Six short paragraphs have been removed, Read the text and choose from the paragraph A-E to complete it.

Reflections on my First Year Teaching Spanish for Heritage Speakers

by profenygaard | Spanish for Heritage Speakers

Sneak peek: The personal process of teaching a heritage speakers class for the first time without any structured curriculum.

I'm not a native Spanish speaker. So when it became known last summer, that I would probably be teaching the Spanish for Heritage Speakers course at my school, my nerves began to build. [1]_____The biggest fear: that I wouldn't get buy-in from them. To be honest, it worried me that my presence in the classroom could make it an unsafe space for my students to talk about race and the issues they are faced with...issues that I could never relate with.

In August, my school paid for me to attend a week-long course at the University of Minnesota called Teaching Heritage Languages and Learners. I learned a lot that week and left feeling empowered and motivated. [2]_____ Framing my role in this way took a lot of pressure off. It then occurred to me...if I am able to cultivate conversation and the specific tasks these students need to encounter, at that point, I am doing my job. During that week I learned the importance of helping my future students gain confidence in their cultural identity. My instructors encouraged us to teach the narratives long left untold in schools. I learned about Critical Race Theory, Critical Service Learning, and Youth Participatory Action & Research. I wasn't quite sure how to implement all these techniques, but in the very least, felt like I grasped my role in all of this.

The course felt like drinking from a fire hose. It was chock-full of great ideas, and ripe with additional resources to round out a curriculum. However, I quickly realized an issue forming as I learned. I was brimming with great ideas and concepts, but greatly in need of concrete, classroom-ready materials. And certainly, I had a wide variety of print materials given to me by the previous instructor, but those lacked in scope, sequence and cohesiveness. [3]_____ I needed something I could run with. Let's just say that at this point in the summer, I fully realized how all-consuming creating this course curriculum would become. But at the same time, I was excited about the challenge!

As the first day of school approached, I planned out my first couple of lessons. First, there was creating a get-to-know-you questionnaire and a *La lucha es real* handout about bilingual struggles. That first week I shared about my life with my students and my love for their language and culture. I had two classes of Spanish for Heritage Speakers, each around twenty students. As I got to know them more, I made sure to memorize each of their countries of origin, because being misidentified can be a huge pet peeve for some people. Little by little, I earned their trust. As I see it, the biggest factor in gaining the trust of my students was clearly communicating my support for Latinos. [4]_____ Mastery of any language is only complete when one can read, speak and write proficiently in the target language. I explained to them that my strengths in reading and writing in Spanish (because I learned it that way) would help them become more well-rounded and that alternatively, their strengths in speaking fluently would help me improve my speaking. In a way, we formed a learning partnership.

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The entire first trimester, we dug in and tackled the theme of identity. Although created for students, the unit held an unexpected vantage point for me as the teacher, and in many ways, helped me process my identity as it related to my role as a white Spanish teacher. Throughout the year we discussed deeper topics like the use of the term Latinx and the various issues surrounding DACA. One of my proudest moments was the response I got on an anonymous survey I gave my students. I included a true or false question that said "Mi maestra apoya a los latinos." 100% of my students responded with true! It made me extremely happy to know the message of support I had been communicating was received.

Throughout this process, I have come to realize that even as a white person, I can still make a huge impact on my students' language improvement and personal identity journey. My role is that of an ally, an advocate, and a facilitator of learning. I would encourage all teachers of heritage courses not to focus on your weaknesses, but instead look to where your strengths lie. For me, my strengths are that I am a good speller in Spanish and that I have traveled to a variety of Spanish speaking countries, giving me a good overall understanding of various cultures within the Spanish speaking world. It has been a lot of fun to teach my students about countries they aren't familiar with and seeing them improve in their spelling.

This past year was a lot of hard work. Creating the curriculum from scratch was burdensome, but honestly, so worth it. I really enjoyed getting to know my students and I love being an advocate for them! [5]_____ The final day of the year came and my students went all out! They brought chips, soda, cookies, tamales that they made themselves, and a piñata! They danced and danced and danced, to *bachata*, *cumbia*, and *banda*! To top it off, one of my students brought in a birthday cake they had baked since it was my birthday the day prior. As my students sang *Las mañanitas*, I couldn't help feeling so lucky to be their teacher!

a) I craved digital materials that were organized, relevant, and usable for my present class. I could not just walk in on the first day of school and tell my students, "Yeah, I've thought about this a lot, and I have some good ideas!"
b) The thought of making too many errors or my students poking fun at me... worse yet, and this was the big one, viewing me as unqualified to teach the course had me on edge.
c) I also clearly communicated that this class, unlike others, was a process and I was there to learn alongside them!
d) At the end of the year, my heritage students had asked me if it was okay if we had a *fiesta* for the last day of school. I agreed, although truth be told, I should have known that their idea of *fiesta* was a bit grander than what I was picturing.
e) The instructors encouraged those of us who weren't native speakers in our job scope. They taught us our job was not to be perfect, rather simply to focus on being a facilitator of learning.

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