

A call for critical and open pedagogies in Spanish heritage language instruction: Students as knowledge producers of Open Educational Resources (OERs)

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ABSTRACT

EN This paper stresses the urgent need to implement critical and open pedagogies in language teaching, especially in the Spanish heritage language classroom. Language courses are often compulsory in secondary and higher education and typically employ traditional pedagogical models that are structured by grammar and/or communication tasks. This study introduces how heritage language teaching emerged as a field of study in the United States and offers a brief overview of critical and open pedagogies and their connection to open educational resources. This paper then introduces critical and open pedagogies to teaching Spanish as a heritage language, followed by a critical look at the existing Spanish teaching material. As an alternative to this material, this article shares a project titled “Discovering El Barrio” which addresses an innovative and productive pedagogical practice carried out by a Spanish heritage language class at Lehman College, CUNY. In this project, Spanish heritage language learners (HLL) became producers of authentic teaching and learning materials for second language (L2) Spanish learners.

Key words: SPANISH HERITAGE LANGUAGE, LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES, CRITICAL PEDAGOGY, OPEN EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES (OERs)

ES Este artículo subraya la urgente necesidad de implantar pedagogías críticas y abiertas en la enseñanza de lenguas, especialmente en el aula de español como lengua de herencia. Los cursos de idiomas suelen ser obligatorios en la enseñanza secundaria y superior, y suelen emplear modelos pedagógicos tradicionales estructurados por tareas gramaticales y/o comunicativas. Este estudio introduce cómo surgió la enseñanza de lenguas de herencia como campo de estudio en Estados Unidos y ofrece una visión general de las pedagogías críticas y abiertas y su conexión con los recursos educativos abiertos (REA). Se presentan pedagogías críticas y abiertas específicas para la enseñanza del español como lengua de herencia (ELH), seguidas de una mirada crítica al material existente para la enseñanza del español. Como alternativa a este material, este artículo comparte un proyecto titulado “Descubriendo El Barrio” que aborda una práctica pedagógica innovadora y productiva llevada a cabo por una clase de ELH en Lehman College, CUNY. En este proyecto, los estudiantes de ELH se convirtieron en productores de materiales auténticos de enseñanza-aprendizaje para estudiantes de español como segunda lengua (L2).

Palabras clave: ESPAÑOL COMO LENGUA DE HERENCIA, IDEOLOGÍAS LINGÜÍSTICAS, PEDAGOGÍA CRÍTICA, RECURSOS EDUCATIVOS ABIERTOS (REA)

IT L'articolo evidenzia l'urgente bisogno dell'attuazione di pedagogie critiche ed aperte nell'insegnamento delle lingue, in particolare modo nella classe di spagnolo come lingua ereditaria. I corsi di lingua spesso sono obbligatori nell'istruzione secondaria e universitaria e solitamente adottano modelli pedagogici strutturati su esercizi di grammatica e/o di comunicazione. Questo studio illustra come l'insegnamento delle lingue ereditarie sia emerso come campo di studi negli Stati Uniti e propone una breve rassegna delle pedagogie critiche ed aperte e la loro relazione con le risorse didattiche aperte (Open Educational Resources, OERs). L'articolo introduce le pedagogie critiche ed aperte per l'insegnamento dello spagnolo come lingua ereditaria e offre uno sguardo critico sui materiali esistenti per l'insegnamento. Come alternativa a tali materiali, il documento presenta il progetto intitolato “Alla scoperta di El Barrio”, che riguarda una pratica didattica innovativa realizzata da una classe di spagnolo come lingua ereditaria presso il Lehman College, CUNY. All'interno del progetto, gli apprendenti di spagnolo come lingua ereditaria sono diventati gli ideatori di materiali d'insegnamento e di apprendimento autentici, per apprendenti dello spagnolo come lingua seconda (L2).

Parole chiave: SPAGNOLO COME LINGUA EREDITARIA, IDEOLOGIE LINGUISTICHE, PEDAGOGIA CRITICA, RISORSE DIDATTICHE APERTE

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1. Introduction: The teaching of Spanish in the United States

Despite changes in the United States bilingual education policies over the years, these policies continue to reproduce monoglossic ideologies (Wiley & García, 2016), casting Spanish as a language of poverty used by Latines¹ and as a negotiable resource used by bilinguals in the United States. Language education policies and practices do not allow U.S. Latines to negotiate Spanish as a resource; rather, they are encouraged to shift to English, leaving not only Spanish behind but also any prospects in the Spanish/English bilingual market as well (García & Mason, 2008). Despite its constant presence in the United States, Spanish has mostly been shaped as immigrant and foreign in education as well as social contexts (Lozano, 2018), thus ignoring a heteroglossic perspective and reinforcing monoglossic teaching paradigms, with direct consequences not just in the educational spaces but also in the work force. In a recent analysis by Lara Alonso and Laura Villa, based on the reproduction of the discursive trope of language profit in the United States, they state, “The marginalized position of Latinxs in the social structure and the racialization of their linguistic practices result in a linguistic exploitation that remains unchallenged in the US” (2020, p. 37). In order to acknowledge that Spanish is not a foreign language in the United States, there is the urgent need to engage with critical pedagogy frameworks to challenge the teaching and learning paradigms that continue to reproduce these monoglossic ideologies which conceive Spanish as a static object of study with no consideration to the political nature of the language itself.

The presence of heritage languages (HL) and heritage language learners (HLL) in the educational system in the United States is not a new development (Fishman, 2001; Roca, 1997; Valdés, 2005). Nevertheless, it was not until the 1970s that there was an explicit reference to HLL from many language teaching organizations. After the Bilingual Education Act was signed in 1968, an article was published in the *Modern Language Journal* following the annual meeting of the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese (AATSP) in New York City, titled “Spanish and Portuguese Cease to Be Foreign” (Teschner, 1973). This was the first time that both language organizations, the AATSP along with the Modern Language Association (MLA), officially addressed the fact that there were Spanish-speaking learners within the “foreign” language classroom and, therefore, teachers would have to be aware of their different educational needs (Potowski & Carreira, 2004). Consequently, as Gutiérrez explains, “these language learners require a pedagogical perspective that values their backgrounds and experiences instead of treating them as beginners” (1997, p. 34).

Despite the diversity of their student populations, some colleges and high schools did not offer heritage language courses until the turn of the 21st century. However, since then, there has been an exponential growth of Spanish HL program throughout universities in the United States (Beaudrie & Fairclough, 2012). By the end of 1990s, there was a re-emergence of heritage language as a field of study within the academic setting (Wiley, 2005). This was the turning point for heritage language education, with the first of many national conferences (the first one in 1999, followed by the second one in 2002) and specialized publications, such as the *Heritage Language Journal*. And yet, the increased visibility also brought new questions and challenges².

In spite of the permanent presence of and exposure to Spanish in the United States, it is a language that mostly remains labeled as immigrant and foreign (Del Valle & García, 2013; Lozano, 2018), and there is a tendency to construct its teaching as the teaching of a foreign language (Alonso, 2006; Pomerantz & Schwartz, 2011). As advocates for critical pedagogies in language teaching demonstrate through their work, the teaching of Spanish, or any other language, as a heritage language differs from its teaching as a second language. For further insights, see the work of Daniel Villa (1996, 2002, 2005), Jennifer Leeman (2005, 2014, 2018), Glenn Martínez (2003, 2016), Sara Beaudrie (2015), along with Damian Vergara Wilson (2021) and Claudia Holguín Mendoza (2018, 2021), among others. The commitment of these scholars has demonstrated the need to contextualize and critically examine historical constructions, as well as the social and political implications of academic and standard language ideologies and linguistic hierarchies (Aparicio, 1997).

This article gives an overview of the development of the teaching of Spanish as a heritage language within the United States and advocates for the application of critical and open pedagogies within the field. In

¹ My intention is to make visible the use of “e” as an alternative to “x” for language inclusivity in Spanish since the latter has encountered some political resistance and the former allows for greater legibility.

² Although it is outside the scope of this paper, since I am advocating for critical and open approaches to language teaching, I would like to acknowledge the problematic labeling of “heritage learner/language.” While in the field of HL education this label has been settled, this terminology has been contested in bilingual education. For further discussion of this point see García (2005) and Van Deusen-Scholl (2003).

addition to this brief history about the emergence of the field, I also present a critical consideration of the instruction materials available for language instruction. Finally, I share “Discovering El Barrio” as a case study of a project born in response to this need to challenge the traditional pedagogies in language teaching to HL. This project illustrates critical and open pedagogies within language instruction where HLL students created, produced, and edited videos based in East Harlem, resulting in publicly accessible authentic teaching and learning materials for L2 Spanish learners beyond the physical classroom. After a description of the project, its methodology, and its scaffolded delivery, I conclude with a reflection about its affordances and constraints, along with further directions to consider for replicating and enhancing the project.

2. Spanish heritage language teaching: An overview

Guadalupe Valdés (1981) was one of the first scholars to take action on the topic of Spanish HLL (also known as Spanish for Native Speakers, or SNS) within the classroom environment. She pointed out that Spanish could not be treated as a foreign language in the United States and drew attention to the subtractive and discriminatory teaching theories and strategies of the time. Valdés compared the teaching of Spanish to the teaching of English and advocated for teaching Spanish as a native language. Valdés called on language instructors to end discriminatory approaches that seek to replace non-standard varieties with standard ones, and instead, recognize the legitimacy of all linguistic varieties.

Sergio Loza and Sara Beaudrie’s introduction to their book (2022) provides a concise historical overview of Spanish HL teaching practices. They chronologically differentiate three waves: the first wave (1981-1999), the second wave (2000-2012) and the third wave (2012-2022). The first wave reinforced monolingual ideologies with an approach that sidelined or even eliminated the multiple contributions of U.S. Latines from any intellectual, cultural, and linguistic perspective within the higher education setting (Loza & Beaudrie, 2022, p. 5). On the contrary, the second wave evolved to include the “development and implementation of sociolinguistically informed pedagogies” (p. 6) and on increasing students’ linguistic repertoire, and/or improving their standardized versions of the language. In other words, the second wave sought to familiarize students with a more formal and academic variety of the language than that which they already speak at home. According to this approach, students who are speakers of non-prestige varieties acquire the more prestigious one, standard variety through education with a language-as-a-resource goal since the language functions as a tool to gain academic and professional success in the future (Beaudrie, Ducar & Potowski, 2014; Ricento, 2005). In addition to the acquisition of this prestige variety, the term “appropriateness” comes into play in order to validate students’ language use in certain contexts. This is sometimes illustrated through analogies between language use and clothing—for instance, it is appropriate to wear a bathing suit when you go swimming but not when you go to a wedding (Potowski, 2016). The understanding that the “variety” that one speaks depends on a specific context upholds the status of prestige varieties, including the standard one (Gutiérrez, 1997). Beaudrie’s findings (2015), based on the analysis of Spanish HL syllabi at a national level, illustrate how pedagogical changes take place gradually since teachers/instructors at the time were still imputing the standard language ideology in their SHL courses (p. 15).

In the global context that we inhabit, Claire Kramsch (2006) calls for a language teaching pedagogy that strives to move beyond the goal of communicative competence (i.e., Communicative Language Teaching, or CLT approach). Taking into account social and economic inequalities as well as historicities—past, present and future—she advocates for symbolic competence: “language learners are not just communicators and problem solvers, but whole personas with hearts, bodies, and minds, with memories, fantasies, loyalties, identities” (p. 251). Within this context, the 2007 MLA report represented a crucial moment with its explicitly acknowledgment of the need to aim for a “translingual and transcultural competence” in language teaching. The report emphasizes how international borders are transformed and reinvented by advances in new technologies and suggests that the objectives of language classes can no longer be understood as foreign. However, as Jennifer Leeman and Ellen Serafini (2016) point out, this report continues to envision students as monolingual speakers gaining proficiency in a target language, a language based on an idealized standard variety. Leeman and Serafini offer a sociolinguistic perspective on teaching HL, providing a list of concepts to be incorporated by teachers and students (i.e., linguistic variation, language attitudes and ideologies, contact language phenomenon). Leeman and Serafini also offer task examples that illustrate the pedagogical practices that truly promotes translingual competence.

This sociolinguistic approach illustrates the need to problematize the normative assumptions that are taken for granted, examine the notion of power associated with them, and interrogate how they operate at linguistic and extra-linguistic levels in different contexts and social practices by establishing the relevant connections with issues of identity and agency (Pennycook, 2001). Language(s) are more than a simple set of linguistic norms, and critical approaches to language teaching must be aware that these norms are conventional and based on social consensus. Consequently, although our social practices tend toward normativity, our pedagogical practices must question them. The idealized notion of standard language is, in itself, a language ideology that is constructed by specific agents within concrete sociohistorical processes (Lippi-Green, 2011; Milroy & Milroy, 1991). From early on, Daniel Villa (1996) challenged the notion of the existence of a “standard variety” of Spanish, and Glenn Martínez’s (2003) provided a perspective that problematized the status of the language itself by questioning the power dynamics behind social stratification. The beginning of the 21st century, with the work of Leeman (2005) and Martínez (2003), ushered in a “critical turn” in language teaching. This third wave (Loza & Beaudrie, 2022) constitutes a step forward, not just from a pedagogical standpoint but also at a broader social level which targets students’ consciousness. This approach seeks to highlight the stratification of dialects within the social structure and the power implications upholding the notion of a *standard* or *prestige* variety. This third wave is characterized by scholars in the HL field developing a critical approach to language teaching (Pascual y Cabo & Prada, 2016). This wave includes work on HL curricular design and anti-racist pedagogies (Beaudrie, Amezcua & Loza, 2021; Lacorte & Magro 2021), and the institutionalization and HL program direction (Beaudrie & Loza, 2021; Carreira, 2017).

Alongside this approach, José Del Valle (2014) posits that it is necessary to think about the social and political positions that shape teachers’ pedagogical practices. He emphasizes the importance of being aware of factors such as ideological forces, institutional requirements, the teacher’s decisions about dialectal choices, among many others, all of which encourage students to become conscious of the situation. Building on this line of work on developing students’ awareness, Leeman and Martínez’s research points to the Critical Language Awareness (CLA) approaches and its curricular development within HL education (Holguín Mendoza, 2018, 2021; Holguín Mendoza, Davis, & Weise, 2018). Leeman’s (2005, 2014) interdisciplinarity pedagogical perspective for Spanish HLL includes disciplines such as literature, film and cultural studies, anthropology, and sociolinguistics. Above all, it highlights the necessity of developing students’ agency and critical awareness. This approach tasks instructors with “envisioning the classroom as a politicized space in which students’ lived experiences as US Latinx bilinguals are surfaced, recognized as legitimate, and contextualized within larger societal powers structures” (Loza & Beaudrie, 2022, p. 9). Following this framework, it must be understood that languages are not natural units, instead they are social constructions; languages are politically defined categories (García & Otheguy, 2015; Otheguy, García, & Reid, 2015). According to this argument, this project is situated within a critical pedagogical framework that aims to:

help students critically understand their own lives and worlds, develop agency in making their own language choices, and participate in the building of a more democratic society, educators must take the relationship between language and sociopolitical issues explicit, provide opportunities for students to examine and interrogate dominant linguistics practices and hierarchies, and encourage students to explore the ways language can be used to perform a wide range of social functions and identity work (Leeman, 2005, p. 36).

In this way, by emphasizing the need to think about the political, historical and social experiences that shape the pedagogical practice of the teacher, language is understood as more than a communicative tool. Its symbolic value allows it to be placed in a social context that affords critical examination of the roles of the speakers, the language itself, and its function within society.

3. Pedagogical framework(s): Critical/open pedagogies & open educational resources (OERs)

Critical approaches to teaching are not a new phenomenon. Within the context of the United States, Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (1921-1997) is well known for his critique of the “banking system” of education that describes the one-way system in which students assimilate the knowledge provided by the teacher (Freire, 1994). Contrary to a “banking” model that consists mostly of memorization and drill practice, Freire advocates for a “problem-solving” methodology where “people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static

reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation” (Freire, 1994, p. 64). As educator Luisa Parra illustrates through her Spanish teaching experience, these pedagogical frameworks create opportunities for students to expand on their social consciousness and reflect on their positionality to act and have an impact for the possibility of a more inclusive future (Parra, 2013, p. 257).

Within this framework of critical pedagogy, there is an emphasis on dialogue and community building, fostering students’ inquiry and agency and motivating students to be active critical thinkers. As Jesse Stommel explains, “Critical Pedagogy is concerned less with knowing and more with a voracious not-knowing. It is an on-going and recursive process of discovery” (2014). These critical pedagogy methods offer new possibilities, especially if we consider affordances of digital spaces to do this work. In this vein, many scholars have highlighted the shared aims of critical pedagogies and open pedagogies, which seek to harness the power of digital technologies to expand opportunities for teaching and learning (Rosen & Smale, 2015; Stommel, 2014). According to Robin DeRosa and Rajiv Jhangiani, open pedagogy

is a site of praxis, a place where theories about learning, teaching, technology, and social justice enter into a conversation with each other and inform the development of educational practices and structures. This site is dynamic, contested, constantly under revision, and resists static definitional claims (2017, para. 2).

While both terms share the same foundations and, as indicated, their hybridity could make them synonymous, it is worth reinforcing their shared vision for the possibilities offered by technology and open digital tools: for this reason, the term Open Digital Pedagogy is useful as well. As Jody Rosen and Maura Smale explain,

Open digital pedagogy is the use of cost-free, publicly available online tools and platforms by instructors and students for teaching, learning, and communicating in support of educational goals, can [...] facilitate student access to existing knowledge, and empower them to critique it, dismantle it, and create new knowledge (2015, para. 2).

Although we may encounter multiple explanations for these terms, many of them emphasize and embrace the push for Open Educational Resources (OERs), as the above definition demonstrates. Despite the fact that in most cases OERs are understood and praised as easily accessible and free materials, the notion of “open” entails different layers of accessibility, frequently supported by Creative Commons licenses, giving the educational materials multiple degrees for being reused, remixed, revised, redistribute and retained. Aside from cost, the use of OERs offers a path for pedagogical experimentation and changes, including many creative possibilities that allow collaboration between students and faculty to create and design pedagogical materials for intended courses and specific purposes (DeRosa & Robinson, 2017, p. 116). These approaches facilitate the expansion of teaching and learning beyond the classroom where students can be thought of as knowledge creators, having an audience and an impact on their institutions and communities.

Regarding existing Spanish teaching OERs, most instruction material has replicated the same grammar-based teaching and learning practices from textbooks with traditional methodologies based on drills, filling in the blanks, and closed-question activities. These resources often focus on teaching the core skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) with a multiplicity of approaches that cover grammar, vocabulary, and culture. Nevertheless, while these traditional paradigms remain predominant, there are some exceptions. These materials do not simply focus on acquiring the necessary and/or demanded linguistics skills; they also cover metalinguistic issues and facilitate interdisciplinary collaborations. For instance, The Center for Open Educational Resources and Language Learning (COERLL)³ is one of the sixteen National Foreign Language Resources Center institutes among language educators that mainly focuses on the creation and dissemination of OERs. More concrete initiatives include The Foreign Languages and the Literary in the Everyday (FLLITE)⁴, which is sponsored by the same center as COERLL. FLLITE provides a collaborative space that builds on a “multiliteracies” approach and emphasizes language play in second language literacy. Another initiative is the Empowering Learners of Spanish material led by Claudia Holguín Mendoza and her team that builds on critical pedagogies to introduce sociolinguistic issues (Vañó García, 2019). Additionally, there is MI-BRIDGE, a task-based, open-access Spanish language curriculum that centers Blackness in Latin America and Black language learners, funded by the National Endowment from the Humanities (Baralt, Clemons, Anya & Gómez, 2022).

³ For more information: <http://www.coerll.utexas.edu/coerll/>.

⁴ For more information: <https://fllite.org/>.

3.1. A critical look at Spanish instruction material

Within the pedagogical framework of second languages, textbooks are considered to be artifacts that transmit specific knowledge to students. In other words, they are seen as tools that teachers/instructors use to communicate a message to their students. Textbooks are "central classroom literature that drives instructional scope and sequence and generates the goals and objectives of second language acquisition" (Pardiñas-Barnes, 1998, p. 230). According to Renate Schulz (1990), critiques of second language textbooks in the United States are based primarily on four aspects: (1) the need to reduce grammatical content, (2) a change from a grammatical organization of syllabi to a more functional organization, (3) the need to include authentic material, and (4) the creation of content that conveys an intellectual challenge for students. Spanish textbooks are no exception. According to Cubillos (2014), "textbooks frequently dictate the content, sequence and pace of our language curricula, and their influence expands even to the teaching methodology deployed by language faculty in their classrooms" (p. 206). Thus, textbooks become the primary instrument within the classroom, dictating content, curricular sequence, and the teaching methodology.

The study by Víctor Arizpe and Benigno Aguirre (1987), which covers seven Spanish textbooks published between 1975-1984 at the elementary university level, analyzes how the representation of Mexican, Cuban, and Puerto Rican ethnic groups is presented with excessive cultural simplification and, therefore, with the frequent use of racial and ethnic stereotypes. Arnulfo Ramírez and Joan Hall (1990), focusing on books intended for the teaching of the Spanish language in secondary school, examine how these textbooks consider topics of abstract content, without human interaction, and without consideration of social class issues. Using the same assessment framework, Deborah Herman (2007) focuses on four other contemporary Spanish textbooks, also used by high schools in the United States, and advocates for a pedagogical change in language instruction that allows a framework for promoting reflection and critical inquiry.

In another study, Ali Zaidi (2010) examines how characters are represented in three Spanish textbooks, noting the absence of historical and sociological contextualization. This absence perpetuates socioeconomic inequalities that, at the same time, perpetuate a hierarchy based on colonial imperialism. Taking these conclusions into account, Hugo Hortiguera's work (2011) examines the audio-visual materials that accompany language textbooks, concluding that: these videos do not question these representations, on the contrary, they confirm and verify them in the Spanish classroom itself. By means of a complex device of generalizations, abstractions, omissions, contrasts or inferences, the other is relegated to a folkloric space and identified with values of frivolity, entertainment, and hedonism (Hortiguera, 2011, "Conclusions," para. 3) (translations, unless otherwise indicated, are my own).

More recently, the work of Lillie Padilla and Rosti Vana (2022) discusses the erasure of Afro-Latinx representation in Spanish textbooks, revealing how Black students are significantly underrepresented in college language programs. These erasures demonstrate the pressing need for more inclusive and equitable language teaching practices that include all students, making the work on Critical Race Pedagogy by Uju Anya (2021) and the MI BRIDGE OER curriculum that centers Blackness in Latin America and Black language learners (Baralt, Clemons, Anya & Gómez, 2022) especially important.

A critical approach takes into account the conditions of production in which the text is conceived as a cultural artifact (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991). As can be seen in this approach, the book can never have a neutral value, since it has an economic and symbolic value within a market:

they are at once the results of political, economic, and cultural activities, battles, and compromises. They are conceived, designed, and authored by real people with real interests. They are published within the political and economic constraints of markets, and what texts mean and how they are used are fought over by communities with distinctly different commitments and by teachers and students as well. (Apple & Christian-Smith, 1991, p. 1-2).

Bearing in mind this perspective in which books are also economic goods with a value within a linguistic and economic market (Bourdieu, 1991), we consider textbooks as organizers of the knowledge system of society. That is to say, that the information and material that is included is considered legitimate and true by its producers and receivers, constructing, producing and reproducing a determined vision of both linguistic and social reality. It is within this perspective that we find the work of Leeman and Martínez (2007), in which a critical analysis of linguistic ideologies is carried out in the discourses of the Spanish manuals for Spanish HL published between 1920 and 1950. What separates this study from the previous ones is the

consideration of the market of production of materials, which makes visible the highly normative linguistic-ideological regimes mobilized by social, economic, historical, and political causes, and which necessarily have implications in pedagogical practices.

4. “Discovering El Barrio”: Students as knowledge producers

Heritage language teaching requires critical consideration of historical and social contexts. In the past, pedagogical models and instructional materials for teaching Spanish, especially HL Spanish, have been found to lack these aspects. Textbooks overlook cultural and linguistic differences and provide content that guides instructors towards more traditional, banking models of education. As an example of ways to counter this tendency, the “Discovering El Barrio” project applies critical and open pedagogies models in a Spanish HL course. As part of these critical teaching methods, students contributed to the development of OER in the form of HL teaching audio-visual materials. This approach acknowledges that students are producers of knowledge, and by providing an alternative to the traditional instructional textbooks, a priority is given to material that incorporates social and historical authentic contexts and engage all Spanish speakers.

This project was conducted during the fall semester of 2017 at Lehman College, The City University of New York (CUNY). Located in the Bronx, Lehman College is one of the twenty-five public colleges within the CUNY system and is federally recognized as a Hispanic-Serving Institution (HSI). Students who enrolled in *SPA 114: Elementary Spanish for Heritage Speakers II* (SPA 114) were placed in class in one of two ways: either they completed the previous language class (*Spanish for Heritage Speakers I*), or they placed via a placement test. This test is not only based on proficiency; it also contains questions regarding students’ background information in order to know more about their language experience. In this institution, 90-95% of students are taking SPA 114 in order to satisfy the language requirement of the college, and only a small minority decide to minor in Spanish.

By the end of the semester, students were expected to be able to: (1) develop their agency and feel comfortable making their own language choices; (2) question and think critically about the connection between language and power in order to challenge the established societal status quo; (3) question how (our) linguistic practices influence current socio-political issues; (4) develop their literacy skills: reading (read critically, interpret, and discuss texts from different genres) and writing (write descriptive and argumentative compositions, become aware of the academic conventions within institutions); and (5) improve and strengthen technology/computer skills using software that combines text, images, audio and other media.

The SPA 114 course was set up through CUNY Academic Commons, a WordPress site available only to students registered in this class⁵. The site enhanced students’ engagement with the required readings, discussion, feedback, and community building; through the class website students were able to collaboratively read and annotate the readings before coming to class, and continue the dialogue, reflective practice, and discussion after the class. In this way, the course was student-driven through questions and provocations posted by students, as well as through discussions generated and moderated by them. Each week, two to three students were in charge of annotating the reading(s) and guiding the class discussion. The annotation was done through Hypothes.is⁶, an open source tool that allows users to annotate a text collaboratively and digitally. This annotation opportunity fosters students’ writing skills and invited them to use their whole linguistic repertoire, while also developing critical thinking skills⁷. During the semester, students were also required to create blog posts. Blogging was another low-stakes writing assignment where students used their linguistic repertoire, and had the opportunity to create multimodal responses and comments by adding hyperlinks, pictures, and/or videos.

“Discovering El Barrio” is an innovative pedagogical practice that enabled Spanish HLL to become producers of audio-visual teaching and learning materials for L2 Spanish learners. Taking El Barrio (i.e., Spanish Harlem, East Harlem) as a starting point, HLL students were able to discover, explore, map and video-record different places of the area, building connections within diverse communities outside the classroom

⁵ Although the actual course with student work is not publicly available, a sample site has been created with access to the syllabus, readings, requirements and other components of the course along the scaffolding and handouts of the project with the final artifacts: <https://spaheritage.commons.gc.cuny.edu/>.

⁶ For more information: <https://web.hypothes.is/>.

⁷ Both WordPress and Hypothes.is are open-source software, meaning that they are free in two senses: “not only do users have the right to use the software, but users, developers, and re-developers have the rights to access, manipulate, break, rebuild the original code to fix bugs, add features, or create new projects” (Shaffer, 2013).

setting. This semester-long project emphasized a decentered classroom perspective, and these methodologies promoted HLL communicative competences as well as cultural and socio-political awareness in a local context. Students were actively involved in formative and summative reflection about their work since they were critically and continuously engaged during the process from design and research to problem solving. Finally, the authenticity of the project was accomplished by students' voices and choices, and made available as OER through CUNY Academic Commons.

This project followed *place-based* and *task-based* methodologies. These methodologies are student-centered and illustrate critical pedagogical practices through critical reflection, collaborative writing, development of problem-solving skills, promotion of inquiry, and active and conscious engagement in the creative process. Differing from grammatical or textbook based instruction, this method of Spanish HL education engages students in an experiential learning project, providing opportunities for exploration of the Spanish language and linguistic practices in a real-world context (Torres, 2022; Torres & Baralt, 2022). According to Julio C. Rodríguez, from the Language & Technology and National Foreign Language Resource Center (NFLRC) at University of Hawaii at Manoa, the key criteria listed in the left column of Table 1 below characterize Project-based Language Learning (PBL). The right column offers examples of how this specific project addressed the criteria:

Table 1
List of key criteria for PBL and how they applied to the project

Project-based language learning (PBL) criteria	Students as creators of OERs: Discovering El Barrio
(1) Key knowledge, understanding and success skills	The project addressed the 21st Century Skills according to ACTFL: communication, collaboration, critical thinking and problem solving, creativity and innovation, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self-direction, social and cross-cultural skills, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility.
(2) The challenge	This project is framed around a challenge or open-ended question: Spanish HLL must select, present and design audiovisual material to Spanish L2 from a local point of view (East Harlem).
(3) Sustained inquiry	This project encourages HLL to continuously generate questions about form and meaning that promote linguistic and cultural connections, at the same time they are learning to search and use digital and non-digital resources that help them solve those questions.
(4) Authenticity	Although authenticity has been discussed from different perspectives in the second language acquisition field, in this project it speaks to the context of the language use (East Harlem), as well as the final product, created by HLL through their experiences.
(5) Students voice and choice	Since motivation is a crucial aspect in language learning, this project creates the opportunity for learners' input in the choice of topic and the evolution of the project. At the same time, by creating the need for interaction, Spanish HLLs who may not feel comfortable speaking Spanish as creators within the project establish a connection between the language and their linguistic and cultural background, while building an environment where they feel comfortable with the language/repertoire they speak.
(6) Reflection	Through blog posts and class/group discussions, participants (both HLL and the instructor) have opportunities to reflect and provide possible ways to explore, discover and review their thoughts and beliefs about language learning.
(7) Critique and revision	This project created different spaces for corrective feedback (from other students and the instructor), and also for the re-thinking of ideas and products throughout the process.
(8) Public product	The material produced by students is accessible as OER.

4.1. Stage 1. Reflection and evaluation of second language audiovisual materials

As an initial task, students were exposed to different audio-visual materials for L2 Spanish learners. These audio-visual materials were extracted from the textbook *Aventuras*, by Vistas Higher Learning (used in

several L2 courses at the same institution). These videos present cultural aspects of the Spanish-speaking communities while introducing new lexicon and reviewing linguistic competencies. Students were able to watch, discuss, and analyze these videos. In small groups students engaged in a critical analysis of these materials as means to identify dominant ideologies and representations embedded within them.

The first video, “Bienvenida, Marissa” is the first episode of a telenovela that tells the story of a group of students studying abroad in Mexico. As it can be observed from Figure 1, each chapter of the textbook presents a different episode of this telenovela following the same structure. The textbook provides a photo-based summary of the episode along with a list of characters on the left side, a “useful expression” list on the right, and some guided activities to check comprehension (i.e., true or false, fill in the blanks, and closed-ended questions). In this specific first episode, Marissa, a U.S. college student from Wisconsin arrives to La Ciudad de Mexico for her study abroad program and has the chance to meet the family with whom she is going to stay.

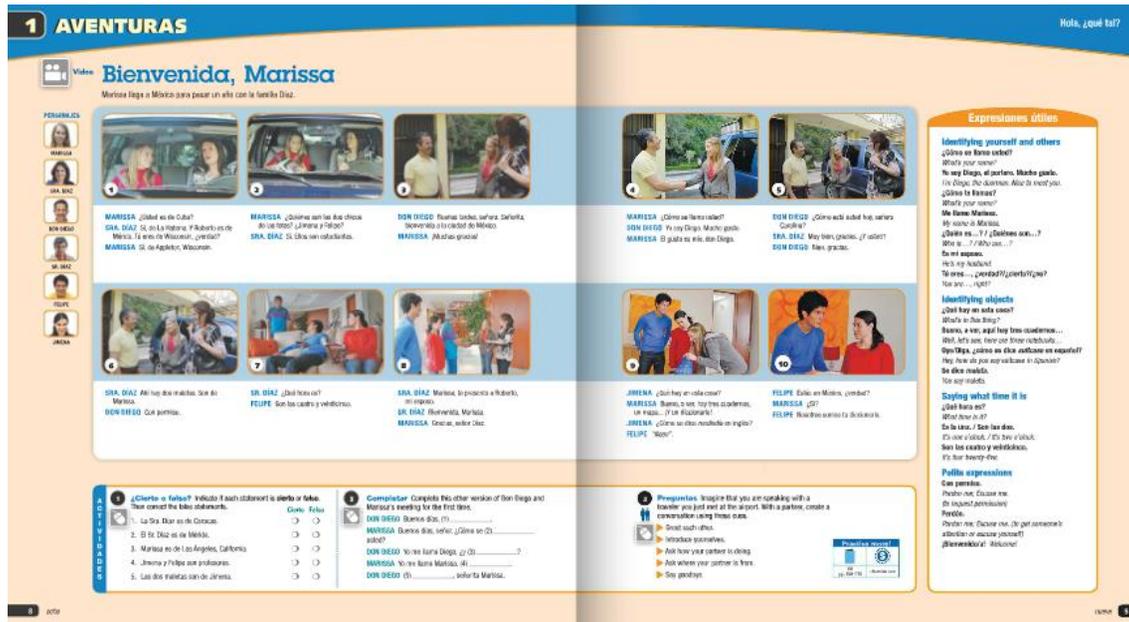


Figure 1. Screenshot of the online textbook

The second video that we used for this project is called “Encuentros en la plaza.” The video was taken from a section in the first chapter called “Flash Cultura.” The content of each video is linked to the main theme of the chapter, in this case, introductions. The video, mainly in English, is based in Buenos Aires, Argentina, and after a quick tour around the different “plazas” of the city, it shows a group of friends meeting for the first time. At the end of this video, the reporter recapitulates the content with the following words: “We saw that the plaza is an important center of cities and towns in the Spanish-Speaking world. That Spanish speakers often engage in more physical contact between themselves than Americans. And that if you ever travel to Latin America or Spain you had better be ready for some very warm greetings” (Blanco & Donley, 2017).

After watching the videos, students completed the open-ended questions. Students first shared their viewpoints and opinions in small groups and then discussed them as a whole class. Students were surprised by the lack of authenticity of the materials presented together with the situations portrayed. They were able to point out how they felt the characters, situations, and/or social practices were unrelatable to them. Students were able to talk about multiple issues concerning how the traditional U.S. college student is represented (i.e., a white, blond girl from Wisconsin staying with an upper-middle class family in Mexico), along with college experiences and expectations (study abroad programs as essential within college degree), and multiple positive and negative stereotypes and generalizations regarding Spanish speakers. Moreover, this assignment had pedagogical implications since students had the opportunity to reflect on how students in their own institution were exposed to Spanish teaching instruction material that represented and emphasized the Spanish language and its speakers as “foreign,” instead of offering a more “local” perspective based on the linguistic diversity in New York City.

4.2. Stage 2. Place-based assignment

To incorporate an experiential, active learning experience as a class, students visited Spanish Harlem. The assignment was scaffolded in three sub-stages: students first carried out some research about the neighborhood, then conducted field work by visiting the area, and finally shared and reflected on their experience.

4.2.1. Pre-visit research

During class, students researched East Harlem. Working in small groups, students read and investigated the history of this neighborhood and the relevance of different locations, especially places that they wanted to know more about or locations that could be of interest to themselves and/or students learning Spanish. Although students working in small groups had the freedom to start their research from scratch, in future projects it would be beneficial for the instructor to provide information regarding the neighborhood, such as a list of videos and/or articles as a point of entry.

Students shared what they had learned about the neighborhood in blog posts. Then, each group came up with a list of places to explore during their visit, and developed a fairly extensive list of locations that included a broad list of restaurants, several churches, museums, schools, non-profit organizations, and food courts. Students noted that they chose these locations because they could take pictures there and also have the opportunity to interact with community members. They then discussed different options as a group in order to make sure that all the groups were not visiting the same locations.

4.2.2. East Harlem / El Barrio

Following the research phase, the class visited East Harlem and each group was able to explore and discover the different pre-selected locations (including grocery stores, bodegas, restaurants, cafés, museums, churches, libraries, music shops, cultural centers, bookstores, and murals, among many others). Students took pictures and videos in order to share the information and experience with their classmates when they reported on their visit on the classroom blog. This reflection assignment allowed students to share their experiences with their classmates, not just through writing, but also by sharing the media they collected during the visit. Although many students' homes were not as far away as one might think considering the parameters of the city, many students were not familiar with the particular sites they explored. They reported how it was the first time learning about the existence of specific places, monuments, museums as well as Hispanic restaurants. Here are some excerpts from students' blog entries:

[Nuestras expectativas relacionadas con "El Barrio" eran diferentes a las que pudimos ver. Pensábamos que al llegar nos encontraríamos con algo feo, paredes con graffiti, las calles sucias y otro estilo de vida, pero no fue así. En Harlem visitamos una Iglesia Católica, una cancha de jugar baloncesto donde vimos las paredes pintadas con un arte hermoso. Visitamos una florería y finalmente fuimos a un teatro]

[Nuestro viaje al este de East Harlem "El barrio" fue disfrutar plenamente, pudimos ir a lugares donde hablamos con las personas del vecindario. Les preguntamos cómo era el área. Y lo que les gusta de eso. Como grupo, queríamos visitar y conectar con las personas local. Un buen lugar para pasar un buen tiempo es "el museo del Barrio" localizado en el 1230 5th Ave, New York, NY 10029. mientras caminábamos por el museo escuchamos tocar instrumentos de música, nos paramos a mirar y, mientras un grupo de músicos se detenían para descansar, le preguntamos a uno de ellos por su tiempo y hablamos con José, el tipo de la camisa gris.]⁸

⁸ [Our expectations regarding "El Barrio" were different from what we saw. We thought that when we arrived we would find something ugly, walls with graffiti, dirty streets and a different lifestyle, but that was not the case. In Harlem we visited a Catholic Church, a basketball court where we saw the walls painted with beautiful art. We visited a flower shop (*florería*) and finally went to a theater].

[Our trip to the east of East Harlem "El Barrio" was thoroughly enjoyable, we were able to go to places where we talked to people in the neighborhood. We asked them what the area was like. And what they like about it. As a group, we wanted to visit and connect with the local people. A good place to spend some quality time is "el museo del Barrio" located at 1230 5th Ave, New York, NY 10029. As we walked through the museum we heard musical instruments playing, we stopped to watch and, as a group of musicians stopped to rest, we asked one of them for his time and talked to Jose, the guy in the gray shirt].

4.2.3. *Sharing ideas / Puesta en común:*

In the following session, we spent time discussing the visit as well as the blogs they shared on the classroom site. Students were very responsive, giving feedback to other groups and sharing possible ideas. After our discussion, every group was able to narrow down their options and had one or two locations to focus on for their video.

4.3. *Stage 3. Let's be creative: Lights! Camera! Action!*

Each video had to showcase an aspect and/or location from Spanish Harlem. The goal was to provide a context in which the viewer (a Spanish L2 student) could learn more details about the background and impact of the Spanish-speaking community in this area from a more authentic, compelling, and engaging perspective. Students edited their final videos by compiling multiple shorter videos, and images, and adding voiceovers as well as music. The suggested time for each video was three to four minutes.

We had an informative introductory session with a videography fellow who taught us recording techniques, tips for interviewing as well as video editing and productions skills using iMovie. Students can use these transferable skills in other coursework and throughout their careers. Students had five weeks to work on their videos. During this setup period, students had to check in with the instructor and report to the class about the progress on their projects on a weekly basis. Although they also had assistance from the videography fellow for technological support, only half of them took advantage of this opportunity.

Videos were presented the last week of classes and students were able to give feedback both in class and through the tool called Vocat⁹. Vocat, an open-source digital tool that has evolved within the CUNY system, facilitates detailed formative and summative feedback on a variety of media types, including video recordings. In this peer-review opportunity students, along the instructor, were able to comment and react to their classmates' work. This was a chance for students to share their knowledge as experts since all of them had completed the project.

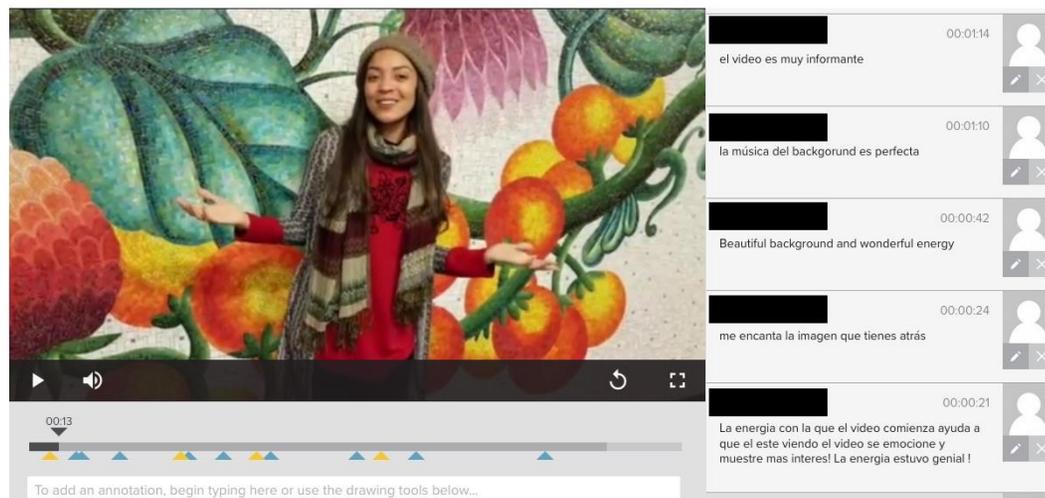


Figure 2. Snapshot of student feedback in one video using Vocat.

4.4. *Stage 4. Curation of the material*

This stage entailed some post-production work with the audio-recordings already created by students. The curation process, conducted once the semester was over, aimed to review the audio and visual material used in each video to confirm and ensure the rights to reproduce the material created with the permission required. I focused the work on two of the videos: "Los murales de 'El Barrio'" and "El Museo del Barrio." First, the introduction of one of the videos was selected to serve as a general introduction in order to maintain consistency in the project itself. Next, I proceeded to search, select, and add music with rights allowing reuse. I

⁹ For more information: <http://vocat.io/>.

then made several cuts in cases where consent was not obtained for interviews, and I updated the credits. I created subtitles, since one of the main goals of this curation process was also to provide a version of the video with Spanish subtitles to ensure accessibility. Finally, some contextual information, suggestions, and resources were added for instructors in case they wished to adapt this material in their classes. A sample site with the CUNY Academic Commons was created to host all of the material.

5. Reflective discussion, pedagogical implications, and further directions

The critical and open pedagogies followed in “Discovering El Barrio” recognized students as knowledge producers from the onset. In the context of the class, students were framed as knowledge producers, active critical thinkers, and researchers who linked scholarship to their local communities, and were able to reflect on the multilingual and multiethnic cultural identities and engage in a meaningful way with the public outside the classroom. By moving beyond the traditional final written text-based essay and/or composition, and by conceiving the final artifact as a public facing OER video recording, students were active participants in the decision-making of every scaffolded step of the project. HLL engaged creatively and critically from design and research to meaning negotiation and problem-solving. The learning space was reimagined physically as well as digitally from many perspectives creating anew the power dynamics of the classroom. Students, as learning peers, collaborated and constructed each scaffolded assignment by incorporating their ideas and voices. This step-by-step process shaped the final artifact.

However, it is important to acknowledge that outside of this project, there were other curriculum and content aspects that could not be modified (i.e., grammar topics, quizzes, exams). The pedagogy presented in this piece does not reflect the entire course design, as can be inferred from the sample site previously provided. However, even when some course elements are predefined, interventions like this project provide a significant and necessary entry point to reconsider the pedagogical approach to current language instruction for heritage speakers, and to reflect upon the language instruction material currently published and required in many of our classrooms.

The videos produced by HLL offer a more realistic, authentic, and true-to-life perspective than many standard L2 materials. Topics, places, and issues are more relatable and interconnected to students’ experience attending a public urban higher education institution, and they do not exoticize and/or stereotype Spanish culture in the way that textbooks tend to portray it (Arizpe & Aguirre, 1987; Cubillos, 2014; Hortiguera, 2011; Ramírez & Hall, 1990; Padilla & Vana, 2022; Zaidi, 2010). Students were able to reflect on how language(s) have been constructed to fit into the textbooks and college language classrooms in a very artificial way. This reflection allowed them to explore the social and educational implications of language teaching within their own institution. It is significant that students, as producers of this material, also retain ownership of the work they have created. Within this context of experiential learning, safe teaching and learning spaces were created where students were able to experiment and take risks, giving and welcoming constant feedback from their peers, allowing for collaboration and community building to develop throughout the semester. Additionally, these spaces improved and strengthened technology/computer skills since students acquired digital and transferable skills that they can then use in other courses and throughout their academic and professional careers.

Admittedly, there were compromises that had to be made concerning the tools used in this project. While tools that align with the goals of open critical pedagogy were used whenever possible, a number of issues sometimes resulted in the selection of other kinds of software. For instance, I opted to use iMovie as a video editing tool, even though it is not an example of free and open-source software. This decision was made based on students’ accessibility to the type of computers and software at their own institution, as well as students’ personal mobile devices. Accessibility was an issue consciously questioned during the design, production and post-production of “Discovering El Barrio,” and students were also involved and active participants in the decision-making of these conversations. By making these concerns transparent to students, they, as a community, decided not to make the class WordPress site public (including annotations and discussions), and also determined which Creative Commons license to use for their videos that were made publicly available (namely, the Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International license).

The production quality of the video recordings produced as final artifacts do not equal the ones provided by the audio-visual materials that accompany textbooks by multiple publishing companies. However, I do not believe that this is a constraint that negatively affects these public-facing artifacts since current mobile devices provide a more than acceptable recording tool. Although the project required significant time invested

in its design, planning, scaffolding, and curation, by its own nature, the “openness” of this project intends to foster collaboration and community building practices. Educators could easily replicate the project by remixing this assignment and scaffolding design for their own class and/or by reusing, remixing, revising, and redistributing the material created by the students in accordance with the Creative Commons license. For similar future projects, I would suggest structuring the language class under a thematic subtitle, like many English composition courses currently do, since narrowing the theme of the course from the beginning would help frame the scope and teaching approach to students. The content and structure of the class would follow this main subject matter, instead of being organized by different grammatical aspects.

The curriculum of language instruction in general, including HL teaching, is sometimes rigidly structured with little or no room for flexibility and creativity. However, interventions and place-based projects such as this one could be introduced without completely redesigning the entire course. I envision these assignments as the entry point for further critical thinking about challenging the traditional pedagogies of language instruction, and HL in particular. Even if it is not the definite answer to contest the traditional pedagogies, the adoption and creation of OERs could facilitate, and even encourage, the implementation of these critical and open pedagogies in HL teaching in general, and Spanish in particular, thereby creating an environment that fosters inquiry and develops students’ agency and critical awareness.

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