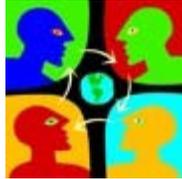




## Heritage Voices: Program



### En Nuestra Lengua Literacy and Culture Project

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<http://www-personal.umich.edu/~tsatter/ENL>

### About the Program Directors



En Nuestra Lengua is hosted at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Its directors, Teresa Satterfield and José R. Benkí, are on staff at the university.

Dr. Satterfield is an associate professor of Romance linguistics in the Department of Romance Languages and Literatures and the Center for Human Growth and Development. She is also a faculty affiliate of the Center for the Study of Complex Systems and Latino/Latina Studies. Her research and teaching include the study of first language acquisition in Spanish speakers, multicultural language contact phenomena, and the linguistic development of heritage language speakers.

Dr. Benkí is a research investigator in the Survey Research Center. He holds a Ph.D. in linguistics from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. His research interests include speech production and perception, bilingualism, and the role of speech and language in survey interviews.

## About the Program

The En Nuestra Lengua (ENL) Literacy and Culture Project is a collaboration between the University of Michigan, the Ann Arbor Public School District, and members of the Latino community in Ann Arbor. Collaborators seek to develop academic language proficiency of Spanish-speaking children. The project was initiated in May 2010 as a proof-of-concept prototype of a Saturday school Spanish language program for students whose home language is Spanish. Students and families come from many different countries including Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, France, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Spain, the United States, Uruguay, and Venezuela. The program is staffed by teachers who are native Spanish speakers.

Saturday school models have proven to be successful academic venues for students of other ethnic and language minority backgrounds such as Chinese, German, Hebrew, and Japanese (Chao, 1997; Wang, 1996; see also [Heritage Briefs](#) on heritage language schools in the United States). However, this language education model has not been widely implemented in immigrant Latino communities (Carreira & Rodriguez, 2011). It is thus a novel approach among available educational programs with heritage Spanish speakers, who are raised in a home where Spanish is spoken, speak or at least understand the language, and are to some degree bilingual in Spanish and in English (following Valdés' [1997] definition of heritage language speakers). Students who enter the program meet minimum proficiency in Spanish as measured by the Illinois Snapshot of Early (Spanish) Literacy, administered to every child prior to participation in the program. Students find themselves in a supportive learning environment on Saturdays and have opportunities to participate and use Spanish in many types of activities.



Students, 7 and 8 years old, watch a fellow student play the Spanish guitar.

ENL program staff work with elementary school Spanish speakers to enhance their oral fluency and literacy skills in Spanish as they gain pride in the heritage language and culture. An abundance of literature shows that Spanish speakers in the United States benefit socially and academically from the maintenance of their home language. A solid body of research also indicates that young Spanish speakers have greater success in their development of English literacy if they have received early instruction in Spanish

(e.g., August, Calderón, & Carlo, 2001; August & Hakuta, 1998; August & Shanahan, 2006; Greene, 1998; Slavin & Calderón, 2001; Slavin & Cheung, 2005; Willig, 1985; Wong-Fillmore & Valadez, 1986). Likewise, research has demonstrated that retention of intergenerational ties through maintenance of a family's language and culture has a positive impact on immigrant children (Montero-Sieburth & Christian Batt, 2001; Tjunedis, Satterfield, & Benkí, in press).

The pilot ENL program in the spring of 2010 accommodated 40 socioeconomically diverse Spanish-speaking children in Grades K–3. Sessions lasted for 90 minutes on Saturday mornings and were free of charge for the participants. The classes were held in a centrally located public school attended by a large number of ENL students during the week. An additional class was provided for 3- and 4-year-old siblings of the school-age children, increasing the number of students in the pilot to 55. Students received textbooks and other reading materials in Spanish.

After the pilot was completed, community demand for the program surged. Questionnaires administered to the parents of ENL students show that parents believe that their children are developing written and spoken proficiency in Spanish and forming a community with the other Spanish-speaking children in the program. ENL resumed in the fall of 2010 with a 9-week session, with the majority of the original participants returning. The amount of instructional time was extended from 90 minutes to 2.5 hours. A 9-week winter session, from February to April 2011, had an enrollment of 85 students, with a waiting list because of the high demand. A 6-week spring/summer session ran from May 2011 through June 2011. Saturday attendance has consistently remained high. The program continued in the 2011–2012 academic year with 95 participants and is in place for 2012–2013. Participation in the program continues to be free of charge.

Findings on the 55 children ages 5–9 who participated in the program during the 2010–2011 academic year show that they consistently performed at grade level not only on Spanish language and literacy assessments, but also on measures of English proficiency. Anecdotal data from the students' public school teachers further indicate that the children's reading level in English and general participation in class improved coinciding with participation in the Saturday school.



Students, 3 and 4 years old, take part in a pre-reading discussion.

Concurrent with the Saturday language instruction for students, meetings for Spanish-speaking parents provide support for information sharing, interacting with the American public school system, and discussing relevant topics. Parents and other volunteers also participate weekly in reading stories, singing songs, and giving cultural presentations in the students' classes as well as providing snacks for each class.

## Community Support

The ENL project enjoys considerable community support as measured by continually increasing attendance; formal questionnaires and informal feedback from parents and ENL instructors; and comments by Ann Arbor school district administrators, teachers, and staff.

The program has received financial support from the U.S. Department of Education, the Ann Arbor Area Community Foundation, the Rotary Club of Ann Arbor, private donors in the local community, and the following units of the University of Michigan: Arts of Citizenship (Ginsberg Fellowship), Latin American and Caribbean Studies Program, Office of the Vice-Provost for Academic Affairs, School of Education, Center for Educational Outreach, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, and National Center for Institutional Diversity. In addition, teachers in the public school system have generously donated Spanish books from Scholastic to support summer reading.

The core ENL administrative and instructional team collaborates with individuals from many areas of specialization (formal and applied linguistics, education, developmental psychology, speech and hearing sciences, and linguistic anthropology) and from three universities in addition to the University of Michigan (Eastern Michigan University, Wayne State University, and Texas A&M University). The program also continues to benefit from its access to highly trained native-Spanish-speaking educators who work with the students. These include graduate students in the field of education, who bring cutting-edge teaching techniques to the Saturday classes. ENL also recruits heritage Spanish speakers from the local Ann Arbor high schools and undergraduate students from the University of Michigan to serve as assistants in the Saturday classes. Instructors are able to carry out research and publish findings related to the Saturday school. Following a service-learning model, undergraduate student assistants who work with the program receive course credit.

## Curriculum

ENL lessons complement the public school curriculum in English and consist of approximately seven 20-minute curricular activities in language arts, mathematics, science, and geography, all carried out in Spanish as individual, paired, or group tasks. Routine activities include homework review, a parent-led reading, and a cultural presentation with discussion. Since ENL meets only on Saturdays, daily Spanish homework assignments are critical to the program's success.

The science component, initially developed and implemented by University of Michigan science education doctoral students in collaboration with ENL staff, teaches analytical and critical thinking skills in Spanish and provides hands-on opportunities to carry out experiments, explore nature, and understand the natural world.

The McGraw Hill Interamericana series *Hagamos caminos* (Ada & Wensell, 2004) is used for Grades K–2. Grade 3 uses intermediate *Lecciones de escritura* and *Lecciones de lectura* (Forte, 2002, 2003) and various Spanish fiction pieces. For all levels, non-fiction readings from sources such as Scholastic's Spanish-language magazine *Let's Find Out* are regularly provided.

## **Challenges**

The ENL project is always in need of funding to carry out cultural projects and activities, pay minimal salaries to the teachers, and cover the fees for school program space. Lack of funding for an ever-expanding program that continues to be in demand in the community is a big challenge.

The provision of an academic Saturday program for heritage Spanish speakers also comes with the challenge of effectively evaluating the linguistically and culturally diverse participants and placing them in classes according to criteria designed to obtain the maximum learning benefits. At this juncture, ENL is in the process of establishing formal linkages with Ann Arbor Public Schools and hopes to make participation in the Saturday program count for public school academic credit for the elementary school students.

## **Conclusion**

There is a clear need for the development of new models, or innovative modifications of existing models, for heritage language education in U.S. schools. As preliminary data show (Benkí & Satterfield, 2011), an initiative like the ENL project, when operating in tandem with the school system, has the potential to achieve positive gains in student language and literacy development and school performance, similar to the gains that are made in school-based bilingual programs. The language and literacy advances made by students in the ENL program not only provide proof of concept for the Saturday Spanish school, but also strongly align with the Interdependence Hypothesis, suggesting that when children develop language and literacy skills in their first language, second language acquisition is facilitated and enhanced (Satterfield, Sánchez, Morales, & Benkí, 2011). ENL has maintained high attendance and participation rates and continues to be sought out by the southeastern Michigan community. There is a waiting list of families for the 2012–2013 program. ENL staff and administrators look forward to continuing to refine the Saturday school Spanish language and literacy model in order to develop it for replication and expansion in other communities, as they also continue to build the research base on the program.

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**To learn more about En Nuestra Lengua, [read the program profile](#).**

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The Heritage Voices Program Profile on En Nuestra Lengua was prepared by Na Liu for the Alliance for the Advancement of Heritage Languages, Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington DC.

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