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Chapter 10

Literature–Based Programs for First Language Development: Giving Native Bilinguals Access to Books

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The benefits of providing language minority (LM) students access to books in terms of literacy and language development has been persuasively argued by several researchers (Krashen, 1993; Pucci, 1994; Constantino, 1994). More access means more reading, and more reading leads to higher levels of literacy and language acquisition. The problem currently facing teachers is how to provide such access. The method is to build literature–based, extensive and free voluntary reading programs into the language arts curriculum. This chapter will detail three separate program models that have been found to be highly effective in giving LM students more access to texts in their first language, leading to increased vocabulary acquisition, positive attitudes toward reading, and long–term reading habits. We will first describe the elements involved in each program model, followed by a short description of the results of evaluation studies conducted to test the effectiveness of each approach used. It is hoped that by detailing the components of the programs, teachers will be able to set up similar models in their elementary, secondary, or university settings.

Model One: Extensive Reading, Free Voluntary Reading, and Classroom Library

Program Elements

The first model was employed in a fifteen-week, intermediate (fourth semester) Spanish class at a large private university. Among the English speaking students enrolled in the course were six native Spanish bilinguals. There were three important elements in the execution of the course.

Extensive Reading

Extensive reading involves the use of mostly popular, easy-to-read literature which is likely to appeal to students' interests and be comprehensible to them. Students were assigned six graded books and two abridged books (see description below). Before beginning the course, none of the students, with the exception of one of the bilingual participants, had read an entire book in Spanish. The class met twice a week for eighty minutes, during which time students could read quietly and discuss their readings with the instructor. Whole-group sessions were planned for each class period, during which the required readings were examined in more depth. Students were required to turn in a short report about each book they read, giving their reactions to the texts. These reports were not graded for grammatical or content accuracy, but rather used as a tool to allow students to respond in some form to their reading. Students were encouraged to read one assigned and one self-selected book each week, as their grade was determined by the number of texts they completed by the end of the semester. The instructor conducted the class sessions in Spanish, although students could respond in the language they felt most comfortable with.

Free Voluntary Reading (FVR)

In FVR, students are allowed to choose their own texts to read (Krashen, 1993). During the course, students were asked to read three

books of their own choosing, keeping a log of the titles and authors and submitting a short reaction report about the book. Students were not required to finish books they did not find interesting or comprehensible. In order to encourage students to find books of their own interest, each week students volunteered to report on their personal reading, commenting on the texts they had chosen. These brief oral reports served to stimulate interest in different texts and create more of a "literacy club" atmosphere among the students (Smith, 1988).

Classroom Library

The use of a classroom library was critical to the success of this model. Morrow (1985) and Routman (1991) (cited in Fractor, Woodruff, Martinez, and Teale, 1993), note that certain features of well-designed classroom libraries increase students' motivation for free reading. These features include:

a. Having a specific place to read: In our program, a special section of the university's School of Education library was employed, called the "Spanish Corner." We were also able to hold class in the library, providing students with immediate access to books.
b. Comfortable atmosphere--Our area was quiet and well lit, and contained enough chairs to accommodate all of the students.
c. Accessibility to books--Students could go directly to the bookshelves to select their texts. Books were displayed in an attractive manner, often with the fronts of the books facing outward.
d. Variety of books--A number of different genres were provided to students in order to satisfy various interests. Texts included children's books, adolescent fiction, literature, history, geography, and comic books.

Types of Materials Used

The type of materials used in this model were typical of those employed in extensive and free reading programs (Cook, Dupuy, and Tse, in press). They included:

a. Graded Readers--Graded readers are books that have been edited, simplified, or written in such a manner as to be more comprehensible to second language learners. The graded readers

turned out to be an excellent resource for the native bilingual students, as they allowed them to build up their confidence in reading, an important element found in other programs (Nash and Yun-Pi, 1992/3). This was an excellent "jumping off point" for students into the world of Spanish reading.

b. Light or Popular Literature--By light reading, we mean unabridged texts written for native speakers that are not "classical" literature or technical works. For most students, this type of reading constituted the second stage of their reading, beyond the graded readers. There are a number of different types of popular reading that were used, including:
   - Children's books--While easy to understand, some books may not provide interesting topics for students, especially adults, although they might be of use to younger students.
   - Adolescent fiction--This proved to be the most popular resource, as the books were both understandable and contained sufficiently adult themes to captivate the students' interest. As with other second language learners (Cho and Krashen, 1994), the *Sweet Valley High* series proved successful with students.
   - Comics--Students had a variety of comic books available. This did not prove to be a major source of reading for most students, however, perhaps because of the amount of slang and colloquial expressions found in many of these publications.
   - Newspapers and magazines--Students generally enjoyed reading Spanish newspapers and magazines, which had the advantage of providing some comprehensible text for every level and interest (e.g. sports, fashion, politics, etc.).

Literature and Expository Texts

More complex, unabridged books were also used by some students, including short stories, encyclopedias, and history books. This served as the final stage for those students, including many of the native bilinguals, who had passed through the light reading and wanted more adult-level content. The assigned graded readers all focused on a common topic, in this case detective stories. The decision to use a unifying theme considered to be of interest to university students was based on the recommendations for "narrow reading" by Krashen (1985) and Anderson and Pikulski (1992). Narrow reading gives the reader the

advantage of context, characters, and recurring vocabulary from book to book, allowing him/her to build upon previous knowledge and thus make the language of the text more comprehensible.

When students were ready for the light reading stage, a common problem was their inability to find books which matched their interests, a key variable in promoting pleasure reading (Nell, 1988). Often, if a book was interesting, it was too difficult, and if it was easy, it was not interesting. The instructor strove to find books that fit both criteria by adopting a method used by Ross (1978) in selecting texts for elementary students. First, the instructor asked each student to make a list of topics they might be interested in reading about. Second, the instructor attempted to find texts on these topics or in these genres, and gave the texts to the students to inspect. Third, students are instructed to flip through the books to see if they are both interesting and comprehensible. Fourth, students showed a book they had selected to the instructor, who could then give the students some background on the topic (if possible) and help them decide whether they wanted to read it. Fifth, students started reading the book, continuing if they found it enjoyable, stopping and selecting a new book if they did not.

Program Evaluation

In order to determine what effect the program had on the six bilinguals who participated in the program, a vocabulary checklist (Rodrigo, 1994) used to measure growth in passive word knowledge as well as an Affective Survey designed by the researchers were administered to the students. The results indicated that all six students made gains in the vocabulary in just one semester, an average of 6% on the checklist. In the affective survey, five of the six students said they enjoyed reading in Spanish more after taking the course, and all six felt that their competency in Spanish reading had improved over the fifteen-week semester. Some comments from open-ended questions on the survey included:

> "I liked the fact that there was no testing...I actually felt the results of my improved reading comprehension as [the program] was going on." "The material was interesting in that it helped me gain a better handle on Spanish." "By reading subjects that interested me, I grew to understand more about Latin American views and learn Spanish writing techniques I was not familiar with."

Model Two: Popular Literature Survey and Literature Circles

Program Elements

The second program model was used in a special Spanish for Native Speakers course in a medium-sized public university in the southwest. Twenty students (six men, fourteen women) enrolled in the ten week course, which satisfied their foreign language requirement at the university. 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 into equal segments among the three areas. The reading components are described below.

Popular Literature Survey

While the bulk of the course was devoted toward self-selected reading, a packet of twenty assigned readings, which contained examples of a large range of genres, including children's literature, Chicano poetry, newspaper articles, and academic reports, was also included in the curriculum. The instructor also brought in popular materials (newspapers, magazines, adolescent and adult literature) for students to examine and check out. There were three 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 (such as those described in Model One--comics, short stories, poetry, novels, essays, plays) would provide students with some background to make more informed choices in their free reading. Second, although the level of the assigned reading was at times too difficult for some students, heterogeneous small groups were formed in class to allow lesser proficient readers to discuss the assigned material with better readers, giving them an opportunity to increase their confidence in oral skills as well. Finally, the cultural themes in the readings gave the class common points of discussion each week.

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 a self–selected book discussion group called a "literature circle" (MacGillivray, Tse, and McQuillan, 1995). The instructor made grouping suggestions based on approximate reading level of the students as determined by a short English summary of a Spanish newspaper article, but the final decision of grouping was left entirely to the students. Some students chose to group themselves by interest, others according to perceived ability in Spanish reading proficiency or oral fluency. It was up to each group to decide what they were going to read and discuss during the thirty–minute time slot allotted to literature circles during each class period.

As in Model One, students were encouraged to ask the instructor's advice as to possible books, since even after a few weeks of being familiarized with various genres and authors, many students felt unsure of what was available to read. The instructor gave recommendations depending on perceived interest and language proficiency (e.g. *Como agua para chocolate* by Laura Esquivel, the poems of Pablo Neruda, children's stories, *Cosmopolitan* magazine, some adolescent novels). Many groups took the instructor's suggestions, others did not. Two literature circles began by reading nonfiction magazines, 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 of reading was determined entirely by the individual groups. The most proficient groups read two novels and 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. Performance in the groups was never formally evaluated by the instructor, although students did decide to give peer evaluations as part of a student–determined participation grade.

Program Evaluation

As in Model One, changes in vocabulary growth were measured by a vocabulary checklist developed by Rodrigo (1994). The results (reported in full in McQuillan, 1995) indicated that the group made significant gains in word knowledge in just ten weeks of the program, averaging 8%, a considerable feat considering that no formal evaluation or vocabulary instruction was employed. 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 direct instruction (Nagy, Herman, & Anderson, 1987; Krashen, 1989, 1993).

An Affective Survey was also administered to the students and, for the purposes of comparison, a control group of nineteen students (nine men, ten women). It was comprised of a combination of traditional grammar exercises and assigned culture readings with essay writing assignments and quizzes. While no measure of reading attitudes was conducted before the course began, there were no significant differences between the two groups as to their pleasure reading habits at the beginning of the semester. Students responded to statements on their attitudes and practices on a Likert-style 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 statistical tests were conducted on the resulting figures for comparison and experimental groups. Given that the forms were completed anonymously, there was little incentive for the students to "please" the instructor with their responses.

The results of the survey of attitudes toward Spanish literacy of the experimental and control groups are shown in Table 1 (from McQuillan, 1995). As noted above, neither group reported much pleasure reading (Question 1) before enrolling in the SNS course (less than 17% from both groups), with no significant difference between the two classes. Both groups reported having significantly more positive attitudes as a result of taking the SNS course. The difference between the two groups at the end of the quarter was not statistically significant (Question 2 only). VR methods, then, were as effective as assigned readings and traditional skills instruction in improving students' attitudes toward Spanish reading. Both classes reported that the SNS courses improved their confidence in reading (75% of the total), while again there was no difference between the two groups (Question 3). It should be

emphasized that the control group, like the experimental group, also used some cultural readings in class, which may have contributed to those students' positive attitudes toward reading after the course.

Table 1. Reading Habits and Attitudes of Native Spanish Bilinguals (n=39)

1. Before taking this class, I would read in Spanish for pleasure.

Experimental		Control	
Yes	No	Yes	No
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.

Experimental		Control	
Yes	No	Yes	No
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.

Experimental		Control	
Yes	No	Yes	No
80%(16)	20%(4)	68%(13)	32%(6)

4. I would recommend this course to a friend to help them improve their reading and writing in Spanish.

Experimental		Control	
Yes	No	Yes	No
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.

Experimental		Control	
Yes	No	Yes	No
75%(15)	25%(5)	53%(10)	47%(7)

Moreover, the treatment period was extremely short in comparison to other FVR programs reported on 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. Longer periods of

FVR exposure, or comparisons to a more strictly skills-oriented course, may have produced results more clearly favoring the free reading students, as in other studies.

Students were asked if they would recommend the course to a friend to help them improve their Spanish reading and writing (Question #4). Again, the overwhelming majority said "yes." Finally, students were asked if the course improved their knowledge of sources of popular and literary reading material. More than three fourths of the experimental group answered affirmatively (76%), as did a little over half from the control group (53%), although these differences did not reach statistical significance.

The experimental group was also asked to fill out an additional survey on a number of specific points related to the functioning of their literature circles. While no control group comparisons are 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 2. 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.

Table 2. Attitudes Toward Literature Circles by Experimental Group (n=20)

	Yes	No
1. 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)

As shown in Table 2, 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: self-selected, free voluntary reading 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 interesting 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.

Students did not find the presence of the teacher observing their circles to be inhibiting (Question 5). This is perhaps because they knew there was no teacher evaluation of the groups, and that the instructor made an attempt only to "listen in" without interfering with the flow of the discussion.

Model Three: Popular Literature Survey, Outside Reading, and Inquiry Learning

Program Elements

The third program model was also used in a similar class as that employed in Model Two, a university Spanish for Native Speakers course. There were ten students (three men, seven women) who enrolled in the course and agreed to be evaluated for the study (McQuillan, 1995). The main elements of the course were:

Popular Literature Survey

The same method as described in Model Two was used.

Weekly Free Voluntary Reading

Students were asked to read an average of ten articles per week from either *La Opinion* newspaper, a Spanish language magazine, or an equivalent amount of reading from children's, adolescent, or adult literature books. 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, similar to that done in Model One. Students were asked to comment on what they were reading, and were

given time in class to ask questions about material they did not understand. This component provided the bulk of the FVR in the course. 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.

Individual Inquiry Learning Project

Each student carried out a ten-week project related to some aspect of interest in Spanish language or Latino culture. 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 their work. Others decided to read a novel or short stories in Spanish in addition to their weekly FVR. Although a grade was assigned to the project, the topics 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, usually comprising less than 10% of class time.

The grade was determined in the following manner:

Student reading log:	25%
Inquiry Learning:	50%
Lecture Quizzes:	15%
Grammar Quizzes:	10%

Note that 75% of the grade was related to self-selected, extensive reading.

Program Evaluation

Approximately seven months after the end of the course, the experimental course students were asked to fill out a Literacy Practices Survey created by the researchers. For the purposes of comparison, a control group of eighteen SNS students (five men, thirteen women) who

had not participated in the FVR course were also surveyed. This was done in order to determine if those who had been exposed to FVR had significantly different reading habits than those who had not. Table 3 summarizes the results of the experimental and control group survey. The difference between the two groups was found to be statistically significant. Among the experimental group, 90% said that they continued to do some form of free reading seven months after the end of the course. Only 45% of the control group, which had no exposure to FVR, reported any sort of pleasure reading. These results are similar to those reported by Greaney and Clarke (1973), who also found that FVR has long-term effects. In their study of sixth-grade boys, they discovered that those who had participated in an FVR program were reading more than those who had not *six years* after the end of the course.

Table 3. Self-Selected Pleasure Reading in Spanish

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

When the experimental participants were asked if they were free reading in Spanish more, less, or about the same now than before taking the SNS experimental course, 75% responded "more."

While the number of subjects was admittedly small, the results from the experimental group were impressive given the short period of exposure to an FVR approach. It should be noted that ten weeks may be too short for some students to "get into the habit" of reading. One student 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.

Implications: Providing More Access

The three models presented here of providing language minority

students with access to print are by no means exhaustive. Other ideas to expose and encourage literacy have been suggested that were not used in these models, including Sustained Silent Reading (e.g., Pilgreen and Krashen, 1994) where students are provided fifteen to thirty minutes each day to read self-selected materials; and Read Alouds (Trelease, 1982), where stories are read to students during class to encourage interest in books. These models have been successful in getting LM students interested in reading, resulting in gains in vocabulary and increased interest in improving their Spanish literacy.

There is an important obstacle to the implementation of any book-based program of the type advocated here--namely, obtaining a supply of books! Teachers will need to be creative in their solutions, perhaps appealing to local public libraries and finding other low-cost alternatives. What is certain from the experience of the teachers who participated in the programs outlined in this chapter is that, after a certain investment of time at the beginning of the project, the rewards were not only greater interest by students in reading, but a lessened workload for the teacher. Most of the elements in the models do not require a great deal of teacher time, since students take responsibility for reading. There are no worksheets to correct and no exams to grade. More importantly, teachers have the satisfaction of knowing that students will continue reading on their own long after they leave their classrooms.

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