

# The Academic Experiences of Native Spanish Speakers in the Traditional Spanish Classroom

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## *Abstract*

*This study examines the academic experiences of heritage Spanish-speakers who were placed in a traditional Spanish class for non-Spanish speakers at the secondary level. Each of the participants in the study demonstrated advanced-levels of oral proficiency in Spanish yet each was placed in a beginning-level Spanish class. An ethnographic case study method was used to explore the effect of this inappropriate placement on the students' linguistic abilities and academic identities. This study addresses an all-too-common practice that fails to advance heritage language students' knowledge of their native language. The needs of these students differ from those of non-native speakers, and the type of class that they take should reflect this.*

## **Introduction**

Between 1990 and 2006 the number of Hispanic students enrolled in American public schools nearly doubled. Of the 49.4 million students enrolled in K-12 public education in 2011, one-in-five is Hispanic (Fry & Gonzales, 2008). In 1990, that number was one-in-eight. The percentage of Hispanic students will continue to grow in the decades ahead. According to Fry and Gonzales (2008), the Hispanic school-age population will grow by 166% by the year 2050 while the non-Hispanic school-age population will grow by only 4%. If this trend continues, in fewer than 40 years, Hispanic children will constitute the majority of public school students.

At present, Hispanic students represent 20% of the public school population nationwide (Del Valle, 2008). Within the broad classification of Hispanic, the cultural background and linguistic abilities of students vary greatly. This study focuses on students who acquired Spanish as their first language and who live in homes where Spanish is the primary spoken language. Students who meet these requirements are often referred to by the terms residual speakers, bilingual speakers, home-background speakers, native Spanish speakers or heritage Spanish speakers. Because Spanish is the first language of this group, it is not uncommon for these students to demonstrate limited proficiency in English. The United States Department of Health and Human Services (2012) defines limited English-proficient children (LEP) as national origin-minority group children whose inability to speak and understand

the English language excludes them from effective participation in the educational program offered by a school district. Another term that is often associated with LEP students is heritage language speaker. Heritage language students are those who have been “raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speak or at least understand the language, and who are, to some degree, bilingual in that language and in English” (Valdés, 2001, p. 38).

While not all Hispanic students arrive at school with a limited English proficiency, those that do present a significant challenge for their teachers and for the school system. This is partially due to federal laws mandating that every school district take affirmative steps to accommodate these children and rectify their language deficiency. A handful of states such as California, Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas, where traditionally the percentage of Hispanic students approaches or exceeds 50%, offer a wide variety of special services to help children overcome language deficiencies including bilingual education, English to Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) programs, community-based English tutoring, and two-way immersion programs. Many of these programs are funded under Title III of the *No Child Left Behind Act* (Fry & Gonzales, 2008).

Increases in the population of Hispanic students in public schools in non-traditional states have also been significant. For example, from 1994-2004 the number of Hispanic students increased fourfold from 1.8% to 7.7% of Georgia’s public school population. Although this accelerated rate of growth has slowed somewhat in the last eight years, Hispanic children currently represent 12% of Georgia’s school population (Eads, Algarin, Afolabi, Stephens, & Nweke, n.d.). According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (2010) there are 88,755 LEP students enrolled in Georgia schools. This figure represents an increase of 43.8% since 2004. Although concentrated in the metro Atlanta area, school systems around the state have seen increases in their Hispanic student population. For example, in Murray County and Colquitt County, school districts, that have less than 10,000 students, almost 15% of the population is Hispanic. Two other medium-sized systems, Dalton City and Gainesville City report over 50% Hispanic student population (Eads et al., n.d.).

Despite the increases in population, the offering of appropriate services for LEP children has not kept pace with demand. Many factors such as inexperience, absence of an ESOL specialist, and lack of resources, have forced smaller school systems around the nation to look for alternatives in how they educate these students (Valencia, Menchaca, & Donato, 2002). One such strategy is placing heritage language learners in mainstream Spanish I and Spanish II classes. A rationale for placing Spanish-speaking LEP students in beginning-level Spanish classes can be that such classes will help raise the students’ grade point average and provide them with success experiences since many heritage Spanish language learners struggle with regular academic classes. This study considers how this practice in a small school system in Georgia affected the linguistic abilities and academic identities of four heritage Spanish language learners.

## Review of the Literature

During the last two decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of heritage learners of Spanish in traditional high school Spanish classes (Tal-

lon, 2009). Some of these students take Spanish class because it is a prerequisite for college admission. Others choose to study Spanish because they feel that the class will be an easy A for them and will help bring up their grade point average (Jessen, 2008). Some heritage learners do not choose to take a Spanish class, but rather are placed by a school counselor in the hopes that the class will supplement or replace ESOL services. Finally, heritage learners of Spanish are sometimes placed in beginning Spanish classes for the purpose of learning to speak a standard variety of Spanish as opposed to the regional dialect that they were taught at home (Valdés, 2001).

A survey conducted by the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese found that heritage learners in the classrooms were a major concern of the organization's members (Tesser, 2000, p. 14). One of the causes of this concern is that within the parameters of the *heritage learner* label there are many levels of native language fluency. Valdés (2001) noted that not only are there many different dialects and varieties of Spanish, but it is often the case that the standard Spanish is not the Spanish vernacular used in the heritage students' communities. Moreover, many Hispanic students who come from Spanish-speaking homes have been educated in the United States in English-only classrooms. As a result, "[students] may or may not be able to speak the heritage language, and their literacy skills in the language are usually limited" (Wang & Green, 2001, p. 173). Traditional Spanish language classrooms are not designed to meet the spectrum of the needs of the heritage learner, and the misplacement of these students often creates frustrations for both the student and the teacher.

For native speakers who do not come from a background where the standard dialect is used and who have never had any formal instruction in their native language, gaps between formal and informal registers of the language can soon appear. Reagan and Osborn (2002) state that "it is not uncommon for native speakers of Spanish, for instance, to have difficulties in basic Spanish foreign language classes, largely because of the differences between the normative language employed in the classroom and the language variety of the native speaker" (p. 9). In addition, heritage language learners may be able to communicate easily when speaking informally, but may have problems using a formal academic register. (Hanson-Rautiainen, 2007; Tallon, 2009; Whys, 2006). Lack of background knowledge in the native language (Spanish) can also affect students' academic performance in their second language (English). Hanson-Rautiainen (2007) observes that "many [heritage learners] quickly learn basic English, but they never acquire the fundamentals they will need to pursue education beyond high school. At the same time, they lack a strong background in Spanish language literacy. Because they have yet to master either language, everyday academic performance is an ongoing struggle" (p. 9). Whys (2006) echoes this idea by stating, "...many [heritage learners] reach a plateau at a certain point in their English studies because they do not have a firm foundation in grammar in their first language" (p. 4).

Another area of potential conflict between Spanish teachers and heritage learners in a foreign language classroom is that of expectations of the performance and role of heritage speakers in the classroom. In a study of teaching assistants who were instructing native speakers in Spanish classes at the college level, Potowski (2001) found that the teaching assistants exhibited behaviors that made heritage learners feel uncomfortable in the class. These behaviors included "holding unreasonable ex-

pectations for [heritage learner] knowledge of the Spanish language and expecting greater classroom participation” (Potowski, 2001, p. 4–5). Many Spanish teachers are unsure of what to do with native speakers in the classroom. For some, the solution is to have them serve as models or assistant teachers. The problem with this strategy, however, is that the expectation imposed on the heritage learner is often too high. In order to instruct others, heritage speakers must possess pedagogical knowledge of the structure of the language and have the skills necessary to explain it to others (Potowski, 2001). Not all heritage language learners possess these qualities and placing them into an authoritative position causes unnecessary stress on them. Being faced with these higher expectations may cause heritage language learners to withdraw or show only minimal participation in the Spanish class.

Based on the manifold issues raised here, the research questions that guide this study are:

1. How do heritage Spanish language learners negotiate the Spanish and English speaking worlds in which they live?
2. How has the heritage Spanish language learners’ enrollment in traditional Spanish I or Spanish II classes impacted their language abilities?
3. What is the relationship between heritage Spanish language learners and their classmates in the traditional Spanish class?

## **Methods**

The researchers used critical ethnography and ethnographic case study method. Critical ethnography is a form of qualitative research which, like other forms of qualitative research, seeks to “contextualize issues in their particular socio-cultural-political milieu, and sometimes to transform or change social conditions” (Glesne, 2006, p. 4). The case study method provides a framework for gathering, sorting, and analyzing data. The strength of case study is that it focuses on specific situations to “define research topics broadly and not narrowly, cover contextual or complex multivariate conditions and not just isolated variables, and rely on multiple and not singular sources of evidence” (Yin, 2003, xi).

### *Setting*

The research was conducted at a magnet school located in rural, southeast Georgia. The research site was a small, K–12 school that has a curriculum focused on agriculture, math, and science. Students were chosen by a lottery system to attend the school. In the school, there was one classroom per grade for students in kindergarten through fifth. In the middle and the high school (grades 6–12), there were two classrooms per grade. The graduating senior class of 2008 consisted of 43 students (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). The school was the only one in the county system that was not a Title I school, and it consistently exceeded the state average on standardized test scores. The graduation rate was 100%. Enrollment for the 2007–2008 school year was 486 students (K–12) with the following ethnic composition: White (69%), Black (19%), Hispanic (5%), Asian (4%), Native American (2%), and Multiracial (1%) (Georgia Department of Education, 2009). Due to budget limitations, the school was closed in 2010.

### *Participants*

Our heritage language learners ages 15–17 who were enrolled in traditional Spanish I or Spanish II classes at the research site volunteered for this study. They are identified by the following pseudonyms Sara, Diana, Juan, and Rosa. Each student was of Hispanic descent and indicated that Spanish was the principal language spoken at home, and none of these students were being served in an ESOL program. In addition, each student was in grade 10 or 11 and all of the students qualified for free or reduced lunch. The students in this study did not have the choice of “opting out” of the Spanish class. Due to the small size of the school, there was no other class in which students could be placed. Therefore all students at the research site, including research participants, were required to take Spanish as a *foreign* language. Qualitative data were gathered from student interviews, student reflective journals, and teacher/researcher reflective journals.

### *Researcher’s Role and Reflection Journal*

The lead researcher’s role in this project was that of a participant, observer, and activist. She taught the language classes in which the participants were enrolled and interacted with the participants every school day. As a result she was unable to adopt a completely detached, clinical attitude. In order to make explicit and monitor her feelings the researcher kept a daily journal documenting what transpired during Spanish I and II classes each day for a period of 10 weeks (roughly one grading period). Information recorded by the researcher also consisted of observations, feelings, details of lessons, and discipline issues that arose. The researcher’s observations were triangulated with the other data obtained from interviews and student journal entries.

### *Student Interviews*

Participants were interviewed at three points (beginning, middle, end) over a period of 10 weeks (roughly one grading period). Interviews were conducted individually and in groups before school, after school, or during homeroom. Interviews were recorded and transcribed by the first author. After transcription, participants had the opportunity to read back over their interviews in order to guarantee accuracy. Interview questions were open-ended, which left room for additional questioning, thus providing for a semi-structured interview format.

### *Participant Reflective Journals*

Students completed a daily journal entry for a period of 10 weeks. Each day, students summarized what they did in their Spanish class that day and recorded their feelings about what happened in the class. Students were also asked to include information about how they were feeling about education/school in general each day. Students were given time to do this at the end of their Spanish class. Journals were collected daily and kept in a locked storage cabinet.

### *Teacher/Researcher Reflective Journal*

The first author kept a daily journal documenting what transpired during the students’ Spanish I and II classes each day for the same 10 weeks. Information recorded by the teacher consisted of (1) the degree to which the heritage learner engaged in the day’s activities, (2) heritage learners’ perceived interest in class activities, (3) the

degree of success with which the heritage learner completed the day's tasks, (4) interaction between the heritage learner and traditional learners in the class, and (5) interaction between the heritage learner and teacher/researcher. The teacher/researcher evaluated each of these components using a scale of High, Medium, and Low. Student completion of homework and in-class assignments as well as grades on quizzes and tests provided additional information which was used to determine degrees of success on particular activities (component # 3).

## **Findings**

Many topics were discussed during the student interviews and written about in the student and teacher reflective journals. When sorting the data, the interview transcripts / journal entries were read and highlighted as themes emerged. Next, the researchers went through to find commonalities and coded those as well. As the data were analyzed, common themes begin to emerge. These findings fall under the umbrella of the three stated research topics: (1) how the participants negotiate the Spanish and English speaking worlds in which they live, (2) how the participants' enrollment in traditional Spanish I or Spanish II classes impacted their language abilities, and (3) the relationship between and participants and their classmates in the traditional Spanish class. The results are presented by topic.

### *Negotiation of Spanish and English Speaking Worlds*

Based on the information gathered in the interviews and student journals, all of the participants felt uncomfortably caught between their English and Spanish-speaking worlds. At home and in many public places such as church, there was pressure to speak Spanish with parents and older adults although all of the participants strongly preferred to speak English. The participants gave many examples of how they expressed this preference for English in their daily lives. For example, all of the participants reported using English exclusively with their siblings and peers. Several of the participants said that they usually answered a question that was posed in Spanish by first using English and only using Spanish as a last resort. Participants also mixed Spanish and English frequently, a process referred to as code switching. However, such language mixing was generally discouraged by the adults who interacted with these children. For example, Diana first attended school in Belize where she had studied Kriol, a Belizean English-based Creole language. Diana recalled that students were not allowed to speak Spanish at the school in Belize. If a student did speak Spanish, the teacher would hit his or her hand with a ruler. This practice caused one of her relatives, who only spoke Spanish at the time, to get in to a lot of trouble. As a result, he now refuses to speak Spanish at all even though he understands it.

All of the participants mentioned their lack of proficiency in Spanish as the major reason for defaulting to English in their daily discourse. For example, Sara stated, "See, it's hard now for me to speak Spanish, like straight, without thinking... like whenever I speak Spanish I don't like comprehend it until later, until like after, I have to think about what I said." Several of the study's participants also mentioned that they tended to avoid people who speak only Spanish. Again Sara summarized this feeling by stating, "And sometimes- that's why sometimes I just try to avoid them so I don't have to have any more conversation with them. Cause I don't want to look

dumb. Like “oh, she’s Mexican but she doesn’t speak Spanish right.” The generalized fear among the participants was that speaking Spanish poorly could earn them the label of *nopalote en la frente*, a slang expression that is sometimes used to describe a Mexican or Mexican-American who is living in the United States or who frequently visits the United States (Cardona, 2005). While this phrase is often used in a positive manner as a way of stating that someone has strong ties to their heritage, it can also be used in a more derogatory sense. The students in this study used this expression in a negative way to describe a person who is clearly Mexican but who directly or indirectly denies their heritage. All the participants in this study identified *nopalote en la frente* as an unfavorable term and expressed a desire to avoid acquiring this label.

In summary, these four students faced a linguistic dilemma. On the one hand, they felt that English was the language that they spoke the best and they preferred to use it over Spanish. Their Spanish proficiency, they believed, was somewhat lacking. For this reason, they avoided speaking Spanish to older, more linguistically proficient adults. However, avoiding Spanish altogether was also problematic because they feared the label of *nopalote en la frente*.

#### *Impact on Participants’ Linguistic Abilities when Enrolled in Traditional Spanish Classes*

Participants in this study were placed in a beginning-level Spanish class despite the fact that Spanish was the primary language spoken in their homes. All of these students were keenly aware of their deficiencies in Spanish, yet data from their journals and interviews reveal that the traditional Spanish classes in which they were enrolled were not meeting their needs. Many of the journal entries show that the students were bored by the material being presented in the classroom. Sara’s journal entries, for example, clearly indicate that she would rather be reading novels in English than participating in class activities. Rosa also expresses frustration at the slow pace of the class. She states that going over the tests and quizzes is unhelpful because she always makes As, so the review is hardly necessary.

Although the study participants expressed frustration at having to move slowly through the work, they did not express a desire to leave the class. Rosa, for example, found some benefit in the Spanish I class in which she was enrolled. When Rosa was a child, her mother spent some time teaching her the basics of Spanish such as the alphabet and how to read and write. These lessons with her mother were the only instruction that she had ever received until she entered her Spanish I class. Although Spanish was her first language, she recognized that she needed further education. This recognition was a common theme throughout her interviews and her journal entries. One journal entry reads, “...[the lesson] was all beneficial. Even if I already know how to speak Spanish, I’ve never really had the proper teachings.” One area in which Rosa felt she needed help was speaking Spanish formally. She described how she and her siblings tended to mix English and Spanish together when communicating. Part of the Spanglish mix was using English pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar rules when speaking Spanish. She states, “There’s these words that we just don’t pronounce right. It’s pretty funny. But my mom understands. My mom’s like, ‘if y’all go to Mexico they are not going to understand what y’all are saying.’”

Diana also recognized her need for instruction in the Spanish language, specifically in the area of vocabulary. She explains, “To me, I would like to learn Spanish,

but I want to learn harder stuff. You know- like stuff I don't know." When asked to give an example of a *hard* word, Diana explained that she would like to have words presented to her in her Spanish class that were at the level of the vocabulary words presented to her in her English class. Her reason for wanting to know these types of words is that she felt lost sometimes when she hears adults talking because she does not know all of the words that they are saying. She admitted that she often asked her parents and other adults to rephrase the sentence or give her another word for something. Although she eventually learned the meaning of the word that she did not understand, she did not like being put in the position of feeling confused. While Diana's journal entries frequently identified vocabulary exercises as being beneficial, they also showed Diana's frustration at having to move slowly through the work. Many of the vocabulary words taught in the traditional Spanish class were part of her vernacular.

Unlike other participants, Juan believed he was proficient in Spanish and did not need any additional instruction in the language. He explained his enrollment in the class by stating, "I mean, I didn't have a choice. They put me in here. You know, they say you got to have this class to graduate." Juan stated that he probably would have chosen to take the class anyway because it was an easy A, and it was like a free period for him. Juan thought most of the activities in the traditional Spanish classroom were easy. However, he found activities from a text especially designed for heritage language learners to be too difficult. He mentioned his dislike for this book which he referred to as *the book of torture*.

A review of student journals and interviews reveals several commonalities. Three of the four study participants feel that they need instruction in the Spanish language. These students also express a desire to have this instruction available to them. All of the students agree that the rigor of the work in their beginning-level Spanish classes is lacking in relation to their abilities.

#### *Relationship Between Participants and their Classmates*

The prior knowledge of Spanish that the study participants brought into the classroom set them apart from their peers. They recognized that they were different, and they also noted that their classmates thought of them as being different. It was not uncommon for study participants to be placed in a leadership position by their peers or by the teacher because of their background knowledge; they spoke at length about their role as a leader in the classroom. Each student reported that being seen as a leader by their peers made them feel good about themselves. Diana stated that "[The non-Spanish speaking students] put us on a pedestal." For Diana, the role of a leader was not one that she necessarily wanted. Yet, her classmates frequently asked her for help both inside and outside of the classroom, and so she often found herself in a leadership position. She mentioned several times throughout her interviews and journals that she disliked group and partner work, especially when she was paired up with anyone other than Sara. On multiple occasions, she revealed that she did not have the patience to work with other students because many of the other students were so far below her level that it annoyed her to have to work with them. All of the study participants mentioned in their interviews and journal logs that other students in the class wanted to partner up or work with the heritage language learn-

ers According to Sara, for example, “here in our class when someone needs to know something, they’ll automatically turn to either me or Diana.”

While Diana had a strong negative reaction to group work, the others did not seem to mind the attention so much. In fact, some actually considered being in a position to help their classmates a positive thing and something that they enjoyed doing. Rosa stated that being able to help others made her feel needed by her classmates, and she enjoyed being in a position to offer help to them. In fact, helping others in the classroom actually seemed to boost the self-esteem of the heritage language learners. When asked in the group interview to discuss things that occurred in the Spanish class that made them feel good about themselves as students, three of the study participants agreed that they felt good about themselves when they were able to help others in the class. All of the participants described how being seen as a leader by their classmates improved their image of themselves as students, thereby affecting their academic identity. Furthermore, three of the four students admitted that they enjoyed acting in the leadership role within the class.

Although the students generally recognized their position as a positive one, they all mentioned that there was one very large downside to being viewed as a leader. This downside occurred when they made an error in class. Even though each study participant maintained an A average in their Spanish class, they did not have perfect grades. As a matter of fact, only one of them had the highest grade in his or her Spanish class. While the students did not mind not having a 100 average, their classmates’ reactions to any grade of less than a 100 did bother them. All of the study participants recounted experiences of feeling dumb in the classroom whenever they missed a question or did not make a 100 on an assignment. This dumb feeling did not stem from the incident itself but rather from their classmates’ reaction to them missing a question. For the heritage language students, the downside of being seen as the expert is that their classmates often put too high of an expectation on them. The expectation was so high that any grade that was less than perfect could make these students feel inadequate. Sara recalled a time when she made an eighty-something on a quiz. The boy next to her had made higher, and bragged loudly to the class that he spoke Spanish better than the Mexican. Sara stated that this type of situation irritated her because she knew that her knowledge of Spanish was superior to the student who was bragging. Juan also stated in his interview that when he had a grade of less than a 100, he heard such things such as “You have a 94? How do you have a 94 in Spanish? You’re supposed to have a 100.” All of the students reported that they were pressured to have good grades by their peers and made to feel *dumb* if they made lower grades than their classmates. This experience motivated them in different ways. Two of the study participants, Diana and Rosa, stated that feeling dumb made them want to work harder on the material in class so that the situation would not happen again in the future.

## Discussion

This case study focused on the experiences of four heritage language learners enrolled in traditional Spanish classes in high school. It is clear that the linguistic and cultural background of heritage language Spanish speakers sets them apart from their non-Spanish speaking classmates. Because of this, instruction in the heritage language should be different for these students than for their non-Spanish speaking peers.

This study draws attention to the issues that heritage speakers of Spanish face in trying to negotiate their Spanish-speaking home and English-speaking school environments. Study participants recognized a need to improve their knowledge of their first language, Spanish. This need derived from a desire to communicate with proficient Spanish speakers and a fear of being labeled as someone who repudiated their Hispanic heritage. This finding is in accordance to research by Tallon (2006) who found that “not only do heritage students fear that the native speakers will catch all their errors, they also feel that they will be judged by them” (p. 152). In this study, students felt like they were being judged not only as an individual but also as a member of the larger Hispanic culture based on their language fluency. For this reason, study participants made a habit of avoiding the use of Spanish with more fluent speakers.

While the study participants reported being hesitant to speak Spanish outside of the school setting, within the Spanish classroom they spoke without reservation. This confidence to speak stemmed from the positive feedback that they received from their monolingual classmates. It is incumbent on Spanish teachers to provide further positive feedback that would encourage heritage language students to maintain rather than abandon their heritage language. Although a class for non-native speakers is an inappropriate placement for a heritage learner, a skillful and compassionate teacher can help such a student understand the value of being bilingual and the role one’s heritage plays in their identity. Within the classroom setting, the heritage language students can act as expert informants. Although the participants in this study did experience great popularity, especially when time to work in pairs, this popularity did little to improve their knowledge of the Spanish language.

Even though the need is there, the traditional Spanish class generally fails to provide adequate compensatory services for heritage language students despite the best intentions of the school. All of the students in this study declared a desire to improve their Spanish language skills. Despite their motivation, the students did not believe that they made any significant language improvements while enrolled in their traditional Spanish I or Spanish II classes. Wang and Green (2001) state that the strategies employed in traditional Spanish classes “ignore a host of linguistic characteristics, sociopsychological factors, and verbal strategies, such as codeswitching, that are typical of individuals who speak more than one language” (p. 171). Instead of adding to the skills that the heritage language students have, the traditional foreign language classroom takes away from potential educational opportunities.

As the population of Hispanics grows, the number of heritage language learners in schools will increase. There are no clear guidelines governing the heritage language education of Spanish speakers in Georgia. If current policy stands, education of these

students in their home language may go one of four ways: (1) these students may not be enrolled in a Spanish class at all. They may replace this class with another foreign language (such as French), or they may simply receive no foreign language credit. (2) Like participants in this study, future students may find themselves enrolled in a traditional Spanish class. (3) As per Georgia policy (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.) students may exempt Spanish class altogether yet receive credit for it on their transcripts. (4) Students may enroll in a Spanish class for heritage or native speakers. The last option is the one that would be most beneficial to students as it would provide them with an appropriate Spanish class that helps them improve their Spanish language skills. It is apparent that the students in this study needed classes designed to teach them Spanish as a heritage language, not as a foreign language. While classes such as these exist in major metro areas, they are rare in small, rural systems.

With the current reductions in spending on education, the dilemma of heritage language learners is not likely to be a top priority for lawmakers or school administrators. In the absence of special classes for heritage language learners, Spanish teachers will likely shoulder the burden of trying to integrate this steadily growing population into their classes for non-native speakers, a solution that was unsuccessful in this study and likely to be unsuccessful in the future. It is therefore imperative that we as educators advocate an equitable and culturally responsive education for heritage speakers of Spanish.

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