename myself, I would choose the name (insert name) because…

(b) Materials written for foreign language learners: Readings on the geography, history, and demographics of the target culture – a staple of foreign language textbooks – present their own challenge. Though they relate directly to the target culture, they tend to be presented from an “outsiders’ perspective” and lack the kind of emotional hooks associated with the earlier examples of “Bend it Like Beckham” or “My Name.” The trick with these kinds of readings is to tap into HL learners’ cultural resources to enrich the presentation of the material and contribute to a deeper understanding of ethnic and national identity. Two complimentary prompts can form the basis for activities that further this objective. Students can complete these prompts themselves or ask family members and other adults from the HL community to complete them:

(i) One thing that few people in the US know about the (geography, history, traditions, people) of my heritage country is…,

(ii) One thing that few people in my heritage country know about the (geography, history, tradition, people) of the US is…

The answers gathered can be presented in a poster at a “mini-conference” on the country of origin or they can be posted in the classroom or in the school hallway for others to read. The insights gained through this process can also prompt insightful discussions about stereotypes.

(c) Miscellaneous materials: Some materials with little or no apparent connection
to HL learning actually have hidden HL themes. The trick with these materials is to learn to spot and bring out such themes. Using “Little Red Riding Hood” by way of example, the fact that the grandmother lives on her own, far away from her family, lends itself to discussing the treatment of elderly relatives and notions about family structures in the HL culture. Another hidden HL theme in this story concerns the supervision of children. Many cultures may frown upon children traveling on their own (especially across a forest) to visit a relative, while others cultures may consider it part of learning to become an independent and self-sufficient adult.

These differences can form the basis for activities that involve comparing the perspectives and practices of the HL country (or countries) to those of the US, thereby addressing migrant identity. Taking a humorous approach, students may write or represent the frustrations of a wolf from a heritage country where multigenerational living arrangements are the norm, because he can never get any time alone with the child or the grandmother. In the same vein, they can compare the picnic basket that a Little Red Riding Hood from the HL culture would take to her grandmother to the one taken by an American Little Red Riding Hood.

(3) Encourage learners to make their own personal connections

HL learners bring a range of experiences and perspectives to the language classroom. This means that for any given lesson, they will connect to the material in a variety of different ways. This poses obvious challenges for teachers, who may find it difficult to anticipate these different connections, let alone respond to all of them.

The text-to-self connection helps teachers meet this challenge by opening a window into the minds of learners: what they find interesting, puzzling, meaningful, etc. This information can inform teaching, class activities and discussions, syllabus design, materials selection, etc. For learners, the text-to-self connection is a tool for personalizing the material and for interacting with a text at a deeper level.

Three different examples of text-to-self connections are given below.

A. Copy a sentence from the text that caught your attention.
   Explain the personal relevance of this sentence to you.

B. Identify a theme from the text that you would like to study or discuss in greater depth.
   Explain why this is of interest to you.

C. Describe a reaction by the writer or a character that you find puzzling or intriguing.
   Explain why this is the case and describe how you would react in such a situation.
Taking learners as they are

When designing an HL curriculum it is important to keep in mind that ethnic identity evolves over time. Tse (1998) proposes a four-stage model of ethnic identity development in HL learners. Stage One is characterized by unawareness of ethnic identity. At Stage Two, there is ambivalence or evasion of the home culture. Stage Three, ethnic emergence, is characterized by identity exploration and, in some cases, shunning of the dominant culture. Finally, at Stage Four there is identity incorporation, which involves the embracing of a bi-cultural identity.

A curriculum that is fine-tuned to students’ stage of acculturation seems logical, although there is no research on this topic. Clearly, a curriculum for a high school classroom and one for a college course will be different, given that by the time students get to college many have moved beyond the stage of rejection and toward that of acceptance of the HL. There is also bound to be individual variation within any age group, since not all learners move through these stages in lockstep, as well as individual variation stemming from personality factors. The two Latino college students cited below serve by way of illustration. Enrolled in the same Spanish HL class and with very similar backgrounds, they offered very different answers to this question: How can schools better serve the needs of Spanish speakers?

Student 1: Schools should value the home culture more and bring into the classroom. But they don’t do that. And so immigrant children have to compartmentalize their lives to blend in among other students. They end up pushing aside their home life and language while in school. It’s difficult to feel confident and connect with the school when that happens… There is a gap between the home and the school, but there should be bridges.

Student 2: People ask me how I feel as a Latino about this or that issue. But why should it matter where I come from? Why do I have to be viewed through the lens of my ethnicity? I am an American. I was born here, raised here, and educated here. I love this country. I don’t know how other people feel about that, but I know how I feel and what I am.

In light of this, teachers need to put effort into understanding their students. Questionnaires which probe issues of identity and perceptions of the target and dominant cultures can help with this. The NHLRC’s website at http://web.international.ucla.edu/nhlrc/data/questionnaires offers three questionnaires that can be adapted for this purpose: Julio Torres’ questionnaire and both of Elke Stracke’s.

Conclusion

HL students arrive in language classrooms with affective issues that are often central to their sense of who they are and how they fit into the surrounding society. Issues that pertain to finding identity at the intersection of two cultures and languages, dealing with rejection from both of their worlds, and meshing these two worlds as they develop a sense of who they are, need to be central in guiding class materials and activities.
References & Further Reading:


In 2006 the Foreign Languages Program at CSU-Pueblo began a radical change in philosophy and curriculum. The transformation centered around two major influences: ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012), and the MLA report “Foreign Languages and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World” (MLA Ad Hoc Committee on Foreign Languages, 2007). Our goal was to become a proficiency-oriented program that would focus not on what students knew about the language but what they could actually do with the language. Our success was astounding. Our numbers swelled once word got around that our program was useful for anyone who wanted to apply second language skills to any field of interest. Students interested in Business, Social Work, Mass Communications, Law, Nursing, English, Psychology, Health, and other fields, signed up as minors, majors, and even double majors.

The spike in interest was most noticeable in our Spanish program where numbers doubled from one year to the next. Though many of the students signing up were second language learners, we began to have a large influx of heritage speakers. CSU-Pueblo is an Hispanic Serving Institution, which means that at least 25% of our university enrollment is comprised of Hispanics. Many of these students had stayed away in the past because they thought the people who studied Spanish were going to become Spanish teachers or literary scholars. They also thought they already knew Spanish so there was no need to study it. With our new approach we could tell them that in our program they would further develop the amazing gifts of language and culture their families had given them and, as educated bilingual speakers, would possess a valuable edge once they joined the workforce in their respective fields.

By 2009 it became obvious that our heritage speakers would need special attention. Not only had they become the majority of our majors, but they also had an array of unique affective and pedagogical needs we wanted to address. For starters they needed to be recognized and named as a group. No longer would they be “those kids who learned some Spanish at home but can’t read or write” or “those kids who have a Spanish last name but don’t speak the language.” After a few failed attempts at finding outside guidance we were blessed to learn about the NHLRC in 2010. The NHLRC’s STARTALK summer teacher workshop (National Heritage Language Resource Center, n.d.) and its online workshop (National Heritage Language Resource Center & STARTALK, n.d.) gave us definitions and a shared
vocabulary through which we could verbalize the problems that until then had no name.

The positive transformation we have experienced these last few years has not come without challenges. Getting everyone on board, training adjuncts and lecturers, retraining professors, breaking our old habits in the classroom, redesigning our curriculum, adding multidisciplinary content to our classes, creating new assessments, attending to our students’ affective needs, and taking into account the various motivations for language study of our diverse student population has been overwhelming at times. Like many institutions, we do not have the resources to offer separate tracks, so we have had to find strategies to maximize learning for second language learners, heritage language learners, and even native speakers who sign up in our program and share the same classroom.

As overwhelming as this may sound we have been able to build a strong foundation around three pillars: Our focus on proficiency guided by ACTFL standards; the incorporation of cultural inquiry and more subject areas into the curriculum as advised by the MLA report; and the pedagogical guidelines for HLL programs presented by the NHLRC. These three pillars have helped us create a program that truly serves our extremely diverse student population. The model we used for Spanish has now been applied successfully to all our other language programs. The positive results of our efforts are tangible. Our numbers are strong, student satisfaction is high, and our program assessments show that the majority of our students are graduating at the proficiency levels we have set as goals for minors and majors. More importantly, these same students are finding jobs in a variety of fields and using their language skills to become assets in the workplace.

Though our program is strong, there is always room for improvement. We now realize that good work is never done; instead, it is a process in which we must constantly participate. In this process we have to be ready and fearless when it comes to trying new approaches and discarding things that are not working. It is important to have continuous conversations with colleagues and to stay informed through research, workshops, and conferences.

Within our general program we have found these items to be central:

• Instructor training – All our lecturers and professors have participated in the ACTFL Oral Proficiency Interview Workshop. This has helped us understand proficiency levels and develop a common vocabulary. When we say “we need to help a student get to intermediate high,” everyone knows the type of functions the student should perform together with content, context, text type and accuracy goals. It also helps us have realistic expectations, avoid frustration, and celebrate our students’ achievements at their level.

• Placement – This is at the core of our program. If new students are not true beginners they undergo an oral proficiency interview for placement. HLLs who
have measurable proficiency enter our program at the second- or third-year level in a course specifically geared to develop literacy and formal speaking skills for HLLs. The course also includes L2s who are at a similar proficiency level. In these courses we explore themes that deal with cultural identity while teaching to students’ common necessities and differentiating for their unique needs.

• Credit for prior knowledge – This is a huge incentive for students who already have some proficiency when they enter our program. If students place in a higher-level course and pass that course with a C or more, they can file for credit by exam for the previous courses they were allowed to skip because the higher-level course counts as the exam.

• Content courses – We have second-, third- and fourth-year courses that offer multidisciplinary content and allow students the opportunity to improve their proficiency and literacy by learning about subjects such as business, high and low culture, sports, history, politics, gender, literature, linguistics, film, identity issues, etc.

At the course level, instructors are strongly encouraged to practice the following:

• Getting to know students – All instructors are encouraged to gather information about their students’ language background and goals. This helps instructors tailor the class according to their students’ pedagogical needs, home culture, and motivations for learning the language.

• Explicitly acknowledging the diverse abilities students bring into the classroom – All instructors are encouraged to recognize, acknowledge, and validate what each student brings to the classroom. This helps L2’s be at ease about HLL’s oral abilities, while HLL’s can be at ease about L2’s grammar knowledge.

• Letting students know the type of learner they are and what they need to focus on – Instructors are encouraged to address diverse language acquisition backgrounds, explain the different categories of learners, and help students figure out what they need to focus on in order to advance their individual proficiency.

• Acknowledging the validity and usefulness of all variations of the language – Instructors are encouraged not to be language purists, address the topic of language variation, and talk about appropriate contexts for expression. Creating pride is important. In our Spanish program we actually celebrate Spanglish day and our Spanglish speakers teach others how to code switch.

• Practicing careful error correction – Instructors are encouraged to take into consideration students’ affective needs and the degree of control that is expected of the activity or project.

• Developing practical syllabi – Syllabi present broad objectives, flexibility, and a variety of items for assessment that allow opportunities to show proficiency in different ways. All syllabi have an explanation of the range of proficiency levels.
students should strive to achieve while engaging in all class activities. They also allow for long timelines to complete projects so students who need more time can pace themselves.

• Being a guide on the side – Instructors are encouraged to not be the center of the class but instead direct students from activity to activity, and supervise and help with tasks and projects that give students opportunities to build proficiency by engaging in actual practice of the language.

• Grouping students sensibly – Most of the activities in class are done in pairs. Grouping is done according to criteria that fit the activity, be it ability, interest, learning style, or other thought-out reason.

• Practicing differentiation in class activities – For example, using the same text but giving pairs different tasks, giving pairs the same task but having different expectations, or asking each student to focus on different aspects.

• Offering a blend of task-based, project-based, content-based, and community-based instruction that takes into account student interests and knowledge - With these approaches individual students can concentrate on the gaps they must fill in order to complete the activity.

• Incorporating cultural inquiry – Instructors are asked to incorporate activities that encourage students to learn and participate in the target language cultures. The target language culture should not only be about what happens abroad but also in the U.S. within that language community. Students are pushed to constantly compare and contrast all manifestations of the target language culture and share their own culture.

As the process of building our program continues we have three goals to tackle in the immediate future. First, we would like to have our entire faculty complete the NHLRC online workshop. Second, we want to rework our first year courses to display more sensitivity to HLLs who have the linguistic needs of L2s but the identity issues of HLLs. Third, we would like to change our program name. Though we are currently called “Foreign Languages,” this is a name that ignores the fact that for a great number of our students the languages they are studying are not foreign. We want our name to reflect who we are. Suggestions?
References


National Heritage Language Resource Center. (n.d.). UCLA Workshops for Heritage Language Instructors. Available at [http://web.international.ucla.edu/nhlrc/category/profdev#2](http://web.international.ucla.edu/nhlrc/category/profdev#2)


Dr. Alegría Ribadeneira has received several awards for her teaching and service including the Student Choice Award for Outstanding Service and Transformative Leadership at CSU-Pueblo. She actively researches and presents on issues of instruction, assessment, and program development. Her current project focuses on a study of best teaching practices for courses that combine Heritage Language Learners and Second Language Learners.