How Should Heritage Languages Be Taught?: The Effects of a Free Voluntary Reading Program

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ABSTRACT *The United States has experienced a sharp rise in recent years in the number of heritage language (HL) bilinguals, students who speak a language other than English at home. Due to a lack of advanced language development in other settings, many of these students enroll in foreign language courses in their respective home languages. This paper reports on a program designed to promote heritage language and literacy development in one university-level HL course, Spanish for Native Speakers (SNS). The ten-week program involved two classes of mostly English-dominant SNS students participating in an experimental course that included a combination of the following elements: free voluntary reading (FVR) outside the classroom, in-class literature circles (small group book discussions), a survey of popular literature in Spanish, and individual inquiry learning projects. Three measures of the course were used to evaluate its success in terms of vocabulary acquisition, attitudes toward Spanish literacy development, and reading habits. The experimental group made significant gains in word knowledge, read more than a comparison group of SNS students, and exhibited positive attitudes toward Spanish literacy at the end of the ten-week course. The evidence in favor of FVR, theoretical justifications for the approach in SNS courses, and implications for redesigning heritage language curricula at the secondary and university levels are discussed.*

Schools in the United States have seen a substantial growth in recent years in the number of students who come from non-English-speaking homes or backgrounds. This phenomenon has resulted in a heightened interest in courses designed to help these students develop literacy in their heritage language (HL) (Merino, Trueba, and Samaniego 1993).[1] While some of these students receive limited instruction in their non-English language during early years of schooling in the form of bilingual education, these programs are largely transitional, resulting in little to no primary language support to students following an "early exit" at the third year after school entry (Crawford 1991). Bilinguals who have high English skills upon enrolling in school normally receive no development whatsoever in the heritage language.

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The task of continuing the language development of these native bilinguals has fallen largely on foreign language departments at the high school and university levels, an increasing number of which now offer special HL courses (Collison 1994; Liguori 1995). By far the most common of these is for the largest U.S. heritage language group, Spanish speakers. Most of the methods currently advocated for the HL classroom focus on traditional grammar and skills instruction, yet there is little evidence that such methods are effective in HL language and literacy development. This study describes an alternative approach to the teaching of heritage languages, one that provides students with access to a print-rich environment through the use of self-selected pleasure reading, also known as "free voluntary reading" (FVR). After briefly reviewing the literature on the status of HL maintenance in the United States and the effectiveness of FVR in first and second language acquisition, I will provide a rationale for a free reading and popular literature approach in the HL classroom and present the results of two studies of FVR at the university level. The first study examines FVR's effect on vocabulary acquisition and attitudes toward Spanish literacy; study two reports on how an FVR course influenced students' long-term reading habits in Spanish. The implications of the findings in the teaching of heritage languages at the high school and university levels will also be discussed.

Heritage Language Students: Learning a Second Language While Losing the First

Heritage language students now constitute more than one out of every ten children enrolled in American schools, and in some states like California the proportion is as high as one out of every three (McArthur 1993; Crawford 1991). Many districts have implemented bilingual education programs, providing primary language support to students for an average of three school years, at the end of which time they usually are transitioned to English-only classrooms. Despite some public skepticism regarding the effectiveness of bilingual education, several reports have concluded that such programs are overwhelmingly successful when properly implemented, leading to more rapid acquisition of English and academic content (Willig 1985; Krashen and Biber 1988; Cummins 1989; Ramirez 1992). What's more, both heritage language adults and children appear to be learning English at a remarkably high rate, and HL students show signs of doing as well as native English speakers in certain measures of academic performance (Krashen and McQuillan 1995).

HL students in the United States learn English so fast and efficiently, in fact, that many "shift" to English and begin to lose their home language altogether. The process of language shift has been extensively documented by Fishman (1991), who found that there is a consistent move to English in the United States by HL speakers, to the detriment of their home language. Wong-Filmore (1983) investigated over 1,100 HL families from a variety of languages (Spanish, Korean, Chinese, Khmer, and Vietnamese) and found that this shift often takes place very soon after children enroll in English-language schools. Hakuta and D'Andrea (1992) found that there was a significant drop in Spanish proficiency across generations of Mexican background high-school students, and that this drop was also noticeable within generations, depending upon the age at which students began speaking English. Pease-Alvarez (1993), in a study of 64 eight- and nine-year-old bilinguals, found the loss of Spanish beginning with first-generation students.

While Hernandez-Chavez (1993) has noted that language shift and loss does not always follow predictable generational patterns, since social factors and language contact vary across communities and families, the shift away from the HL seems in many cases to be quite dramatic. Merino (1983) found that over half of the children she studied in one K-4 bilingual program experienced loss of Spanish in a two-year interval, and Pease-Alvarez and Winsler (1994) noted such shifts among fourth graders within just one school year. By the time students arrive at the high school and university level, the evidence suggests that many have lost parts of their oral proficiency and often have lower levels of literacy in their HL than in English (Garcia and Diaz 1993; McQuillan and Tse, in press).

The one way HL speakers *can* continue their literacy development in a school setting is by enrolling in secondary and university foreign language classes. Unfortunately, students enrolling in regular sections of their respective languages create a special dilemma for instructors, since they often have a wide range of "uneven" HL proficiencies that do not fit neatly into the traditional second-language classroom. Garcia and Diaz (1993) found, for example, that among their random sample of Latino bilingual high school students in Miami, 75 percent claimed that they could understand Spanish and English equally well, but only 46 percent could write them both with equal facility. Some high schools and universities have responded by creating separate courses for bilinguals, particularly for the

largest group of HL students, Spanish speakers (Trueba 1993). These programs, however, have not received extensive attention as to their effectiveness.

The problem facing HL curriculum designers, then, is to find efficient methods of promoting overall language and literacy development for this diverse population of HL bilinguals. One possible solution is to adopt models that have proven effective in other language development settings and apply those elements to the HL classroom. I will now examine the research on one approach, FVR, which has been shown to be successful in a variety of settings. To understand the impact of FVR on overall literacy development, it is helpful to review studies that have examined its effectiveness both in and out of school, since our ultimate goal is to make use of activities that promote literacy acquisition, regardless of where they are normally carried out.

The Effectiveness Of Free Voluntary Reading

Out-of-School Studies

In general, more free reading has been found by researchers to correlate very highly with several measures of reading achievement. The California Assessment Program (CAP) (Alexander 1986) found a very positive relationship between the amount of reading eighth graders do per day and their scores on the English and Language Arts sections of the CAP. A national survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Education (Foertsch 1992) also found that fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders who read more outside of school performed better on tests of reading comprehension. The same study found, however, that traditional in-school reading instruction—workbook assignments or instruction on "reading skills"—had no impact on reading. Anderson, Wilson, and Fielding (1988) similarly found that pleasure reading by fifth graders was "the best predictor of several measures of reading achievement...including gains in reading comprehension between second and fifth grade" (285).

Additional research supports the proposition that print exposure in general is strongly related to reading comprehension and vocabulary knowledge. Guthrie (1981) concluded from a survey of the amount of reading done by adults in three countries (United States, New Zealand, and Iran) that the volume of reading was highly associated with reading comprehension achievement. West and Stanovich (1991) found that print exposure was a significant predictor of vocabulary knowledge among college students. In a study of 63 fifth-graders, Allen, Cipielewski, and Stanovich (1992) reported that recognition of pleasure reading materials correlated strongly with measures of word knowledge and reading comprehension. Several other studies have shown similarly strong relationships between the amount of voluntary reading done and a variety of literacy measures (Greaney 1980; Cunningham and Stanovich 1991; Constantino 1994a; Cho and Krashen 1994).

In-School Studies

Abundant evidence exists that free reading is also highly effective in both first (L1) and second (L2) language acquisition when incorporated into in-school programs. Typical free reading programs allow students to choose a text to read during their language arts class instead of doing the normal routine of worksheets on grammar, vocabulary, or reading skills. In his review of 41 L1 and L2 studies comparing in-school free reading programs with traditional methods, Krashen (1993) found that 38 (92 percent) showed either the same or superior gains for FVR. Southgate, Arnold, and Johnson (1981) also found that seventh- through ninth-grade students in classes where teachers spent more time on self-selected reading made the greatest progress on reading achievement.

Some of the results in favor of FVR are truly impressive even for short treatment periods. In one study of high school English as a Second Language (ESL) students, participants gained an average of 15 months on a standardized reading test in only four months, or nearly one month per week of free reading (Pilgreen and

Krashen 1994). While no control group was used in the study, the results do point to the incredible potential of self-selected, extensive reading. Even more spectacular results come from reports on programs in Singapore and the Fiji Islands (Elley and Mangubhai 1983; Elley 1991) for more than 3,000 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) elementary students. Researchers found that extensive reading programs outperformed traditional methods in *all* areas of language development, including reading comprehension, grammar, listening comprehension, and writing. There are several other studies which show that better L2 readers are also better L2 writers (Janopoulos 1986; Kaplan and Palhinda 1981), suggesting that the gains made in reading will aid students in writing as well.

Reading Attitudes, Reading Frequency, and FVR

The promotion of positive attitudes toward literacy is an important goal of first- and second language courses, in that more positive attitudes lead to more reading (Smith 1990). Giles (1994) studied the free reading behaviors of 64 fourth graders and found that, controlling for reading ability, a positive attitude toward literacy was a significant predictor of the amount of reading done. Several studies of extensive popular literature and free reading programs have shown that they are highly motivating and promote more positive attitudes toward reading. Greaney (1970) found, for example, that a group of sixth-grade students who participated in an FVR program showed significantly more positive attitudes toward reading than a comparison group. Cook, Dupuy, and Tse (1994) reported that 64 percent of the students surveyed thought that their extensive L2 reading course was better than previous skills-focused language courses they had taken, compared to only 38 percent in the control group. Tse and McQuillan (in press) reported on the case study of one reader, Joyce, who went from indifference to reading in both her native and second languages to developing an avid pleasure-reading habit after a short exposure to popular literature in her university ESL course. Pilgreen and Krashen's (1994) ESL high school students also reported more favorable attitudes toward reading after an FVR course, as did Cho and Krashen's (1994) Korean-American ESL adult subjects. McQuillan (1994) found in a study of 49 university foreign-and second-language students that extensive reading of popular literature was favored by a significant margin over traditional grammar instruction, and was considered by their subjects exposed to both methods as more pleasurable and more beneficial for language acquisition.

Students who participate in in-school FVR programs also read more frequently than those who do not. Greaney and Clarke (1973) found that sixth grade boys who participated in an FVR program for eight and one-half months were still reading more than a comparison group of students six years after the end of the treatment period. Pilgreen and Krashen (1994) reported that their students read significantly more after their FVR course than before, and Constantino (1994a) found that her university subjects also reported reading more for pleasure after having participated in an FVR class.

A Rationale for FVR In Heritage Language Courses

The case for FVR in language and literacy development is very persuasive in light of the evidence from both first- and second-language acquirers. There are also good reasons for using the approach specifically with HL students. Due to the often low levels of HL literacy among many native bilinguals, one of the principal objectives of HL courses is to help students read and write better both in and outside the classroom.[2] Yet there is little research evidence that any of the methods currently advocated by most HL curriculum designers are effective in literacy development, however defined. Most textbooks and pedagogical recommendations for Spanish for Native Speakers (SNS) courses have focused mainly on grammar or some form of skill-building (e.g., AATSP Report 1972; Aparicio 1983; Gonzalez and

Gonzalez 1991), although a few have moved to more comprehension-based methods (Valdes, Lozano, and Garcia-Moya 1981; Roca 1992).

Some in the SNS field have advocated an alternate approach based on critical pedagogy theory used with other linguistically diverse populations (Cummins 1989). Faltis (1990), for example, has proposed a curriculum design grounded in the work of Paulo Friere (1970) and Lev Vygotsky (1978) in which students are involved in "problem-posing education." Students identify, recognize, and understand problems in their own lives and the lives of others and then "develop ways to overcome and to improve the conditions that give rise to them" (119). Students use Spanish as a "medi[um] through which the most important goal can be realized," that of critical reflection and action (119).

This problem-posing curriculum is said to lead to individual learning through social interaction. As Faltis explains, each student has a "Zone of Proximal Development," which consists roughly of the gap between what a learner can do *without* assistance and what he/she can do *with* assistance (Vygotsky 1978). By providing "assisted performance" in this zone, a more capable teacher or peer collaborates with the learner both linguistically and cognitively to help him/her pose and solve problems of relevance. These interactions gradually lead to the learner being able to work independently at progressively higher levels of HL competence.

While the FVR approach outlined in this study was not originally conceived in the critical pedagogy framework, it is consistent with it in several respects. By choosing their own texts and inquiry projects (see below), learners determine almost the entire curriculum in collaboration with each other and the instructor, becoming empowered in the process. Students help bridge the "cultural gap" that Barrera (1992) notes often exists in HL classrooms, and their needs and concerns become central to the course as reflected in the choices they make. By discussing their readings and reflections in the classroom, students are assisted by more capable others in order to gain a greater competence in both Spanish and in dealing with the issues raised in their reading and writing.

There are two additional advantages to using FVR that address the particular needs of the HL and SNS population:

(1) *FVR serves the needs of every student, regardless of proficiency and background.* Aparicio (1983) observed that students in SNS courses display a wide range of backgrounds in Spanish, and most teachers of SNS courses would probably concur that students enter their classes with varying levels of both oral and written Spanish proficiency. Merino, Trueba, and Samaniego (1993) also point out that there can be a variety of proficiency levels among native HL bilinguals. This is confirmed by the evidence cited above from Garcia and Diaz (1993). This means that a more individualized approach to curriculum is practically a necessity for an HL population. Self-selected reading provides the perfect mechanism for meeting the needs of every student in the classroom, rather than shooting for a mythical "middle ground" as in the traditional grammar or skill-building curriculum, which is often too high or too low to be of use to students.

(2) *Self-selected reading, particularly that of popular literature, both assists students in understanding their cultural heritage and gives greater prestige to various dialects of the home language.* A common feature of FVR programs is the promotion of the use of nonacademic, popular literature. Such materials provide not only motivating reading for students but also give them important links to popular culture that many English-dominant bilinguals do not have available. Readings from popular culture, particularly those from the students' own communities, have several benefits. First, the texts are written in the discourse most nearly approximating the oral language of students, and hence are more comprehensible. This practice is consistent with both language acquisition theory (Krashen 1981) and the recommendations of other SNS researchers that reading for native bilinguals be culturally appropriate (Dernersesian 1993; Barrera 1992).

Second, popular literature exposes second- and third-generation speakers to other aspects of the heritage culture, giving them the opportunity to deepen their interests and identify in a positive manner with other members of the HL-speaking community. In addition, by supplying students with texts written in a number of dialects, FVR can place value on language varieties as well as provide access to the standard or dominant dialect. Third, popular literature provides a "conduit" to other literary texts. Several studies show that avid popular literature readers do go on to more challenging texts (Schoonover 1938; LaBrant 1958), and that self-selected reading tends to be more difficult than that typically assigned by the teacher (Southgate, Arnold, and Johnson 1981; Bader, Veatch, and Eldridge 1987). Moreover, Davis, Gorell, Kline, and Hsieh (1992) found that pleasure reading was among the strongest predictors of positive attitudes toward the study of literature among undergraduate students. There is every indication that popular literature can be a "bridge" to enriching students' understanding of ethnic heritage as well as exploring the vast array of HL literary texts.

Study One: Vocabulary Acquisition And Reading Attitudes

Subjects

The experimental and control groups were drawn from two SNS courses at a medium-sized public university in the Southwest. All students were assigned to the ten-week SNS class as part of their foreign language requirement. Although assignment to treatment groups was not random, no notice was given to students that the classes would differ in curriculum, and there were no requested transfers between the experimental class and a comparison course using traditional methods offered concurrently that semester. Both classes met twice a week for two hours. The comparison group (N = 19; M = 9, F = 10, median age = 26.9) (used only for the Reading Attitudes Survey, see below) used a combination of traditional grammar exercises and assigned culture readings, with essay writing assignments and quizzes. The experimental group (N = 20; M = 6, F = 14, median age = 23.4) participated in FVR Program One.

FVR Program One: Popular Literature Survey and Literature Circles

The experimental course had three basic components: a survey of various genres of popular and classic literature, self-selected literature circles, and writing workshops. Class time was divided roughly in equal segments among the three areas. The reading components are described below:

(a) Popular Literature Survey—While the bulk of the course was devoted to self-selected reading, a packet of 20 assigned readings, which contained examples of a large range of genres from children's literature to poetry to newspaper articles to academic reports, was also included in the curriculum. Authors representing different styles of U.S., Latin American, and peninsular Spanish were included in the selection, including Rudolfo Anaya, Alfonso Rodriguez, Sandra Cisneros, Octavio Paz, Marco Denevi, and several others. There were two reasons for the assigned reading: first, and most importantly, many of the students had never read for pleasure in Spanish. It was thought that an introduction to various popular and literary forms (comics, short stories, poetry, novels, essays, plays) would provide students with a background to make more informed choices in their free reading. Second, the cultural themes in the readings gave the class common points of discussion each week.

(b) Literature Circles—While the literature survey continued throughout the entire ten weeks, students were asked at the beginning of Week Two to think about materials they would like to read with other members of the class as part of self-selected book discussion groups, or "literature circles" (MacGillivray, Tse, and McQuillan 1995). The instructor brought in popular materials (newspapers, magazines, and adolescent and adult literature) for students to check out and examine. Grouping suggestions were made based on approximate reading

level of the students as determined by a modified use of an Immediate Recall Protocol (Bernhardt 1983)[3], but the ultimate decision of grouping was left entirely to the students. Some students chose to group themselves according to topic interest, others according to perceived ability in Spanish reading or oral fluency. Once in their groups, students had to decide what they were going to read and discuss during the 30-minute time slot allotted to literature circles during each class period.

Some groups asked for the instructor's advice as to possible texts, since even after a few weeks of familiarization with various genres and authors, many students felt unsure of what was available to read in Spanish. The instructor gave recommendations depending on perceived interest and language proficiency, which varied widely. Both U.S. and foreign texts were read by students, including short stories from *Palabra Nueva: Cuentos Chicanos* (Elizondo, Armengol, and Aguilar 1987) and *U.S./Mexican Border Literature: Short Stories* (Di-Bella, Reyes, Munoz, and Polkinhorn 1989); *Como agua para chocolate* by Laura Esquivel; poems of Pablo Neruda, Sandra Cisneros, and Federico Garcia Lorca; and several translated and original U.S. and Mexican adolescent novels and children's books. Two literature-circle groups began by reading nonfiction magazines and the newspaper *La Opinion* of Los Angeles, but fiction seemed to work better in terms of group discussion, and after a few weeks all of the circles were reading some form of fiction. The amount and type of reading were not formally tabulated or monitored by the instructor, and were determined entirely by the individual groups. No clear patterns emerged as to favorite texts; students read very widely in terms of both content and dialect of Spanish. It is estimated that the most proficient groups read about two novels and/or several short stories in the ten-week span; the less proficient groups read eight-to-twelve children's, adolescent, or graded reader texts of varying lengths. Students were also encouraged to read outside of class, but no effort was made to measure their outside reading.

The instructor gave students some suggestions as to possible approaches to discussion through whole class sessions based on the assigned readings. Students were asked to talk about whatever they felt comfortable discussing, including personal reactions, comparisons with other texts, and comprehension/language problems. The instructor monitored the groups, providing assistance when asked, but generally left students alone to conduct their circles as they wished. Neither performance in the discussions nor the amount of reading was formally evaluated by the instructor. Instead, students formed an evaluation committee and decided to use peer and self-assessments for their reading grade, which constituted 75 percent of the final course grade.

Measurement of Vocabulary Knowledge

The pre- and posttest administered to the students on the first and last days of class consisted of a signal-detection Spanish vocabulary checklist developed by Rodrigo (1994). Vocabulary checklists have been found to correlate highly with multiple-choice tests (Anderson and Freebody 1983; Meara and Buxton 1987) and have several advantages over them. First, unlike multiple choice instruments, they require no extraneous strategic knowledge that may distort the validity of the test; second, they need no complex distracters embedded in contexts that are constructed for specific age groups; and third, they can test a much greater number of words in less time. In addition, Anderson and Freebody found that in follow-up interviews and assessments, vocabulary checklists produced a more valid and accurate measure of word knowledge than multiple-choice exams.

The instrument used in this study was found to have high reliability (KR-21 = 0.91, from Hatch and Farhady 1982). Students were asked to place a check next to the words they knew on the list, which contained both real words and nonwords used as distracters. The checklist contained 400 words: 300 real Spanish words (e.g., *quejarse, cabina, soplar*) drawn from intermediate-level readers and texts, and

100 nonwords (e.g., **pentir, *cadar, *gurolloso*) to counteract guessing. The number of real words checked (Hits=H) was compared to the number of false words checked (Failures=F), and a resulting score was computed from the formula below (Zimmerman 1994):

$$\frac{(H-F) * (1 + H-F) - 1}{H * (1-F)}$$

The formula produced similar results to those used in other signal-detection vocabulary studies (West and Stanovich 1992). While the same pre- and posttest may present a threat to the internal validity of the study (students may recognize words from the first administration) (Campbell and Stanley 1966), it was believed that the large number of words used in the checklist and the ten-week interval reduced the likelihood of such effects. Students were not informed in advance they would be given a posttest at the end of the quarter.

Measurement of Student Attitudes Toward Reading

At the end of the ten-week session, students in both the experimental and comparison groups completed an anonymous literacy attitudes survey created by the researcher to gauge their attitudes toward reading and writing as a result of their experiences in the SNS classrooms. Students responded to statements on their attitudes and practices on a Likert scale of 1 ("strongly agree") to 5 ("strongly disagree"). Due to the small numbers in each cell, responses were collapsed into two categories, Agree/Yes (1 and 2) and Disagree/No (3, 4, and 5), and Chi-square tests were conducted on the resulting figures for both groups. Given that the forms were completed anonymously, there was little incentive for the students to "please" the instructor with their responses.

Results and Discussion

Vocabulary Acquisition

Table 1 shows the pre- and posttest scores, with the increases or decreases for each sub-

TABLE 1

Scores on Vocabulary Checklist and Percentage Gain/Loss (N = 20)

Subject	Pretest	Posttest	% Gain/Loss
1.	8%	15%	7%
2.	9%	21%	12%
3.	14%	24%	10%
4.	16%	21%	5%
5.	18%	27%	9%
6.	19%	40%	21%
7.	22%	39%	17%
8.	30%	43%	13%
9.	30%	51%	21%
10.	31%	40%	9%
11.	34%	46%	12%
12.	34%	52%	18%
13.	38%	64%	24%
14.	40%	53%	13%
15.	52%	61%	9%
16.	58%	75%	17%
17.	70%	66%	(4%)
18.	79%	47%	(32%)
19.	79%	79%	—
20.	82%	77%	(5%)

ject shown. A paired t-test showed that students overall in the experimental group made significant gains in vocabulary knowledge in just ten weeks (mean gain = .08, $t = 3.12$, $p < .01$). The students ranged widely in vocabulary knowledge, with the scores on the pretest ranging from eight percent to 80 percent correct on the adjusted score. Four students had pretest scores of 70 percent or higher, suggesting ceiling effects were taking place with this instrument. In fact, three of these subjects scored lower on the posttest, most likely due a regression to the mean, and one scored the same. Despite the presence of these advanced subjects, the large gains made by the beginning and intermediate students still resulted in a significant gain for the group. Factoring out the advanced students, the mean gain rises from .08 to .14, a dramatic increase in passive word knowledge.

Since students were not concurrently enrolled in any other Spanish course during the ten-week course, the amount of assigned reading was negligible (about one-to-two pages per week), and there was no indication of significant increase in exposure to Spanish print other than the reading done in connection with the course, it was believed that there were no plausible threats to internal validity that would suggest the necessity of a control group (Campbell and Stanley 1966). The subjects served, in effect, as their own controls. The gains made by the students in such a short period are impressive, particularly considering that no formal evaluation or comprehension checks on the self-selected reading were done, and there were no vocabulary- or skill-building exercises during the course. The results are consistent with other data, which suggest that vocabulary acquisition is largely incidental and is most efficiently achieved through reading, particularly pleasure reading, rather than through direct instruction (Nagy, Herman, and Anderson 1985; Krashen 1989, 1993).

Attitudes Toward Spanish Literacy

The results of the survey of attitudes toward Spanish literacy of the experimental and control groups are shown in Table 2. Neither

TABLE 2

Reading Habits and Attitudes of Native Spanish Bilinguals (N = 39)

Item	Experimental		Control	
	Yes	No	Yes	No
1. Before taking this class, I would read in Spanish for pleasure.	10% (2)	90%(18)	16%(3)	84%(16)
2. I am more likely to read in Spanish for pleasure after completing this course than before I started.	80%(16)	20%(4)	63%(12)	37%(7)
3. As a result of taking this class, I feel more confident as a reader in Spanish.	80%(16)	20%(4)	68%(13)	32%(6)
4. I would recommend this course to friends to help them improve their reading and writing in Spanish.	85%(17)	15%(3)	89%(17)	11%(2)
5. As a result of this class, I know more about types of popular and literary reading material in Spanish.	75%(15)	25%(5)	53%(10)	47%(7)

group reported much pleasure reading before enrolling in the SNS course (Question 1) (less than 17 percent from both groups), with no difference between the two classes. Both groups reported having significantly more positive attitudes as a result of taking the SNS course (Questions 1 and 2) (experimental: Chi-square = 17.07 Yates Correction for Continuity applied, $p < .001$, df = 1; comparison: Chi-square = 7.05 Yates Correction for Continuity applied, $p < .01$, df = 1). The difference between the two groups at the end of the quarter was not statistically significant (Question 2 only) (Chi-square = .66 Yates Correction for Continuity applied, p = .42, df = 1). FVR methods, then, were as effective as assigned readings and traditional skills instruction in improving student's attitudes toward Spanish reading. Both classes reported that the SNS courses improved their confidence in reading (75 percent of the total), while again there was no difference between the two groups (Question 3) (Chi-square = .21 Yates Correction for Continuity applied, $p = .65$, df = 1). There was similar agreement between the two classes on whether the course helped their reading and writing and the extent to which the course exposed them to new reading material.

It should be emphasized that the comparison group, like the experimental group, also used some popular cultural readings in class, which may have contributed to those students' positive attitudes toward reading after the course. Moreover, the treatment period for the experimental group was extremely short in comparison to other FVR programs reported in the literature. Krashen (1993) has noted that most sustained silent reading programs, for example, need at least seven months for the full effects to take place. Since this treatment was only ten weeks, it may be that longer periods of FVR exposure, or comparisons to a more strictly skills-oriented course, would have produced results more clearly favoring the free-reading students, as in other studies.

The experimental group completed an additional anonymous survey on a number of specific points related to the functioning of their literature circles. While no group comparisons were possible, the results are illustrative of the positive attitudes developed by the use of the reading groups and give us additional information on the effectiveness of this method of FVR. The results are shown in Table 3. Again, the "Agree" figures correspond with those who answered either 1 or 2 on the Likert Scale, and "Disagree" with either 3, 4, or 5.

As seen in Table 3, the large majority of students indicated that the literature circles had a very positive impact on their experience of Spanish reading, increasing their enjoyment, confidence, and comprehension (Questions 1, 2, and 3). The opportunity to hear the views of fellow students in a low-stress environment is also perceived as beneficial (Question 4). Literature circles seem to combine the best of two effective strategies for classroom reading: FVR and cooperative groups (Kagen 1986). It is also important to point out that almost all of the students reported doing the reading for their literature circles. This is indeed an inter-

TABLE 3

Attitudes Toward Literature Circles by Experimental Group (N = 20)

Item	Yes	No
Literature Circles (LCs) made Spanish reading more enjoyable.	85%(17)	15%(3)
2. LCs increased my confidence in reading in Spanish.	90%(18)	10%(2)
3. LCs increased my reading comprehension in Spanish.	95%(19)	5%(1)
4. Hearing the views of others helped me understand the text more.	90%(18)	10%(2)
5. I did all of the reading for my LC.	90%(18)	10%(2)
6. Having the instructor observe my LC inhibited our conversation.	15%(3)	85%(17)

esting finding: students enrolled in a compulsory course will read without formal evaluation if they are allowed to select their own texts. The draw of FVR and literature circles seems to be particularly strong in motivating students to read.

Study Two: Reading Habits

Subjects

The experimental group (N = 10; M = 3, F = 7) consisted of students who had enrolled in a special FVR SNS course (separate from the one used in Study One) at the same medium-sized public university. They were administered a "Literacy Attitudes and Practices" survey designed by the researcher. The survey was given to the experimental group approximately seven months after the end of the course. The comparison group (N = 18; M = 5, F = 13) was made up of students enrolled in a similar SNS course at the same university during a later quarter. The comparison group was used to provide "baseline data" to determine whether those who had been exposed to FVR had significantly different reading habits from a similar population of university native Spanish bilinguals. The comparison group was given the same survey on the first day of the quarter, minus questions applicable only to the experimental group relating to a comparison of reading habits before and after the course.

FVR Program Number Two: Popular Literature Survey, Outside Reading, and Inquiry Learning

The second experimental course consisted of three reading and reading/writing components:

(a) Popular Literature Survey—The same method as described in Study One above was used.

(b) Weekly Free Voluntary Reading—Students were asked to read an average of ten articles per week from either *La Opinion* newspaper (Los Angeles), a Spanish-language magazine (U.S. or foreign), or an equivalent amount of reading from children's, adolescent, or adult literature books from texts similar to those used in the first study. Each student selected his/her own reading materials and was asked to keep a weekly log with the title of the selection and a brief reaction to the piece. Students were asked occasionally to comment on what they were reading and were given time in class to ask questions about material they did not understand. The only evaluation of this reading was the log turned in to the instructor at the end of the quarter. Students who had a very low reading level began with simple newspaper texts (ads, horoscopes, the comic section) and with children's books. More advanced readers chose short stories or popular novels.

(c) Individual Inquiry Learning Project—Each student carried out a ten-week project related to some aspect of interest in Spanish. The only requirement was that the project have some extensive reading and writing in Spanish connected to it. A wide variety of projects resulted. One student read extensively on Mexican rodeos and wrote a report on his findings. Several students who worked as bilingual aides or teachers in local elementary schools did reading and writing in relation to the personal and professional problems they encountered in their jobs. Others decided to read novels or short stories in Spanish in addition to their weekly FVR. Although a grade was assigned to the project, the topic and texts were chosen by the student.

The course also included short lectures on Mexican and Mexican-American history to provide further background knowledge for some students' self-selected reading. Some very limited grammar instruction was also included, comprising less than 10 percent of class time.

Results and Discussion

Table 4 *(see next page)* summarizes the results of the experimental and comparison group survey on whether they were engaged in pleasure reading in Spanish. The difference between the two groups was found to be statistically significant (Fisher Exact Test, Two Tail, $p < .05$). Among the experimental group, 90 percent said that they continued to do some form of free reading seven months after the end of

the course. Only 45 percent of the comparison group, which had no exposure to FVR or an SNS course, reported any sort of pleasure reading.

As shown in Table 5, when the experimental participants were asked if they were free reading in Spanish more, less, or about the same now as before taking the SNS experimental course, 75 percent responded "more."

While the number of subjects used in the study was admittedly small, the results from the experimental group were impressive given the short period of exposure to an FVR approach. The findings here are consistent with Greaney and Clarke's (1973) work discussed above on the long-term impact of FVR programs. It should be noted that ten weeks may be too short for some students to "get into the habit" of reading. One student from the experimental group noted that "I continued reading for the next quarter but as time went on it became less and less." Still, students reported noting improvements both in their understanding of Spanish and in their attitudes toward pleasure reading. "I enjoyed (the course). I could tell my comprehension and fluidity were improving in Spanish." Participants also expressed satisfaction with the wide selection of readings assigned, which gave them exposure to avenues for further reading.

Summary

The results of the present studies, given their quasiexperimental nature and small sample sizes, can only be suggestive. Nevertheless, they provide encouraging evidence to support the large body of literature showing that FVR programs lead to improved vocabulary knowledge, more positive attitudes toward reading, and more reading in the long term by students exposed to such an approach.

It could be argued that traditional curricula for HL classrooms—grammar instruction, skill-building in reading strategies, vocabulary lists—may be able to match the gains made by an FVR approach in terms of vocabulary growth or overall language development. In the present study, for example, the only direct method comparison between FVR and a traditional course showed the two to do about the same in affecting attitudes toward reading. Even if the case were one of equal gains in proficiency, however, there would still be compelling reasons for high school and university SNS instructors to use FVR. As noted above, FVR is considered more pleasurable, beneficial, and motivating by students exposed to both FVR and skill-building approaches. Moreover, students who participate in FVR *continue* to read in greater numbers than those in traditional approaches after the end of the course, extending their language development beyond the classroom and making them independent learners. It is not likely, on the other hand, that students continue to fill out grammar worksheets after the quarter

TABLE 4

Self-Reported Pleasure Reading in Spanish

Group	Yes	No*
Experimental	90% (9)	10% (1)
Control	44% (8)	56% (10)

* Fisher's Two-Tail Exact Test ($p < .05$)

TABLE 5

Amount of Pleasure Reading in Spanish Before and After Course

Group	More	Less	About the Same
Experimental	60% (6)	20% (2)	20% (2)

has ended. Research on the out-of-class practices of language acquirers suggests that such form-focused self-study is not common (Smith and Supanich 1984, cited in Krashen 1993; McGroarty 1989).

The importance of finding effective methods of helping HL students develop literacy is even more pressing given the process of language shift and loss among bilingual students in the United States. It is clear that exposure to print is needed to ensure further language maintenance and continued acquisition on the part of HL students. Access to books has been found to lead to more reading (Heynes 1978; Houle and Montmarquette 1984), yet many native bilinguals lack access to Spanish reading materials, beginning with the elementary grades (Pucci 1994, Constantino 1994b). The HL classroom may be their last chance to make them truly biliterate.

Moving toward this new model of support for HL literacy will require a certain investment of time and money by HL programs, particularly in gathering together suitable materials for students to read. School and public libraries, local newsstands, and other sources can be tapped in the effort. Teachers will find, however, that FVR methods are actually less labor-intensive in the long run than traditional curricula, since students are not required to fill in worksheets or take lengthy tests that need to be corrected. They only need to find something of interest and read.

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NOTES

[1] A variety of terms has been used to refer to languages other than English in the United States. "Ethnic" is used by several prominent researchers in area of language maintenance (e.g., Hernandez-Chavez 1993; Fishman, Gertner, Lowy, and Milan 1985), and "ancestral" has also been proposed. I use "heritage" here because it is the one most familiar to those in the foreign language field.

[2] The purpose of college-level SNS courses has not always been universally agreed upon. Marjorie Johnston wrote in *Hispania* in 1945 that students in an SNS class should ideally "enlarge their vocabulary, learn to spell, study sentence form, improve oral and written expression, and develop interest, taste, and skills in reading" (Johnston 1945). Valdes-Faltis, Lozano, and Garcia-Moya (1981) advocated concentrating primarily on literacy skills while allowing the student to retain his/her spoken dialect. Zamora (1981) believed that the literacy skills needed in other university Spanish courses should be part of the SNS curriculum, but Faltis (1984) considered that literacy both in and outside the classroom should be emphasized.

[3] The Immediate Recall Protocol is a test of reading comprehension in which students read a passage in their second language and then give a summary in their native language. Students in the experimental group were asked to read a short article from a Spanish-language newspaper the first day of class and write a summary in their dominant language (for almost all the subjects, English). The instructor evaluated their reading comprehension based upon that sample.

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