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Task-based elementary Spanish in rural Indiana: A practice-based collaboration

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Abstract

Spanish is the second most spoken language in the United States and the most taught additional language (L2) in elementary-level schools. However, the amount and type of access differs according to the resources available. Rural settings, which comprise a third of all schools in the US, often have fewer resources and support for the development and maintenance of exposure-track L2 programs, which meet once per week with the goal of, as the name suggests, providing exposure to the L2, rather than a focus on cumulative language development. Given that there are immediate and long-term benefits of even low levels of early bilingualism, ensuring

access to quality L2 education is a matter of equity. This paper centers on the first year of a longitudinal collaboration between an exposure-track Spanish language teacher in a rural elementary school, and the research team who created a task-based program tailored for the school following a needs analysis. We analyze the first year of the grant-funded program based on task effectiveness, student enjoyment, and teacher perspectives. We contextualize results within the rural community and offer initial longitudinal data on US exposure-track Spanish. We detail how we adjusted the program for the second year, are freely sharing the materials on the Task Bank (tblt.indiana.edu) and have transferred the program to the teacher's autonomy. Finally, we highlight that the success of this program was and is due to the collaborative nature of the partnership between the teacher, the researchers, and the administrators.

Keywords: TBLT; Spanish; practice-based collaborative research; rural communities; contextualized task-based evaluation

1. Introduction

Spanish is the second most used language in the United States (United States Census Bureau, 2021) and the most taught additional language (L2) in schools, including the elementary level (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011). Officially, Spanish is spoken by 13.2% of the US population as a home language (L1), but this does not account for those who speak Spanish as an additional language (L2; United States Census Bureau, 2021). In the most cited survey available of elementary and secondary schools across the United States completed in 2008, 88% of respondents reported offering Spanish instruction to students, which marks a nine percent increase from 1997 (Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011). Of those schools offering Spanish instruction, almost half of the programs (47%) offered are exposure-track programs, a five percent increase since 1997.

While many students in the US have access to exposure-track programs where Spanish is taught as a "special" class such as art or music once per week, the amount and type of access differ according to the resources available to the community. Given that benefits of even low levels of early bilingualism are both short- and long-term, ensuring quality access is a matter of equity. Students in rural settings in the United States are one example of a population often left out of robust access to L2 education. While approximately 9.3 million students attend rural schools in the United States (Showalter et al., 2019) and half of all US districts are considered rural (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014), access to high-quality L2 education is limited due to financial constraints and limited resources that are unevenly distributed across rural districts (Coady, 2019). Additionally, whereas in urban communities students may have access to varied language learning

opportunities and resources outside of the classroom, students in rural communities often rely on the L2 instruction they receive in the classroom (Cuong, 2021).

Educators teaching in L2 exposure programs are similarly left out of critical resources and ongoing support. Individual states are in charge of the policies for world language programming and, due to the national teacher shortage overall and the particular lack of world language/L2 instructors, teachers in exposure-track settings often have little to no training in the target language and little if any programmatic support. This lack of support is exacerbated in rural settings where the resource base is affected by federal policies on immigration, public health, and economics (Coady, 2020). In addition to more modest resources, rural settings often experience uneven distribution of resources across schools (Coady, 2019). Teachers in rural settings often do not have equal access to professional development compared to their urban counterparts, which can lead to under-preparedness for the linguistic diversity present in these rural settings. Additionally rural teachers, like so many in underserved communities, often play multifaceted roles, such as translators for non-English speaking families. For example, at the study site presented in this paper, the bilingual teacher in charge of exposure-track Spanish for all grades is frequently called upon to substitute in the dual language immersion program, and to translate in administrative and counseling when Spanish-speaking parents or children speak a language other than English.

Our project begins to address the need for providing support for robust language exposure¹ instruction in one rural community, at one elementary school. In this paper, we describe the project at large before concentrating on the inaugural year of collaboration between the exposure-track teacher and our research team. In breaking down the nature of our partnership, and the data that demonstrate its effectiveness and impact for all involved, we hope to provide one example of how creating and maintaining a robust, research-grounded exposure-track program is possible when individuals with complementary expertise work together and provide ongoing mutual support.

2. Literature review

2.1. Early exposure to additional languages

In the United States, researchers typically distinguish between three types of additional language exposure tracks available to elementary-level learners:

¹ We use the denotation FLEX when discussing the literature, to reflect the distinction made by the authors we are citing. However, we will use exposure or exposure-track to refer to the L2 Spanish program we created to reflect the reality that Spanish is not a “foreign” language within the United States.

“Foreign”² language experience (FLEX), “foreign” language in the elementary school (FLES), and dual language immersion (DLI) (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016; Pufahl & Rhodes, 2011; Rubio, 2018). These tracks differ according to the amount of target language exposure learners receive and whether or not there are proficiency and learning goals (Rubio, 2018). For example, DLI programs range from an equal split of time in each language to 90% of the school day spent in the target language, with the goals of being biliterate and bilingual with sociocultural competence and equal academic performance in English and the target language. FLES programs meet at least once per week for 60 minutes with the aim to build interpersonal skills and oral proficiency from kindergarten through 5th grade, and then add on basic reading and writing in 6th grade. Finally, in FLEX programs, students typically receive Spanish instruction once a week ranging from 30 to 60 minutes, and there are no stated proficiency goals. Instead, FLEX “goals” are to provide exposure to a “foreign” language, with the possibility of also providing some cultural information, and fostering curiosity for future language learning. In the US, Pufahl and Rhodes (2011) noted from their published survey that FLEX programs are the most commonly implemented programs in elementary schools; they found that 47% of early childhood language-focused programs were FLEX programs, 39% were FLES, and 14% were DLI or full immersion.³ Given the minimal instructional and interactional opportunities with the target language in FLEX programs, it is critical that the time be well-spent in ways that promote acquisition and the benefits of bilingualism.

2.2. Learning opportunities and the case for task-based language teaching

Two published studies have examined potential learning in exposure-track settings: Javorsky and Moser (2021), and Gurzynski-Weiss et al. (2021). The first explored the effect of a French FLEX program on Pre-K children’s engagement with the language and L2 learning, while the second was a cross-sectional study examining potential L2 Spanish gains from one semester to the next in an elementary setting. Javorsky and Moser (2021) found that while all students in the FLEX program were highly engaged learners and demonstrated French receptive

² The quotations are ours and are used to call attention to the subjective, inaccurate, and othering distinction.

³ In the 2017 K-12 National Foreign Language Enrollment survey report, these categories were reconceptualized to (dual) immersion (12%), hybrid (1.5%), online only, (3.5%) “standard” foreign language (which seems similar to FLES; 62%) and exploratory (formerly FLEX; 21%). However, only 38% of elementary schools ($N = 282$) responded to the survey and most researchers still cite Pufahl and Rhodes (2011), which had a nationally representative sample (evenly split between metro status and school type) of 2,688 elementary schools.

skills, only the most highly engaged were able to produce French independently of memorized classroom routines. Gurzynski-Weiss et al. (2021) found that not only did the Spanish L2 students increase their use of vocabulary and their understanding of the arbitrary nature of form-meaning relationships (as measured by Piaget's Sun-Moon problem; Piaget, 1929), older students who had been in the exposure-track for more time demonstrated cumulative learning (more years, more vocabulary and better understanding of the arbitrary nature of form-meaning mapping). Thus, both studies, while modest, provide initial evidence that cumulative learning is possible and indeed happening in exposure-track programs even within a single semester. Additionally, students who were in their second year of study (or beyond) demonstrated cumulative learning; in fact, for Gurzynski-Weiss et al. (2021), there was a direct relationship between years of study and L2 use.

While there is no extensive research on L2 learning in elementary-level exposure-track settings, we can hypothesize that the same factors that are important for L2 learning at later ages are also important for early L2 learning. For example, L2 researchers agree on the centrality of the role of L2 input, or the language to which learners are exposed. Simply put, exposure to the L2 is necessary before any processing, use, and production of the L2 is possible (Bybee, 2008; Corder, 1967; Ellis & Larsen-Freeman, 2009; Lantolf, 2020; Long, 1996). In addition to input, learners need the opportunity to interact in socially meaningful ways using the target language. They need to communicate with a more experienced communicative partner, have the opportunity to notice more advanced use of language, and have their partner express confirmation that what they say is being understood, or not. These exchanges, often referred to as negotiation for meaning, highlight the mutual attempt for understanding between the learner and their partner (often a teacher in an instructed setting), and the opportunity for the more advanced partner to offer feedback on the learner's production (Lantolf, 2020; Long, 1996, 2007). Within these interactional exchanges the learner is producing in the L2, and able to test out their hypotheses about how the L2 works. All these components – input, interaction, negotiation for meaning, feedback, and output within meaningful social exchanges – are subsumed within cognitive interactionist (Gass & Mackey, 2014) as well as sociocultural approaches (Lantolf, 2020) to L2 learning, and are considered in task-based language teaching (TBLT).

Both a pedagogical and research approach, TBLT is centered, as the name suggests, on the concept of *task*, or activities that individuals do every day in their real, outside-of-the-classroom lives. Most importantly, when it comes to L2 education, a task-based approach centers on non-linguistic communicative outcomes. In other words, the goal of a task is not to use a certain aspect of the L2, but to complete a real-world (or pedagogically adjusted version of a real-world) task, such as two people finding a time to meet for a coffee, based on the availability

windows within their schedules (versus simply “talking about their schedules using vocabulary related to time”). An example of a communicative goal for an input-directed or listening task would be students successfully putting pictures in the correct order based on their aural understanding of a story. Additional characteristics commonly cited from Ellis (2009) – and adopted in our study here – are: tasks have a primary focus on meaning (as compared to form); students have to rely on their own resources (rather than have all answers provided to them or reading a premade dialogue out loud); tasks have a connection to real-world language use,⁴ meaning that students, following practice with a given task, could be successful in similar communicative interactions outside of the classroom. The immediate real-life applicability of TBLT renders it a particularly well-positioned language teaching perspective for a community where there are immediate opportunities and need for use of the L2 outside of the classroom. However, TBLT is not a frequently used methodology in exposure-track settings (nor in other elementary L2 settings) and, as with all new methods, requires training and ongoing support (e.g., East, 2012; Erlam & Tolosa, 2022; Gurzynski-Weiss, 2022; Van den Branden, 2009).

TBLT uses *tasks* to direct learners’ attention to meaningful use of the L2 to complete a communicative outcome. Learners’ engagement in tasks is often scaffolded in a pre-task, during-task, post-task series (Ellis, 2018). Willis (1996) referred to this as the task cycle where there is a pre-task, during-task cycle of task, planning and report stages, and then a language focus, where students collectively analyze and undergo additional practice. In both of these important task-based models, learners are eased into a task in a preparation phase, where they are provided with new information or review prior learned items that they will need in order to complete the task on their own or in pairs; this phase may also include modeling what is expected, activating prior knowledge, etc. The during-task part, or the task cycle (à la Willis) is the part where learners actually do the task, when they complete the communicative outcome. For Willis, this includes the task completion, then a planning stage when they prepare to share the task with their teacher and classmates, followed by the sharing of the task, which could include a replication of their task performance, a sharing of a communicative outcome or product (such as a meme, advertisement, or completed application), or even describing their process and/or product. Both approaches end with the important post-task phase. In this final phase the teacher guides the learners through additional work, often language-focused, to examine how the learners successfully (or unsuccessfully) completed the task, how they could go about it

⁴ Note that real-world language use is specific to each learner population and context; a beginner-level real-world task for a preliterate kindergartner is remarkably different from that for an adult.

differently next time, or perhaps learners complete an extension or repeat of the task. Thus, not only is TBLT an ideal framework for a setting where there is the possibility of immediate application of the skills to outside of the classroom, it is also an ideal setting for the aforementioned components that facilitate L2 learning.

2.3. Access to early bilingualism as a matter of equity

Rural communities in the United States experience heightened unequal access to L2 exposure, including a lack of language-focused education as well as at times misconceptions and deficit views about culturally and linguistically diverse students (Bunch, 2014; Flores & Rosa, 2015; Lee et al., 2007, as cited in Marichal, 2021). Rural communities are often marginalized in additional ways, including lesser funding for education at large due to a lower property tax base⁵ (Azano & Stewart, 2015; Johnson & Zoellner, 2016), and increased difficulties attracting and maintaining educators. Additionally, recent immigration policies have led to high levels of anxiety and fear of deportation in undocumented families, especially those residing in rural areas, which has resulted in individuals choosing to avoid healthcare and educational services (Coady, 2020). However, there are also strengths in rural communities often not present in urban settings: rural schools are venues for community events, and teachers are often members of the local community and form caring and intimate relationships with families and students and thus are often intimately aware of the needs of the specific community (Coady, 2019). Given that there are both immediate (visible within the year) and long-term (1 year+) benefits of early bilingualism (defined broadly in this paper as early language exposure following Agirdag, 2014 and Espinosa, 2015), this differential opportunity is a matter of equity.

2.3.1. Immediate benefits of early bilingualism

Research on early bilingualism has highlighted that learning an additional language beginning in kindergarten (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016; Peal & Lambert, 1962) can have immediate cognitive benefits (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016; Espinosa, 2015; Peal & Lambert, 1962) as well as social and emotional benefits (Hélot & Young, 2006; Sanders & Downer, 2012). Peal and Lambert (1962) found that early bilinguals had higher scores on vocabulary as measured by verbal and nonverbal intelligence tests. Similarly, Hélot and Young (2006) found that early bilingualism in

⁵ In the United States, 92% of funding for the elementary level comes from state and local funding, including income tax, sales tax, and fees (United States Department of Education, 2021).

multilingual schools,⁶ beginning at age six until age nine, increased children's curiosity towards other languages as measured qualitatively through descriptive observations of class sessions.

2.3.2. Long-term benefits of early bilingualism

There are also notable long-term benefits of early bilingualism. Cognitive benefits include increased concentration and memory as compared to monolingual children (Kormi-Nouri et al., 2003), increased problem-solving and creativity (Stephens, 1997), and potential delay for the onset of memory loss from diseases such as Alzheimer's disease as compared to monolinguals (Gold, 2015). Those exposed to additional languages as a child also demonstrate higher levels of curiosity about others and other languages as compared to their monolingual counterparts who did not learn a L2 (Hélot & Young, 2006) as well as increased appreciation and understanding of diversity and acceptance of others who share different characteristics and traits (Sanders & Downer, 2012). Javorsky and Moser (2021), for example, examined a FLEX program for French during a 10-week study with 12 3-year-old children from different home language backgrounds at an English-only pre-school. Their study used parent surveys which included language inventory as well as a summative evaluation of the preschoolers' language learning for 10 weeks.

3. The current study

3.1. Contextualizing the community site

The community site of our collaboration has a substantial Latinx population: officially, more than 30% of the community is Latinx, with 15% having been born in El Salvador (75%), Guatemala (5%), or Cuba (2%). The community has a Latinx-dedicated community outreach coordinator, substantial community engagement activities such as a Latinx fall festival, and an in-progress Latinx cultural center. This abundant Latinx presence in a rural setting is not an anomaly in the US; indeed, more than half of Latinx students nationwide are in rural settings; nationwide 27.6% of students are Latinx and 15% of Latinx students attend school in rural settings (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). Nationwide, there are 66.4 million Latinx citizens, which is projected

⁶ Multilingual schools are operationalized by Hélot and Young (2006, p. 69) as "a place where linguistic and cultural diversity is acknowledged and valued . . . and a place where the plurilingual repertoire of bilingual/multilingual pupils is recognized and viewed as a resource to be shared and built upon, rather than as a problem."

to grow to 85.9 million in 2030, 108.2 million in 2040, and 132.8 million in 2050, when the US will surpass Mexico and become the most populous Spanish-speaking country in the world (United States Census Bureau, 2021). Unofficially, of course, these numbers and community impact are much larger.

At our school site, the DLI program in Spanish started in 2019 as a result of community-wide discussion and support and was funded by a Dual Language Pilot Program Grant from the Indiana Department of Education. At the time of the onset of the exposure-track program (AY 2021-2022), the DLI was present in grades kindergarten and first grade. The substantial Latinx population in our elementary school site reflects the growing population in the rural community. Approximately 45% of the elementary school population is Latinx (331 of 736), and more than 30% of students at all levels of the district are Latinx (670 of 1965), according to the answers provided by their parents upon registration.

The idea for an exposure-track setting started as a collaborative discussion that took place largely by happenstance. The faculty researcher on this project was invited to a DLI meeting by mistake and inquired as to the school's plans for an exposure track. After briefly sharing the short- and long-term benefits of bilingualism and offering to write a grant to create a program, the partnership between the school and the researcher was formed.

3.2. Organizing question for our collaboration

The remainder of this paper will focus on our collaboration, most specifically focusing on the teacher and research team partnership. The organizing question for this paper is: *How can a longitudinal researcher-teacher collaboration support a Spanish FLEX program in a rural elementary school in Indiana?*

3.3. Needs analysis

The first stage of this project was to conduct a needs analysis, or a survey of how the elementary-level learners currently and in the future can/will/could use Spanish from the perspectives of all relevant stakeholders (Serafini et al., 2015). The needs analysis was facilitated by a faculty member (Gurzynski-Weiss) from a large Midwestern public research university and two PhD students (Wray and Coulter-Kern) from the same university. Gurzynski-Weiss is a professor who taught task-based teaching courses at the local university, while Wray and Coulter-Kern are PhD students who had both taken courses in task-based language teaching and second language acquisition. The needs analysis was conducted over five phases using a

mixed-methods approach. It began with qualitative questionnaires and interviews, followed by the creation of the inaugural year of the task-based program, analysis of the inaugural year, and adjustments for the second-year iteration as needed.

3.3.1. Phase 1: Questionnaires

The first phase of the needs analysis took place during February and March of 2021. In total, 102 parents and teachers (several of whom were also parents) from the target elementary school completed an online survey with open-ended questionnaire items to identify potential target tasks (tasks that the students would ideally need to be able to complete in Spanish outside of the classroom), goals for the Spanish program, and specific needs of the school as well as the local community. Table 1 includes a list of the tasks that parents expressed wanting their children to be able to do as mentioned in the questionnaires.

Table 1 Specific tasks that parents would like their children to be able to do in Spanish

Task	Number of parents who responded for this item
Basic conversation	36
Introduce themselves	20
Make a friend	16
Basic Spanish (alphabet, words, etc.)	15
Ask for/give directions	13
Ask for/give help	12
Understand	5
Order food	1

In general, the most common response from parents on the questionnaire was their desire for their children to have basic conversation skills and be able to interact with Spanish speakers in their rural community.

3.3.2. Phase 2: Follow-up interviews

Phase 2 of the needs analysis took place during late March and early April of 2021, and consisted of follow-up interviews that took place individually between the researchers and two parents, two teachers, and administrators, all of whom took the survey and agreed to be contacted for additional comments. When asked specifically about the types of tasks that they wanted elementary children to be able to do in Spanish, parents, teachers, and administrators alike all mentioned wanting children to be able to help people in the community, and

that they would like the curriculum to include tasks that involve Spanish speakers in their community. For example, one participant from SWDC said:

I would like for [them] to be able to successfully carry on a conversation with someone, regardless of if the person speaks Spanish or English. There are several people in our community that speak only Spanish. I feel her learning Spanish would be beneficial. (SEP9)

Another participant mentioned:

I would like them to be able to have a simple conversation. If we go to the grocery store or the bank and they see someone in the community struggling with a language barrier, I would like them to be able to jump in and help. (SEP37)

A third participant said:

Que lo hablara perfectamente para poder ayudar a las personas que como yo no sabemos inglés [That they would be able to speak perfectly to be able to help people like me who do not know English]. (SSP7)

3.3.3. Phase 3: Curriculum design

Phase 3 of the needs analysis took place during May of 2021 and involved identifying target task types, or overarching tasks, from the needs analysis and focus group interviews. During this phase, nine target task types were identified: (1) making introductions, (2) sharing information, (3) describing yourself and others, (4) following and giving directions to perform an action, (5) following and giving directions to identify/describe a place, object, or person, (6) making decisions about wants and needs, (7) making plans with or for others, (8) appreciating and describing differences, (9) evaluating and appreciating self-growth. In order to better contextualize the tasks within the needs of the community, and to reflect the natural more egocentric nature of elementary children, each target task type was further broken down into a series of four target tasks involving a focus on “myself,” “my grown-ups,” “my community,” and “my world.”

3.3.4. Phase 4: Development of materials for instruction and task-based training for the teacher

Phase 4 of the needs analysis began in June 2021 and included the construction of a task-template following the Willis (1996) task cycle and a task-based program

designed for a high school (Gurzynski-Weiss, in revision), which included pre-task, task cycle, and post-task language analysis phases. Two versions of each task were designed: a beginner version for younger students with less language exposure and an experienced version for students with more language exposure (Spanish-speaking students and students who were enrolled in the DLI program). The experienced version of each task included an increased number of items, reasoning demands (Robinson, 2007), and a written component. All materials were created digitally and housed in a password protected GoogleDrive. For each task the researchers designed a teacher sheet, a student sheet, and a corresponding PowerPoint presentation. The teacher sheet included a description of each task with timing and all materials digitally linked for the teacher to access. The teacher sheet also highlighted the pre-lesson prep, materials needed to complete each task, communicative and non-linguistic goals for each student, and anticipated linguistic resources that students would be able to use, as well as non-linguistic benefits (such as increased empathy, global perspective, self-compassion, and appreciation of differences). Figure 1 includes an example of a teacher sheet.

**TASK SERIES 5: Locating/ identifying/ describing a place,
object, or person**
Target Task 5.4: ¡Adivina quién!
3-5

<p>Task 5.4: ¡Adivina quién!</p> <p><u>Before lesson prep:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • PowerPoint • Create your handout, with a person circled and the corresponding characteristics checked <p><u>Materials needed:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Copies of the handout • Pencil or marker <p><u>For students:</u> Communicative goal: First, identify the person that your teacher describes. Then, describe a person to a partner, answering questions and using physical descriptions; identify/guess who your partner is describing by asking questions about physical descriptions</p> <p><u>For the teacher:</u> Anticipated linguistic resources:</p> <p>For 3-5 and DLI: <i>tiene</i> + physical descriptions (<i>ojos, nariz, pelo, gafas, gorro, viejo, joven</i>) + adjectives (<i>colores, grande, pequeño, liso, largo, corto</i>) + additional adjectives (<i>specify once video and ppt found</i>) with written component</p> <p>[FYI] Cognitive complexity variables: + written component</p>

Figure 1 Example of a teacher sheet (task 5.4 from 2022-23 iteration)

The student sheet was designed to be printed out by the teacher for students to complete during class. The student sheet also included a visual questionnaire at the end of each task where students could circle/color one of five faces to represent how they felt about their task completion. Figure 2 includes

an example of a student sheet, and Figure 3 is an example of the questions from the student sheet that asked how students felt about their task performance.

Nombre:
Clase:
Maestro/a:
Primavera '23

3-5

Task 5.4. ¡Adivina quién!

Tu profesor/a va a elegir una persona de la tabla. Escribe una en la caja al lado de cada descripción que describe tu persona. Después, juega ¡Adivina quién! con un compañerx o con la clase. Pregunta a tu compañerx sobre las características que tiene su persona. Por ejemplo, puedes preguntar a tu compañerx "¿tiene pelo rubio?".



Figure 2 Example of a student sheet (from task 5.4 2022-23 iteration)



Figure 3 Example of a student enjoyment ranking (from 2021-22 iteration)

The PowerPoint provided to the teacher included an introduction slide, vocabulary and input related to each task, often presented via a video, slides with visuals and written vocabulary to highlight the linguistic resources needed to complete each task, and a model of how to complete the task, either in picture or video format. Figure 4 includes an example of a PowerPoint slide and Figure 5 includes a screenshot from one of the videos that the researchers created to model the completion of Task 5.4.

Práctica



Tiene una
camisa azul.

Tiene pelo
moreno.

Tiene pelo
largo y liso

Figure 4 Example of a PowerPoint slide from a lesson provided for a pre-task phase (Task 5.4)



Figure 5 Screenshot from a video provided for a pre-task phase (Task 5.4)

The teacher collaborator (Johana) joined the collaboration in early August the week that classes began. In fact, she ended her nursing job on a Friday, started with the school district the following Monday, and was in full-day administrative training sessions Monday and Tuesday, with classes starting on Wednesday. There was no time or budget allowed for her to create or edit materials, which is typical in elementary-level settings in the US. We met with her that Monday to introduce ourselves and show her the program, met with her weekly after that throughout the year, and corresponded additionally as needed via email and text. The multi-componential collaboration is articulated in Table 2.

Table 2 Academic year collaboration between teacher and research team

Timing	Modality	Purpose	Data
August	Zoom	Personal & program introductions	Summative qualitative comments written down in researcher log; phone numbers shared
Weekly throughout the fall and spring	GoogleDrive	Share the lesson materials with the teacher (PowerPoint, student sheet, teacher sheet); link to teacher QuickCheck; bilingual overview sheet for each unit for parents	Program data for task analysis and triangulation with teacher and student experiences
At the end of each lesson with each class	GoogleDrive	The teacher scans and uploads students' work; completes QuickCheck registering her immediate impressions	Student work for qualitative and quantitative analysis; immediate teacher perspectives (primarily quantitative)
Weekly throughout the fall and spring	Zoom	Check-in on students' and teacher's experiences; ensure student work uploaded; update calendar as needed; preview next week's tasks; make adjustments to future tasks	Detailed qualitative comments written down in researcher log; updates needed for second iteration of tasks noted in project to do list
As needed throughout the fall and spring	Text message	Provide immediate and ongoing support to the teacher implementing the program; answer questions; brainstorm together alternative options	Any program-relevant feedback (e.g., difficulties with a specific task, a request to eliminate scissors for future tasks for the youngest group) was saved in the researcher journal
June	In-person at the elementary school	End-of-semester overview of program and task-by-task analysis	Audio recordings of the interview and a transcript allowed for detailed analysis of the program and changes for each task for the second iteration
August	Google Drive/email	Submission of adjusted program for second year of teacher use	Program data for task analysis and triangulation with teacher and student experiences

During August 2021-May 2022 the researchers and the teacher met weekly via zoom to discuss questions that the teacher had about the tasks, task implementation and changes to tasks, and issues related to the tasks. A picture from one of these meetings is provided in Figure 6.

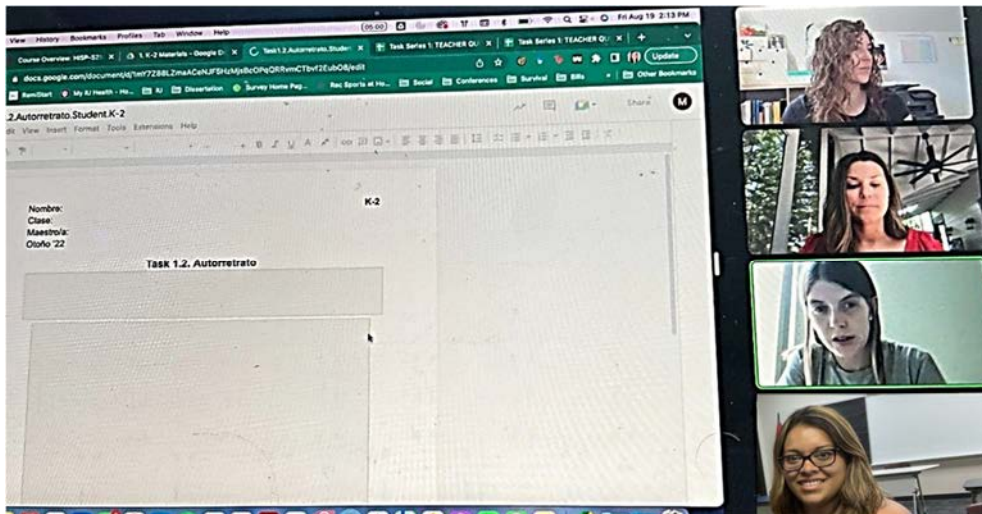


Figure 6 Screenshot from a weekly meeting between the teacher and researchers

To conclude Phase 4, the results and limitations of the first iteration of the task-based curriculum were analyzed in an in-person interview at the school site with the teacher and two of the researchers.

3.3.5. Phase 5: Triangulating task effectiveness

Phase 5 of the needs analysis included the (re)evaluation and adaptation of tasks for the second-year iteration of the program. As this analysis is extensive and ongoing, we focus on the data from the four tasks in Series 1.

Several data sources were utilized to triangulate our analysis of student outcomes and enjoyment. To determine if students were able to complete the tasks as designed, data from student tasks, teacher Quick Checks, weekly discussions, and end-of-year teacher/researcher meetings were triangulated. For student task outcomes, the communicative goals/outcomes for each task were identified, and students' completed sheets were coded for each outcome as either completed, partially completed, or fully completed. Group student data were examined by percentage of successful completion by grade (K, 1st, etc.) as well as by first language (L1 such as English, Spanish, etc.). Questions from the

teacher Quick Checks that corresponded to how successful the task was overall and how many students could complete each outcome were analyzed for each task. An overview of the data sources is provided below:

Data utilized from the first year of the program

→ *Individual and grouped task data*

- 650 students completed 34 tasks; 22,100 tasks completed
- Scanned individually
- Examined individually, as well as by class (individual teacher), level (i.e., 3rd grade), and L1
- Interpreted by researchers (delayed, objective)

2,289 tasks completed for Task Series I

→ *Teacher quick checks*

- Completed after each lesson for each class
- Immediate, impressionistic

→ *Teacher/researcher weekly discussion*

- Research journal notes
- Delayed, impressionistic

→ *End-of-year teacher/research meeting*

- Went through task-by-task
- Triangulated with researcher journal notes (see above) and quick checks (see above)

3.4. Analyzing student work: Communicative outcomes of the tasks

Analysis of the beginner student task data showed that overall, students were able to complete the communicative outcomes as shown in the bar graphs in Figure 7. However, there was a difference between younger and older learners. Specifically, learners in kindergarten through second grade were less successful on each of the four tasks than learners in third through fifth grade, showing that task completion for this task series appears to be mediated by age. This pattern provided additional evidential support to the teacher's suggestion (see the paragraph outlining "adjustments in the second iteration") that the second iteration of the program should be divided by K-2 and 3-5 rather than beginner and experienced students as done in the inaugural year. In terms of task performance by L1, there were no major differences in the successful completion of task outcomes between the three language groups (i.e., L1 English, L1 Spanish, and L1 Akateco)⁷ showing that these tasks provide learning opportunities for all students regardless of language background.

⁷ While there were additional L1s in the student population, of course, in this initial pass through the data we were most focused on L1 Spanish and L1 indigenous languages spoken in Spanish-speaking areas.

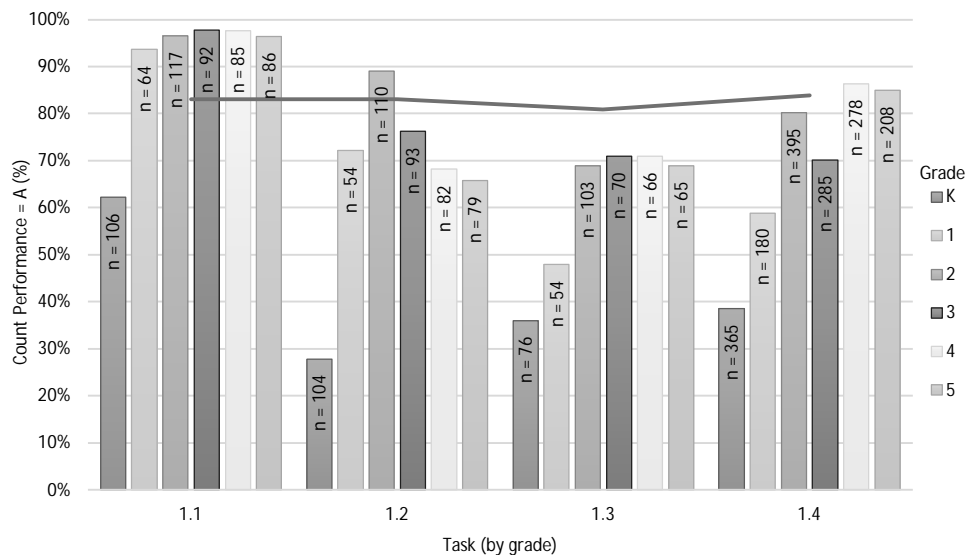


Figure 7 Teacher immediate post-lesson perspectives as compared to student data

3.5. Teacher immediate post-lesson perspectives: QuickChecks

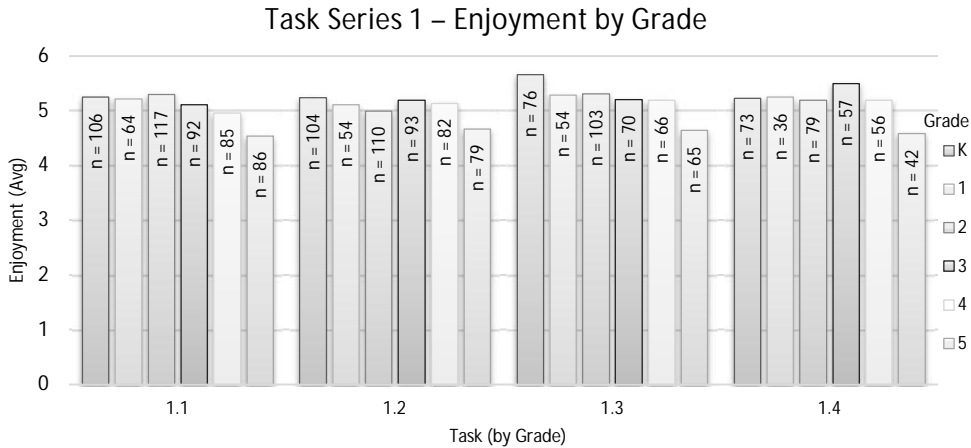
When student task data are compared to teacher data, there is a discrepancy between student performance and teacher perception of students' task completion. The teacher's immediate perception of student task performance as measured by the Quick Checks showed that most students were able to complete the outcomes with the minimum success rate being just below 80%. This indicates that the teacher had a positive perspective and experience during the lessons, but this is inconsistent with the delayed objective evaluation of the student data, reproduced in Figure 7. While the bar graphs show the percent of students in each grade who successfully completed the communicative outcomes of each task in Task Series 1, the line across the top shows the teacher's perception of task outcome completion.

3.6. Student immediate post-task perspectives: Enjoyment measure

Our task evaluation additionally considered student enjoyment of the tasks. At the end of each student sheet, students were asked how much they enjoyed the task and were given a Likert-type scale in the form of five faces, similar to the ones used in doctors' offices. As seen in Figure 8, regardless of grade level and

L1, students had high levels of enjoyment during each task. This could have led to the teacher’s perception of high levels of communicative outcome success.

Figure 8 Student task enjoyment by grade and L1



3.7. Adjustments for the second iteration of the program

The researchers made modifications to the curriculum based on feedback from the teacher, informed by both our analysis and the in-person meeting with the teacher where we discussed each of the 34 tasks in detail, and decided on any necessary changes to the curriculum for the second iteration (AY 2022-23). The main changes to the tasks included changing the differentiation of tasks from beginner and experienced to K-2 vs. 3-5 and DLI. K-2 tasks were adapted to be more input-focused with minimal writing, while 3-5 tasks included more production for 3-5 learners and written components for the DLI and Spanish-speaking students. Finally, additional changes to individual tasks included the timing of the task within each semester, and the addition of a Fall festival task to include Thanksgiving vocabulary in addition to Halloween and *Día de los Muertos* (*Day of the Dead*). All of the tasks were adjusted as described above, as were the corresponding post-lesson teacher Quick Checks. Finally, all materials were transferred to the sole autonomy of the teacher of record, Johana. We encouraged her to adjust and continue to edit the tasks as she saw fit (what we encouraged in the first year as well) and set once-per-month meetings with her on Zoom. We also remained available via email and text as needed. This was done for two principal reasons: (1) we felt it was important for the teacher to have control over the program as soon as possible; and (2) the project was conceptualized as

a collaboration for creation and initial maintenance and the funding⁸ and allocation of time permitted by the university reflected that.

4. Discussion

The organizing question of this paper was: *How can a longitudinal researcher-teacher collaboration support a Spanish FLEX program in a rural elementary school in Indiana?* Given the immediate opportunity for Spanish use outside of the classroom, and the goals articulated by all stakeholders expressing the desire for students to be able to complete real-world tasks with community members, we chose to follow a TBLT framework, where the emphasis was on completing communicative outcomes and student enjoyment rather than on specific language structures. Thus, each 40-minute class period had, as its goal, students being able to complete an age-appropriate real-world task that they might encounter, such as giving their name or describing what someone looks like. We created four scaffolded versions of each of the nine target tasks, allowing students to practice the overarching skill (making introductions, in the four-task series example provided in this paper) about themselves, about their grown-ups, about their class community, and about their larger community.

Both the examination and evaluation from triangulated data sources demonstrate that the collaboration was successful, operationalized by communicative outcome and enjoyment by students and the teacher. When it came to student work, our findings echoed the results from the two earlier studies examining student outcomes in exposure-track settings that students did learn: they completed the communicative outcomes (see Figure 7); a unique measurement in our study, we found that students enjoyed the tasks comparably, regardless of L2 and classroom level (see Figure 8).

The four tasks in our study targeted learners' abilities to follow directions in largely input-focused tasks, more akin to the study of Javorsky and Moser (2021)'s French exposure-track setting than the Spanish productive focus of Gurzynski-Weiss et al. (2021). Importantly, all three published studies on outcomes in exposure-track settings demonstrate learning: Javorsky and Moser (2021) and Gurzynski-Weiss et al. (2021) over time, and the current study in a more cross-sectional nature, examining each task in turn.⁹ Unique to the other two published studies, we included data sourced from the teacher perspective, immediately following each lesson as measured by the Teacher Quick Check, weekly in

⁸ The faculty researcher is in the process of applying for additional funding for more substantial ongoing support at a more expanded level.

⁹ Our analysis of the additional 32 tasks is ongoing.

the Teacher/Researcher meetings held over Zoom, documented in note form with our post-meeting comments in a Researcher journal, and in a Teacher/Researcher end-of-year interview and analysis of each task.

The Teacher Quick Check data were insightful, as they demonstrated an overly positive view of student outcomes; while students were overall very successful in completing the communicative outcomes of each task, the teacher's immediate post-lesson impression was that they were exceptionally and without nuance successful (the line in Figure 7). We interpreted this as evidence further supporting the need for triangulation, and further evidence of the success of the program: both the students (as measured in the post-task face data) and the teacher (as measured by the Quick Check) felt good about their task performance. The Teacher/Researcher meetings provided additional insight for our coding of student work; after we coded each task, we went back to the Researcher journal and examined if there were any comments made about potential student misunderstandings, for example, on how to complete a given task. This helped us adjust the communicative outcomes, adding additional outcomes that we did not anticipate, or breaking down the outcomes into more nuanced detail, to fully capture student abilities. Finally, the Teacher/Researcher end-of-year interview and task analysis, in which we sat down and went through each of the 36 tasks, allowed us to examine the tasks individually as well as holistically as a program. In this meeting we realized that the true division was not between beginner and experienced (Spanish-speaking students, either from home or from the DLI program) but between grades K-2 and 3-5.

The ongoing support and collaboration between the teacher and the research team was a significant part of this project. Literature abounds regarding the importance of ongoing support and access to resources when implementing TBLT for the first time (East, 2012; Erlam & Tolosa, 2022; Gurzynski-Weiss, 2022; Van den Branden, 2009). We were in regular contact via email and text, in addition to our weekly meetings. From the beginning, we asserted that our collaboration would be a two-way collaboration of information-sharing and respect, and explicitly stated recognition of our complementary expertise working towards a common goal: supporting exposure-track Spanish in this school district and, equally, the teacher collaborator in her first year as an educator.

The program completed its second year (academic year 2022-23). Our collaborative team meets monthly instead of weekly, while still providing the ongoing support via email and text as needed. The teacher, students, and administration are looking to continue the program, and we have interest from two additional schools to extend the model to additional contexts. We are beginning to share all 36 tasks we created for this program for free download and use on the open access task-based educational resource site, the TBLT Task Bank (tblt.indiana.edu), in

hopes of reducing the time it may take to create materials for other teachers and schools interested in task-based exposure-track L2 programs.

Most importantly, we believe this paper provides additional evidence of the resources and support that are needed to create and run a customized exposure-track program, and that it is possible to do so when complementary expertise works together. We would also argue that the tailored task-based program—which, for example, includes maps of the specific school building and community in the “following and giving directions” task unit—is worth this investment of time and funding.

5. Limitations and future directions

While we consider the collaboration an ongoing success, we feel future experiences would be enriched with more in-person engagement between the research team, the teacher, the community, and the administration. Given the geographical distance and the schedules of all involved, regular in-person meetings were not possible in this study.

Our collaborative project was limited to one school in one community. It would be ideal to have multiple schools and teachers participating in future iterations to see if and how this collaborative model could be extended and be of potential benefit to additional LOTE learning in rural contexts (e.g., Thompson, 2022).

This initial introductory report of this project launches a series of longitudinal foundational data reports demonstrating that cumulative learning is possible in exposure-track settings (following initial cross-sectional examinations in Gurzynski-Weiss et al., 2021 and Javorsky & Moser, 2021). We are striving to publish these data in as many open-access contexts as possible, with the aim that the data strengthen the opportunity for grant funding for all interested in collaborating to support robust exposure-track programs, especially those in underserved communities.

6. Conclusions

This paper detailed the first year of a longitudinal collaborative partnership between a rural exposure-track Spanish teacher and a university research team, sharing one concrete option of creating and maintaining a robust language program where few resources are otherwise available. Our analysis of the program demonstrated that elementary-level students are capable of learning an additional language through tasks in 40 minutes once per week with a dedicated

teacher and ongoing support for programmatic implementation. We hope this project inspires more practice-based collaborations and continues to demonstrate the necessity of providing longitudinal support for educators, their programs, and for public schools looking to ensure children of all backgrounds and locations have access to additional language instruction and the immediate and long-term benefits this education may provide.

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