

## The switch to remote instruction in Spanish heritage language courses: Why social presence matters

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### ABSTRACT

**EN** The pandemic amplified the educational disparities that Latinx students face in virtual courses. This research project describes Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) learners' experiences with remote instruction, and it proposes using the Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison et al., 2000) and modified versions of the Theory of Social Presence (Fayram, 2017; Hauck & Warnecke, 2012; Strong et al., 2012; Whiteside, 2015) as guiding frameworks to obtain information about social presence (SP) aspects in the online classroom. A total of 126 SHL learners took a validated online survey to evaluate the challenges of switching to a remote modality of instruction. This research emphasizes the need to design effective online courses that foster SP as a key element to diminish feelings of isolation and encourage active participation in the classroom. We propose that teaching presence is an important component of social presence in online SHL courses, and we offer pedagogical implications for practitioners.

**Key words:** LATINX STUDENTS, SPANISH HERITAGE LANGUAGE COURSES, ONLINE CLASSES, SOCIAL PRESENCE

**ES** La pandemia amplificó la disparidad educativa que el alumnado latino sufre en los cursos virtuales. Este proyecto describe las experiencias del alumnado latino en las clases virtuales de español como lengua de herencia (SHL) y propone el uso del modelo de la Community of Inquiry (Garrison et al., 2000) y la teoría de la Presencia Social (junto con sus modificaciones: Hauck & Warnecke, 2012; Fayram, 2017; Strong et al., 2012; Whiteside, 2015) como guía para entender la presencia social (PS) y sus factores en las clases virtuales. Un total de 126 participantes respondieron a un cuestionario en línea validado para evaluar los retos que supuso el cambio a una enseñanza a distancia. Los resultados indican la importancia de diseñar cursos virtuales efectivos que promuevan la presencia social como el elemento clave para disminuir el aislamiento y promover la participación activa en las clases. En este estudio proponemos que la presencia docente es un componente importante de la presencia social en la enseñanza virtual del español como lengua de herencia y ofrecemos implicaciones pedagógicas para el profesorado.

**Palabras claves:** ALUMNADO LATINO, CURSOS DE ESPAÑOL COMO LENGUA DE HERENCIA, CURSOS EN LÍNEA, PRESENCIA SOCIAL

**IT** La pandemia ha aumentato le disparità educative che studenti/esse latini/e affrontano nei corsi a distanza. Questo studio descrive le esperienze di apprendenti di Spagnolo come Lingua Ereditaria (SHL) nella didattica a distanza (DaD), e propone l'uso del modello della *Community of Inquiry* (Garrison et al., 2000) e della Teoria della Presenza Sociale (con le sue variazioni: Fayram, 2016; Hauck & Warnecke, 2012; Strong et al., 2012; Whiteside, 2015) come modelli per ottenere informazioni su aspetti della presenza sociale (SP) durante le lezioni online. 126 studenti hanno risposto a un questionario validato online per valutare le sfide poste dal passaggio alla DaD. I risultati evidenziano la necessità di corsi online efficaci che promuovano la SP come fattore chiave per diminuire il senso di isolamento e incoraggiare una partecipazione attiva alla lezione. Viene suggerita la presenza dell'insegnante come componente importante della SP nei corsi online di SHL e vengono trattate le implicazioni pedagogiche per i docenti stessi.

**Parole chiave:** STUDENTI/ESSE LATINI/E, CORSI DI SPAGNOLO COME LINGUA EREDITARIA, LEZIONI ON-LINE, PRESENZA SOCIALE

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## 1. Introduction

It has already been two years since many educational institutions moved to remote instruction due to Covid-19. The pandemic not only brought uncertainties and challenges that led many schools to make this change, but it also amplified the social injustices people of color have faced throughout the years in the US. For instance, the health disparities that have affected the Latinx community throughout the years increased during the pandemic, which resulted in the Latinx community having the highest numbers of COVID-19 cases and hospitalization rates. In fact, the Latinx community made up 30% of the country's COVID-19 cases ("Double Jeopardy: COVID-19," 2020). Also, the Latinx community is one of the ethnic groups who has been heavily impacted financially; they account for 23% of the initial job losses because of the closure of the industries that depend on consumer spending (Zamarripa & Roque, 2021). Another social injustice that has amplified with this pandemic is the educational inequality which impacts Latinx students. The drastic change to remote learning reinforced Latinx students' struggles to stay in school and receive access to the appropriate technology for online learning. These inequalities illustrate the need to narrow the Latinx achievement gap and close the digital divide.

In a recent study on the key markers for a successful Spanish Heritage Language (SHL) program, Beaudrie (2020) found that one of the common key markers that made a SHL program successful was their use of technology either by implementing a flipped classroom model or incorporating digital tools such as digital storytelling, online reading tools, tele-tandem sessions, virtual discussion boards, among others. Moreover, the program directors recruited for Beaudrie's study stated that the use of technology in the SHL classroom was a great resource for individualized instruction.

Exploring the experiences of Latinx students in online classes and examining effective ways to strengthen students' social presence in these virtual spaces is imperative as SHL programs expand throughout the US. Thus, the objective of the current study is twofold. First, we bring to light the obstacles Latinx youth have faced during the switch to remote instruction and how these obstacles have heightened since then. Second, we propose the implementation of diverse elements of social presence (SP) in the SHL course curriculum to address the disparities we have outlined previously. Social presence refers to the "interaction with others for social and/or affective purpose within [asynchronous] and synchronous online language learning context" (Fayram, 2017, p. 46). We conceptualize it as the connection between instructor and learners in the form of interaction for pedagogical purposes. These interactions can manifest as either instructor providing support to their students or students engaging in authentic and active learning. According to Strong et al. (2012), SP is vital for diminishing students' feelings of isolation, building trust and solidarity among students, and for creating a sense of community in remote and online classes. Given that Spanish Heritage Language courses' primary goal is to promote Spanish maintenance by reinforcing students' linguistic confidence via speaking activities, we propose SP as a key element to foster students success and also improve their confidence in online courses (Amecua, 2019; Beaudrie, Ducar & Potowski, 2014; Valdés, 1996), we propose SP as a key element to foster students' success in online classes. The current project adds to the scarce literature of teaching SHL courses under new challenges like the pandemic. Specifically, this study is the first of its kind as it brings together an analysis of SHL courses, Latinx students, and the implementation of SP practices in SHL classrooms. SHL students need a well-differentiated curriculum and pedagogy when compared to other language students because most of these students first language is Spanish, which they learned through their interactions with their families while growing (Beaudrie, Ducar, & Potowski, 2014). Therefore, they have diverse language skills and also have different language needs; this study proposes the implementation of SP elements in the teaching of SHL online courses to allow for substantial interactions that take into account Latinx students' abilities and needs. and this study proposes one in which SP and teaching presence is paramount particularly considering the new changes of the last year. Some of the findings -which include suggestions from SHL students themselves- offer pedagogical implications for practitioners who teach SHL learners in a virtual environment and proposes designing effective online courses that foster social presence to diminish feelings of isolation and encourage active participation. Thus, with the growth of SHL courses throughout the United States and the recent demand for the implementation of adequate online learning post-COVID-19, the current research will not only be a steppingstone in designing effective online curriculum, but will also address and challenge the educational disparities Latinx students continue to face.

## 2. Theoretical framework

The pandemic forced 55 million children in the U.S. to stay home, leaving many out of school, and others were not given adequate remote instruction (García & Weiss, 2020). Emerging data from this period shows a deep crisis in teaching and learning that has reframed the way educators now understand effective teaching and learning, particularly online. With the change to remote instruction, it has become evident the need for the effective integration of online instruction. Recall that there are major differences between remote and online instruction. Online classes have been offered at various institutions for years, and practices are established beforehand as students complete course requirements entirely online. Clear expectations in this format are outlined from the beginning. It differs from a switch to remote instruction due to a health emergency of a course that otherwise would have been taught face to face. Remote courses during the pandemic necessitated a flip from a traditional face-to-face format to an online format. The latter is the context in which this research is inserted. To examine students' experiences with remote instruction, this study will make use of the *Community of Inquiry Model* (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000) and modified versions of the *Social Presence Model* (Fayram, 2017; Hauck & Warnecke, 2011; Strong et al., 2012; Whiteside, 2015). Given the importance of *community* and *sense of belonging* for Spanish heritage speakers in the Spanish classroom ((Fayram, 2017; Hauck & Warnecke, 2011; Strong et al., 2012; Whiteside, 2015), we opted for these models which position and center SP (the perceived reported experience of being with and interacting with classmates online) as the key element to attain effective online instruction.

The Community of Inquiry model is a framework that identifies the elements that are crucial prerequisites for a successful higher education in a computer-mediation communication environment (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). This model argues that learning occurs within the community through the interaction of three core elements: cognitive presence, social presence, and teaching presence (Garrison, Anderson & Archer, 2000). According to this model, the most basic component to succeed in Higher Education is *cognitive presence*, which is the extent to which the participants in any configuration of a Community of Inquiry (CoI) can construct meaning through sustained communication. Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) mention that cognitive presence, the first core element, "is a vital element in critical thinking, a process, an outcome that is frequently presented as the ostensible goal of all Higher Education" (p. 89). The second core element, *SP*, refers to the participants' ability in the Community of Inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, thus presenting themselves to the other participants as "real people." According to this model, an essential aspect of establishing social presence in face-to-face settings is visual cues. When computer-conference participants have never met, the lack of visual cues that lead to effective relationships may present particular challenges to establish a social presence (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000). However, according to Kuehn (1993) and Walther (1994), participants can develop techniques, such as the use of emoticons or other unconventional symbolic displays, to add affective components to computer-mediated dialogue. The third element of the model, *teaching presence*, consists of two general functions that, in an educational environment, are mainly the responsibility of the teacher. According to Garrison et al. (2000), the first of these functions is the design of the educational experience. This includes the selection, organization, introductory presentation of course content, design, development of learning activities and assessment. The second function is facilitation, a responsibility that may be shared among the teacher and students. The teaching presence element has the goal to support and enhance social and cognitive presence in order to achieve the expected educational outcomes.

The challenge educators face today is creating a CoI in a virtual environment (Garrison et al., 2000). Thus, the CoI model distinguishes between cognitive, social, and teaching presence as invariable elements that shape the main framework for formal higher-level online education analyses. Garrison et al. (2000) state that these three elements of the CoI can enhance or inhibit the quality of the educational experience and learning outcomes. The researchers have applied this model to identify and assess meaningful educational activities in an online environment and have proposed a template with a set of *indicators* of the three crucial elements for a fruitful CoI. The *examples of indicators of cognitive presence* correspond to four phases of critical educational inquiry: triggering event (recognizing the problem, a sense of puzzlement), exploration (information exchange, discussion of ambiguities); integration (connecting ideas, creating solutions); resolution (vicariously apply new ideas, critically assess solutions). The *examples of social presence indicators* include emotional expression (emotions, autobiographical narratives); open communication (risk-free expression, acknowledging others, being encouraging); group cohesion (encouraging collaboration, helping, and supporting). The *examples of teaching presence indicators* include instructional management (structuring content, setting discussion topics, establishing discussion groups); building understanding (sharing personal meaning and values, expressing

agreement, seeking consensus); direct instruction (focusing and pacing discussion, answering questions, diagnosing misconceptions, summarizing learning outcomes or issues). See Figure 1.

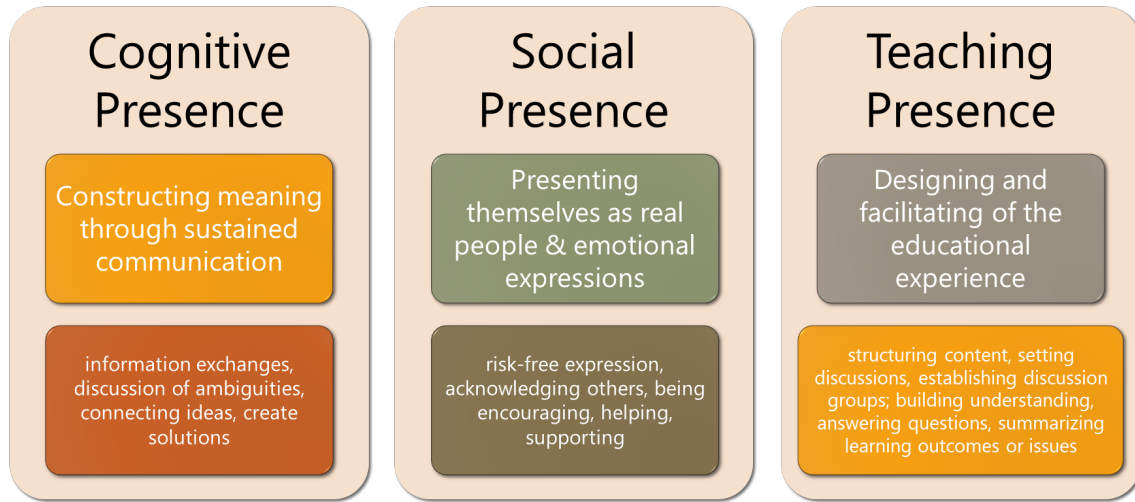


Figure 1. Sample indicators, Community of Inquiry Model (Garrison, Anderson, & Archer, 2000)

The template proposed by Garrison et al. (2000) is intended to guide research into the optimal use of online teaching as a medium for realizing educational goals in a distributed learning context. The CoI framework has been the basis for most content analysis work carried out in SP research to date, including language learning and language teacher education studies.

The other framework that guides this study is Hauck and Warnecke’s (2012) social presence approach which emphasizes the social, cultural, and discursive implications of using computer mediated communication in teaching and provides valuable guidance. Their research illustrates the impact of material design in generating SP. The researchers suggest that SP, especially “the individual’s ability to demonstrate his/her availability for and willingness to participate in interaction” (p. 98), is the central driving force for a successful CoI. Hauck and Warnecke call for a fundamental reconsideration of Garrison, Anderson, and Archer’s (2000) CoI tripartite approach. Specifically, Hauck and Warnecke (2012) propose to separate SP from cognitive and teaching presence. They position SP as the core element because they found in their study that SP is “the *conditio sine qua non* for learning in CMC contexts” (Hauck & Warnecke, 2012, p. 3) and a phenomenon that emerges through task performance in computer mediated communication.

To complement Hauck and Warnecke’s (2012) argument for centering SP as a core element in online course curriculum, we also include Strong et al. (2012), Fayram (2017) and Whiteside’s (2015) proposals on SP. Strong et al. (2012) propose that to center SP as a key element in online courses, the assignments implemented should involve collaboration as well as interactions between students and instructors, institute authentic learning experiences that align with students’ interests and needs, and lastly, increase faculty support in these virtual classes. Fayram (2017) argues that positive SP not only supports and facilitates language interactions, but it is also an essential aspect of communication in language learning. For this reason, she suggests adding *language learning presence* as a new concept to the SP framework. Language learning presence includes any language learning through either focus on form(s) and/or focus on meaning; more specifically, this new concept alludes to perception (i.e., awareness of language learning) and language practice (i.e., non-active learning and mechanical activities). Whiteside (2015) proposal includes adding two key elements to the model of SP: (a) recognizing the prior knowledge and experiences of students and (b) promoting effective instructor involvement and instructional strategies and activities.

### 3. Literature review and purpose of this study

#### 3.1. The educational disparities of Latinx students in Higher Education

The achievement gap in education refers to any significant and persistent disparity in academic performance or educational attainment between different ethnic groups. Latinx students for instance, in the last 30 years continue to have low academic achievement in reading and mathematics in comparison to the

White and Asian students. Also, Latinx students are one of the groups with the highest dropout rates in the United States (McFarland et al., 2019; NAEP, 2012). This is because Latinx students face many obstacles in society and in education. In higher education institutions, some of these obstacles include hostile campus climate, lack of mentorship, and low financial aid which are significant factors that negatively affect their pursuit of college (Pérez Huber & Cueva, 2012). The U.S. Census Bureau Report (2019) states that less than 15% of the total Latinx population have earned a higher education degree. It also calculated that from the total Latinx population in 2018, 11.6 % of this community has a Bachelor of Arts (BA), 3.2% earned a Master's (MA), 0.55% obtained a professional degree, and 0.48% have a doctoral degree. This is in comparison to the total U.S. population where 14.5% have a BA, 6.3% earned a MA, 0.96% obtained a professional degree, and 1.36% have a doctoral degree.

The pandemic and remote teaching intensified educational disparities and added new obstacles which have led to lower school retention rates. In Los Angeles, the second largest unified district in the US, it was reported that after March 2020, more than 50,000 black and Latinx students in middle school and high school rarely attended virtual classrooms or interacted in the online platforms (Esquivel & Blume, 2020). This was not because of a lack of interest in school; rather it was the result of the digital divide where low-income communities do not have adequate internet access nor own a device besides a phone to connect to the online learning environment. Before the pandemic, many low-income community students in higher education depended on their institutions' internet access and computer labs to mitigate this digital inequality (Katz, Jordan, & Ognyanova, 2021). The recent demand to switch to remote teaching impacted 16 million students who lacked adequate internet access or electronic devices, and even after resources were provided, only 4 million students were able to receive the resources necessary to participate in remote learning (Tate, 2021). Tate (2021) states the need to make online learning equitable and accessible to all students. He mentions that it is essential to keep fighting because not closing the digital divide will impact the quality of students' education and their retention rates.

Another significant factor that hinders school retention rates is the level of students' engagement in online classes. Esquivel & Blume (2020) found that Latinx students were among one of the ethnic groups that participated the least in online classes. The authors reported that Latinx students were likely to participate 10%-20% less than their white peers. The inability to engage students in online learning could be the reason why the number of first-generation college applicants is down 3% in comparison to last year before the pandemic. The Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) applications also dropped 10% in comparison to last year (Williams June, 2020). In Fall 2020, the number of Latinx, Black and Native American students attending school dropped 13%. Incorporating and strengthening SP in the curriculum could increase students' participation in the course.

### ***3.2. Social presence, a key element in online learning and teaching***

Strong et al. (2012) highlighted the importance of incorporating collaborations and interactions among classmates and instructors, and overall, emphasized the significance of incorporating and reinforcing the SP approach in an online course. They stated that the absence of facial expressions, nonverbal communication, and physical presence in online courses diminishes students' social presence (e.g., Tu & McIssac, 2002). Strong et al. (2012) used Social Presence Theory and Motivational Theory to examine graduate students' perception of the learning environment, social presence, and the overall satisfaction of the students. The participants were enrolled in an agricultural education e-learning course. A hundred and sixty-four students, mostly female (n=73) and white (n=97), volunteered to participate in the study and completed three surveys at the end of the course: a Distance Education Learning Environment Survey, Social Presence Scale, and a Satisfaction Scale.

The findings showed that the ability to interact with other students and their autonomy in the course were the most positive components of e-learning that provided a richer experience in the course. SP, overall, had the largest effect on the participants' satisfaction with the class. For example, students favored an active learning approach instead of lecture-based instruction, and students opted to develop a relationship with their classmates and for the opportunity to maintain their individual identity throughout the course. In sum, the study emphasized the importance of collaborations and interactions among the classmates and the instructor, and the significance of SP approach in an online course. The researchers explained that meeting the needs of students and working towards increasing students' satisfaction in an online course is crucial to decrease dropout rates.

In another study, Whiteside (2015) explored the level of SP in an online graduate-level programs designed to help K-12 school officials understand SP in a blended learning program. This study explored two different cohorts in a four-year data collection process. The participants were school officials. The first cohort consisted of seventeen participants, and the second cohort consisted of five participants. There was a mix of ages, genders, and races in each cohort. Each cohort began their first face-to-face session in July with four one-credit courses during an intensive six-day session. The participants transitioned to two fifteen-week terms of online coursework and finally, returned to campus for a four-day, face-to-face facilitation for their final three credits. The researcher explored the following research questions, (a) how does SP affect blended learning programs and vice versa? and (b) how can coded online discussions, face-to-face observation notes, and interview transcriptions illustrate SP in a learning community? The method included coding the online discussions for sixteen online courses using pre-established SP coding schemes developed by Rourke, Anderson, Garrison and Archer (1999), Polhemus, Shih, and Swan (2001), and Swan (2002). It also included an examination of instructor and student interview transcriptions and the author's observation notes from over a dozen face-to-face courses.

After the data analysis, two key missing components of SP emerged as the differences between the two cohorts: (a) the importance of the knowledge and experience of the participants, and (b) the importance of the instructors' involvement and the instructional strategies. Instructor involvement refers to the instructor's use and planning of community building activities to establish relationships and make social connections. According to the author, these two components are as central to SP as the categories in the original social presence coding scheme: affective, cohesive, and interactive. Therefore, these two missing elements along with the social presence coding scheme were combined to form Whiteside's (2015) Social Presence Model which now includes the following areas: Community Cohesion, Affective Association, Instructor Involvement, Interaction Intensity, and Knowledge and Experience.

In addressing language learning in online courses, Boothe (2017) expanded on the three components already presented in Garrison et al. (2000), which relate to cognitive, social, and teaching presence for a successful online language learning environment. For Boothe (2017) the three components are part of active learning strategies when course goals are present in classroom activities that allow for individual and group growth with the instructor as a facilitator to build it all. Effective social presence is thus attained when students feel engaged in collaborations that allow them to learn the language. These factors help create a community of learning with multilayered effect and in which involvement from all parts is paramount. For language learning in particular, a cognitive presence connects with the achievement of course goals and objectives through student engagement in the language being taught. Therefore, designing projects that motivate discussions and connect to student realities is paramount.

An SP component leads students to interact with each other while maintaining individuality and the social aspect serves as a linkage among all course users. The teaching presence aspect is also important because students are able to develop skills in a language in which the instructor facilitates and creates opportunities for critical thinking and practical inquiry. Boothe states that a strong teaching presence is relevant in online language courses since the instructor is the binding element in creating the community of learning. The instructor facilitates interaction and assumes a leadership role in the course by providing linguistic feedback which encourages further development in students. Finally, constant reflection on a weekly basis helps consolidate the cognitive, social and teaching components while making needed throughout the semester or quarter.

Fayram's (2017) study, one of the only studies that has analyzed virtual teaching, explored SP and its role in online language tutorials at The Open University in Milton Keynes, England. The researcher examined the following: (a) how does a individual's SP influence language learning, (b) how does another student's SP influence the individual learner's language learning and group, and (c) how does a tutor's SP influence the individual learner and group learning? Fayram (2017) drew on several fields to understand SP in an online language learning modality. First, the researcher used insights from the field of multimodality to understand the meaning-making potential of multimodal environments. The author also drew on CoI (Garrison et al., 2000) and Vygotsky's Sociocultural theory as frameworks to explore the importance of social interaction in learning. This study has an integrated methodology with a qualitative approach, and used mixed methods to collect data via questionnaires, interviews and recorded observations of online language tutorials offered to language students through an online platform. The participants in this study were language students at the Open University. They had varying proficiency levels and were from different age groups. The participants were either studying French, German, Italian, Spanish, or Chinese. The data was analyzed qualitatively via thematic

and discourse analysis with coding schemes to identify patterns of social presence in the data. The main finding of the study is that positive SP is important in online language learning to strengthen and facilitate language interaction, but its effect may depend on individual learner differences and emotional responses. Fayram (2017) concludes that the effects of SP are dependent upon factors related to individual learner differences, emotional responses, as well as its interplay with teaching presence, and *language learning presence* (LLP). LLP is a new concept put forward in this study, and it refers to the type of presence that incorporates language learning (cognitive engagement with language rules), and language practice. For instance, the focus is on whether students can practice the language either in grammatical activities or freely using Spanish.

Taken together, the findings of these studies indicate that establishing SP in online and remote instruction is essential to create a community of learning where students feel connected and can thrive. This is particularly important for our Spanish heritage speakers who are different from second language learners. SHL students can benefit from a differentiated curriculum designed with SP elements. The purpose of the present study is, therefore, to fill one of the gaps in SHL education, which is online teaching. We aim to examine the experiences of students to determine whether there are elements of SP use currently in the SHL course at the university level. Additionally, the goal is to provide practitioners with pedagogical practices incorporating SP elements to increase student involvement and social connections with other students and instructors.

### **3.3. Purpose of the study and research questions**

The previous review of literature exemplifies the impact of implementing and reinforcing SP in both content and language (not SHL) online classes. The previous studies suggest that including elements of SP, such as collaborations and interactions among the classmates and the instructor in the online classroom, is essential to increase students' active participation, satisfaction, and decrease dropout rates. Given the fast-paced growth of SHL courses, it is pivotal to analyze how such classes can also support students in the virtual classroom and contribute to creating an equitable education for Latinx students, while reducing their anxiety level and increasing their possibilities to connect with each other. It is calculated that by the year 2028, Latinx students will be 20 % of the total undergraduate population in Higher Education (National Center of Education Statistics, 2020). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to examine how SHL courses could support Latinx students' academic journeys and increase the level of engagement by examining SP in these specialized classrooms. Focusing on SHL courses is a necessary stepping stone in analyzing how virtual classes could contribute to narrowing the disparities Latinx students face, especially in remote learning even more now that both online learning and SHL education continue to grow.

Thus, using the CoI and SP frameworks, the research questions that guide the current study are:

- 1) What were students' experiences in remote instruction in terms of level of anxiety, level of comfort, and feeling of connection with their peers and instructors?
- 2) In what ways do remote SHL classes incorporate elements of social presence such as individual learner, teaching presence, and language learning presence in their virtual classes?

## **4. Methodology**

### **4.1. Participants**

A total of 126 Latinx students participated in the current study. They were all enrolled in SHL classes at the intermediate and upper-intermediate level in two large universities in the Northeast and Southeast US. All students reported having no uncorrected visual or hearing impairments. Their mean age was 20.2, and they all had been born in the United States or had indicated their age of arrival in the United States was between 3 and 11.

The SHL speakers from the Southeast were undergraduate students at a large research university in Florida where Latinx students represent 17.6% of the full student body. These participants were taking a lower-intermediate course designed for SHL speakers. For the most part, they are second-generation heritage speakers of Cuban parents and first-generation Puerto Ricans who have attended English schools in the state. The lower-intermediate course offered at the same institution fulfilled the Arts and Sciences Foreign Language requirement which is normally completed in three semesters. In addition, this course is a prerequisite for all Spanish majors. By the end of the course, students can recognize, analyze, and understand all Spanish verb tenses, modes, and simple syntactic patterns. The curriculum focuses on reviewing stress rules and patterns, especially syllabification rules and accent marks. Another objective of the course is for students to effectively

use formal variations of everyday vocabulary and formal patterns of written discourse of academic/formal Spanish through various projects.

The Northeast SHL speakers were students at a large college in New York City. The college is a senior liberal arts college of the City University of New York system. The college campus is located in the Bronx, a borough of New York City with 1,418,207 people with a 56.4% population reporting Hispanic origin (U.S. Census report, 2021). The non-English language spoken by the largest group is Spanish, spoken by 47.7% of the population. In addition, the college is recognized as a Hispanic serving institution with an overall population of 13,000 undergraduate students. The Hispanic/Latinx make up 51.4% of the population and the students are mainly of Dominican descent (approximately 58%) and the other Latinx groups are Puerto Rican, Mexican, Mexican American, and Central and South American.

The Northeast study participants were enrolled in six classes of the four SHL courses at the beginner-intermediate (semester 1 and 2) and upper-intermediate (semester 3 and 4) levels offered in the Language and Literatures department. The curriculum for SHL courses was designed taking into consideration the Latinx population at the college and focus on vocabulary development, grammar, spelling, reading, and writing taught through a multiliteracy, critical, and dialectical approach (Leeman & Serafini, 2016; Martínez, 2003). A computerized placement test is administered to establish student placement at the start of the language program.

#### **4.2. Research Team**

Our research team consists of two assistant professors and two teaching professors living and working in New York, Florida, and Washington, who each brought a range of experiences and perspectives to this study. Author 1 is a Latinx woman who was raised in Mexico until she was 11 years old, speaks Spanish as a first language, and started learning English when she immigrated to California. She is a SHL speaker and is an Assistant Professor and Director of the Spanish Heritage Language Program in Seattle, Washington. She teaches Spanish to SHL students. Author 2 is a Mexican woman, born and raised in Mexico as a monolingual speaker of Spanish. She immigrated to the U.S. at age 22 to pursue graduate school. She is now a bilingual Teaching Professor of Spanish and Linguistics in Florida, where she coordinates the Spanish Heritage Track for heritage bilingual students. Author 3 is a Latinx woman raised in Northern Mexico in a Spanish monolingual household, who learned English as an adult, immigrated to the Southwest U.S. for study and work in 2001, and now resides in the Eastern United States. She is an Assistant Professor who teaches and directs the Spanish HL track. Author 4 is a Hispanic woman raised in the Caribbean region in a Spanish-speaking household and who had resided in Canada for an extended period before relocating to the Southeast United States for study and work. She is currently teaching SHL courses in Florida. Our perspectives are informed by our collective experiences in teaching SHL courses and conducting research in the field of heritage language education.

#### **4.3. Data collection and instruments**

Students' linguistic background information was obtained by means of the Bilingual Language Profile (BLP) (Birdsong, Gertken, & Amengual, 2012). The BLP is used to register the language dominance of the heritage bilingual population. The BLP does not characterize language dominance as simply a measure of what language in the bilingual is stronger or used more often. It rather captures the complexity of the linguistic patterns in place at home, at school or at work by relating language use and attitudes without disregard for proficiency skills. There are four sections in the BLP: language history, language use, language proficiency and language attitudes with a continuous score of -218 to 218. Participants responded to the English-Spanish battery. A score of zero or close to zero indicated participant balanced bilingualism. In this study, average BLP dominance in this group of participants revealed an index of -21.79 with the participating sample showing balanced bilingualism. As Table 1 shows, the English dominance score was 144.47 and the Spanish dominance was 166.26. Table 1 also offers a summary of scores by sections. Overall, participants reported using both languages at home and at school in equal measure.



Table 1  
*Students' bilingual language profiles*

Language	Language History	Language Use	Language Proficiency	Language Attitudes	Total Dominance
English	32.23	30.52	49.94	31.78	144.47
Spanish	26.78	30.52	54.48	54.48	166.26

Students' perceptions of remote instruction were obtained by a 30-question online survey. The online survey was designed to investigate Spanish heritage bilinguals' perceptions of remote instruction in their Spanish heritage courses. We used the Col Model (Garrison et al., 2000) and the Theory of SP (Fayram, 2017; Hauck & Warnecke, 2012; Strong et al., 2012; Whiteside, 2015) as guiding frameworks to formulate the survey questions. The research team collaboratively wrote and chose these 30 questions to include in the survey. The 30 questions were intended to capture the elements of SP such as individual learner presence, language learning presence, and teaching presence. They also included open-ended questions that delve into SHL's perceptions of connectedness (to their instructors and peers in both formats), as well as their levels of motivation, interaction, and feeling of belonging as part of the qualitative analysis. Another subset of questions was formulated to test whether SHL students view their Spanish class as a community and a community of learning. The online survey also contained questions that explore the level of anxiety, comfort, and connectedness in SHL courses in both formats (remote vs. face-to-face) as represented by numerical data (percentages) for the quantitative analysis. Appendix A presents the complete survey.

#### 4.4. Procedures

Once the researchers received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval to work with human subjects, authors 2 and 4 contacted the SHL instructors that taught at the university in Florida and at the college in New York. Author 3 asked the instructors if she could virtually visit their classroom to personally invite the students to participate in the study. No compensation was offered to the participants in the study. There was only one session for data collection where participants took the 30-minute survey plus the 10-minute BLP. Students spent an average of 40 minutes in both tasks. The participants first completed the online instruction survey, which had Likert scale and open-ended questions, and then they moved to the BLP. This is a multi-site project, and data collection in all sites had the exact same data collection procedure.

#### 4.5. Validity, reliability, and data analysis

This study is a mixed methods analysis with a quantitative and a qualitative design. As part of the quantitative analysis, the researchers of the current study analyzed the numerical data obtained from the survey by calculating the mean response of participants to questions related to their level of anxiety, comfort, and connectedness. The authors also analyzed the open-ended questions as part of the qualitative analysis. The coding scheme used to analyze survey responses resulted from a combination of Garrison et al. (2000), Hauck and Warnecke (2012), Fayram (2017), Whiteside (2015), and Strong et al.'s (2012) proposals on the impact of material design and curricular activities to generate SP in the classroom. To analyze survey data, the authors first undertook a content analysis of survey responses as proposed by Hauck and Warnecke (2012). This analysis had a qualitative nature, which included expressions of emotions as reported by the students. Hauck and Warnecke (2012) also proposed adding Individual Learner presence (IL) in the coding scheme, along with its affective expressions. Whiteside (2015) provided the needed background to focus on instructor involvement as an important component of survey analyzes. This led to the inclusion of a second major code: *Teaching Presence* (TP), which provided a venue to evaluate particular pedagogical practices implemented with SHLs in a remote teaching environment. The social presence scale adapted from Fayram (2017) was useful to include the remaining codes, *Language Learning Presence* (LP) and *Lack or Need for Social Presence* (LNSP). This scale has been previously used validated in online course evaluations (Cobb, 2009; Swan et al., 2008), and has reported a Cronbach's Alpha of .88 and an internal consistency of  $\alpha = .94$ . Whereas Swan et al., (2008)'s was not fully adopted, part of their scale was adapted to reflect changes that had taken place with the switch to remote instruction in 2020. A central goal was to capture student anxiety (if any) via the surveys in a new modality of learning and knowing about educational disparities traditionally being faced by SHL students, as outlined in the introduction. A central purpose in survey design was to investigate ways for the maintenance of a community of learning in the new teaching and learning environment. The social presence scheme adapted from Fayram (2017) allowed to identify categories and themes to quantify findings across the four major codes.

The complete coding scheme is included in Appendix B.

To enhance the credibility and rigorousness of the current research, the four-person research team engaged in critical and sustained discussions of emerging ideas (Rossman & Rallis, 2017). Specifically, they met online on a weekly basis to discuss the data, coding procedures, and to compile the data to be able to extrapolate patterns fitting into each category. The researchers utilized Garrison et al. (2000), Hauck and Warnecke (2012), Fayram (2017), Strong et al.'s (2012), Whiteside (2015) frameworks as *priori* codes, and this process yielded four major codes: Individual Learner, Teaching Presence, Language Learning Presence, and Lack or need for Social Presence. For each major code category, the authors also added more specific coding schemes. Individual Learner, for example, includes affective expression (values, emotion, emotional connection), interactive (social sharing which includes interaction and collaboration), and cohesive (acknowledgment, approval from instructors and/or peers). Teaching Presence refers to any connection and interactions for pedagogical purpose. This includes instructor support, authentic support, and active learning. Language Learning Presence indicates the learning about the language either through a focus on form(s) and focus on meaning. The emphasis is on whether students were able to practice the language either in grammatical activities, or by freely using Spanish with a focus on meaning approach. The latter category includes perceptions, an awareness of language learning of self and of participating with others for language learning purposes. It also includes language practices such as non-active learning and mechanical activities. Additionally, to these three major code categories, it was also vital to count for lack or need for social presence, which considers any instance where students ask for more collaboration and activities where they can engage with their peers in specific classroom activities. This fourth major code also encompasses students' suggestions for the instructor to interact more with them and incorporate activities that take into account students' needs. The final coding scheme resulted a combination of codes outlined by Fayram (2017) and Strong et al. (2012) based on the theoretical tenets provided by Garrison et al. (2000) and Hauck and Warnecke (2012). This made it possible to include past and more recent proposals pertaining to social presence theory with an emphasis on teaching presence and the need to address anxiety and isolation in SHL students.

## 5. Findings

### 5.1. Levels of anxiety, comfort, and connection in the SHL virtual classroom

To answer research question one, the overall experience of the students, and based on the review of the literature, the analysis is centered in any instance of feelings of anxiety, level of comfort, and on their feelings of connection with their peers and instructors. For instances, when students were asked about their level of anxiety based on delivery mode, 42% students indicated feeling more anxious in remote courses and 20% reported feeling more anxious in face-to-face courses (See Figure 2 below).

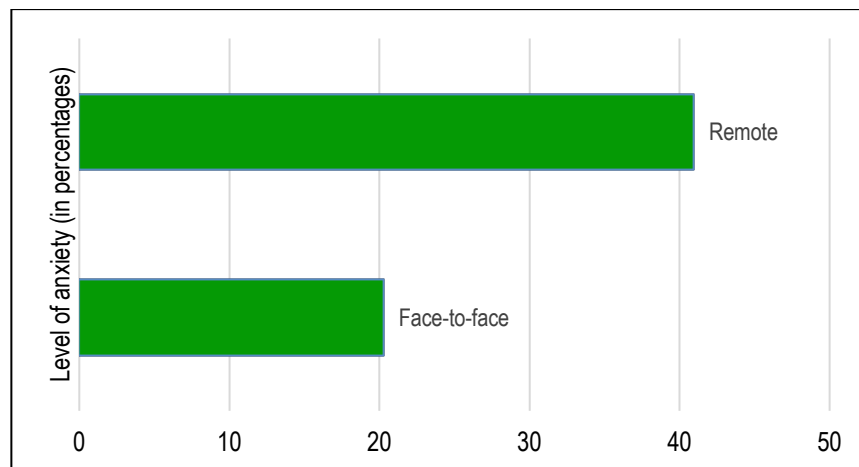


Figure 2. Level of anxiety by delivery mode (remote vs. face-to-face)

Also, although many of the participants (49%) agreed that computer-mediated communication was an excellent medium for social interaction in remote courses, the quantitative analysis of student response indicated that SHL speakers in SHL courses experienced higher levels of anxiety that increased by 11-20% in remote instruction, as compared to face-to-face instruction. However, results also indicated that the level of

anxiety experienced by these students decreased when students had their cameras off (0-10% range), as compared to when their cameras were on because it was required (91-100% range). See Figure 3. The impact of having the camera on or off, is further explained by a student's response in the open-ended questions, who said: "forcing students to have the camera on is a bit too much, I'm sure students will feel 10x more comfortable if they're not forced to show their face."

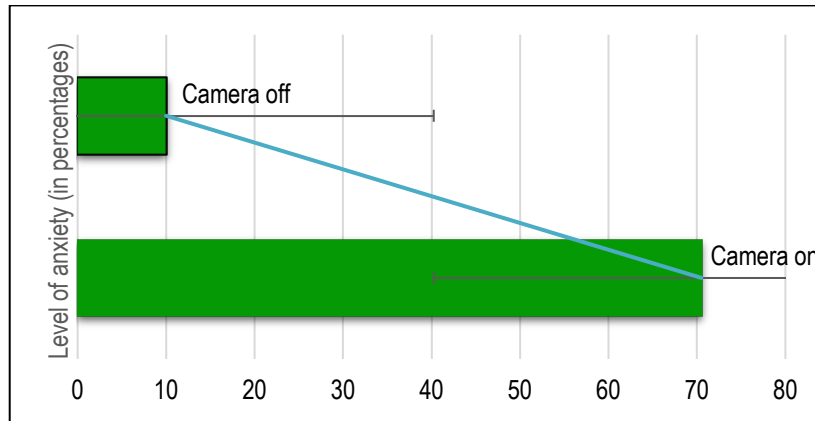


Figure 3. Level of anxiety by camera mode

With regards to levels of comfort with a face-to-face or online learning and teaching environment, the data revealed that students preferred participating in SHL courses delivered face-to-face than in online courses. For instance, thirty-five students responded that they felt more comfortable participating in face-to-face, and this is in comparison to seventeen students who shared that they felt the most comfortable participating in remote environments. It is important to mention that forty-three students responded that they neither liked or disliked participating in face-to-face courses or online classes. When asked about their format preference for language learning, twenty-six students shared that they felt the most comfortable learning in a face-to-face environment, and twenty-six students also revealed that they were the most comfortable when learning in a remote environment. See Figure 4.

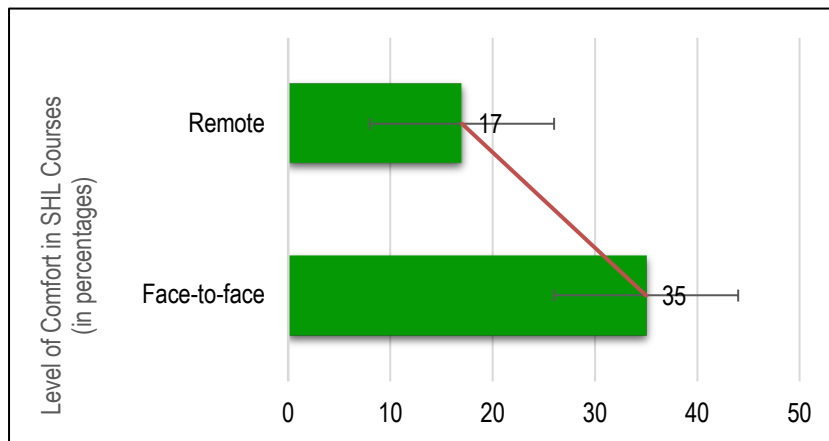


Figure 4. Comfort level by class format

Another aspect analyzed (related to the first research question) was the students' level of connection either with their peers or instructor. Overall, the average connection score reported for the online course was 33%, compared to 57% connection to classmates in the face-to-face course. Students also reported a higher 20 level of connection to their instructors than their peers in both formats. However, students also reported that their classmates facilitated interactions in their online classes, which in turn influenced the frequency of their participation and the quality of their work. Figure 5 presents the level of connectedness with peers and instructors based on the class format.

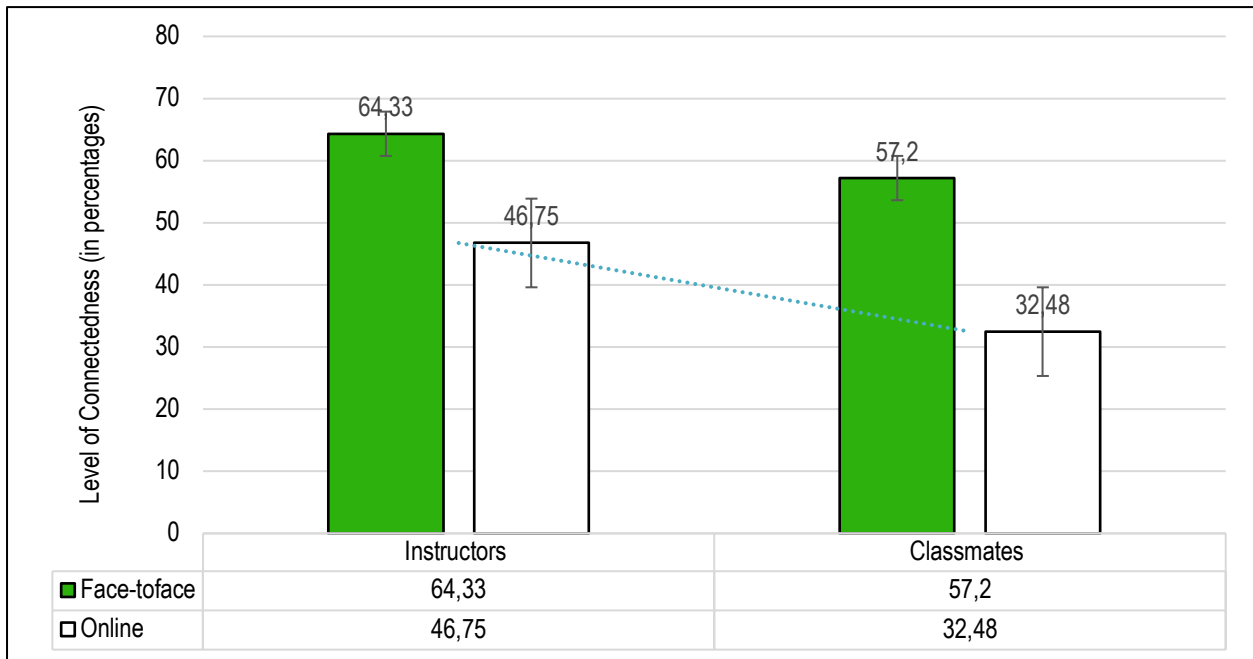


Figure 5. Level of connectedness with peers and instructors by the class format

Taking the time to understand students’ personal, social, and academic needs is even more necessary in the virtual classroom because doing so could reduce their level of anxiety, increase their comfort in the classroom, and strengthen feelings of connection with the students and instructors. As reflected in the previous findings, although students expressed a high level of anxiety, providing the option to have their cameras’ off gave them a sense of relief, which could explain the reported feeling of connection with the instructor even after having to transition to a virtual environment.

### 5.2 Social presence in the SHL classroom: individual learner, teaching presence and language learning presence

The above findings provide an overview of the experiences of SHL students in the classroom and, although most of them preferred face-to-face classes, some students reported high levels of comfort in participating and learning in virtual courses, as well as a 33% level of feeling of connection with their peers and instructors. In answering research question two, the authors will go in depth in understanding the participants’ answers about their experience in the virtual classes.

Specifically, the second research question investigated the expressions of SP elements such as individual learner, teaching presence, and language learning presence in the students’ virtual classes. For this question, the researchers conducted a qualitative analysis, and used the elements of the theoretical frameworks as a priori to find the patterns in the data. Therefore, when students were asked about which projects and/or assignments in the SHL course allowed them to expand their linguistic skills and confidence, the most common themes that emerged were interaction and collaboration in the classroom (individual learner), curriculum that focused on authentic learning and active learning (teacher presence), and language practice (language learning presence). Undertaking a qualitative analysis allowed for introspective evidence that a quantitative analysis would not have been able to reveal.

Most of the participants shared that the assignments with opportunities to interact with their peers either in discussions and overall being able to participate in the course were the most impactful and meaningful for their language learning. Students also stated that presentations/debates, course projects, and work helped expand and reinforce their Spanish confidence. For instance, a student mentioned that “not so much as projects but [allowing] for constant group work. Some students may be hesitant to ask the instructor for help when confused and are more likely to turn to a peer for help.” Another student, when asked about the activity that helped them the most, mentioned that “definitely the class participation, since it encourages you to speak

Spanish.” Having opportunities to interact with each other in an online course strengthens their linguistic confidence, and it also allows participants to build a relationship and create a sense of community with their peers (Strong et al., 2012). Moreover, implementing activities such as group work will not only give students an active role in their education, but this engagement would be a big factor in retaining them in the online course.

The analysis also revealed that the SHL speakers experienced a stronger sense of SP when there was higher teaching presence. Precisely, the assignments and activities implemented in the SHL courses that focused on authentic learning and active learning strengthened students’ SP, and at the same time, allowed them to expand their linguistic skills. These assignments included presentations, community projects, and course projects. The course projects included blogs, autobiographies, and research papers. One student said that “presentations allowed for self-paced discovery of the language while allowing me to be creative.” Another student also shared that “the community service project allowed me to use all my Spanish skills that have been developing throughout the semester.” Whiteside (2015) mentioned that incorporating students’ prior knowledge is vital to build their SP. Thus, assignments such as autobiographies and community projects should be included in online courses because they are key in recognizing the knowledge students bring to the classroom and essential for active learning, which reinforces students’ SP.

Along with having assignments that allowed for authentic learning and active learning, the students mentioned that mechanical activities such as filling in the blanks or grammar assignments were helpful in their language learning. For example, one student shared that the activity “where we had to write our own sentence in Spanish and practice our grammar was very beneficial.” Students also found it very helpful when they learned about the different pronunciations, accents, and the use of lower-case and upper-case letters in Spanish. Fayram (2017) states that in addition to implementing activities that allow for interactions and collaboration, it is necessary to also incorporate activities and assignments that focus on forms to allow students to practice their language in a more technical way. In fact, when students were asked about their recommendations of how to improve the course some mentioned “I think it is vital to go over the basics like sentence structure, proper grammar, etc. because although many of us already speak Spanish, we do not speak it at an educational level or professional.” Hence, when designing the curriculum for an online course, it will be necessary to also include activities that will lead students to develop a metalinguistic awareness about their Spanish, which could possibly contribute to students’ linguistic confidence.

### ***5.3 Lack or need for social presence in the SHL classroom***

Although in the previous section the data exemplified instances of SP, the findings also revealed that the participants called for implementation of effective activities that would lead to more and higher social presence. For instance, in the coding of the open-ended responses, the researchers of the current study found a high number of responses that indicated a need for the instructor to interact more with the students, and a need for the curriculum to take into consideration the needs of the students. The participants also asked for more collaboration and activities where they can engage with their peers. This major code category encompasses students’ suggestions for what activities not to include in an online course, and it also includes recommendations for the instructor to interact more with them and include tasks that take into account the students’ needs.

As mentioned before, most of the students stated that they preferred face-to-face courses over online courses, and this preference could be understood by their responses when asked about what class projects, activities, or assignments they will not recommend for an online course. Most of their answers focused on the opportunity to reinforce individual learner presence which includes affective expression, interactions, and cohesiveness (the capacity of students and instructor to form a close-knit unit to enhance social presence in the classroom). These activities included presentations and group work. One student, for example, mentioned that presentations could be an inconvenience because “some homes aren’t set up or allow students to feel comfortable.” Another student also shared that “presentations live, or video projects are too hard, and having class at home adds a lot of difficult variables to that process.” These responses shed light to the social issues Latinx students are facing and could explain why many students reported lower feelings of anxiety when they had their camera off during virtual classes. Similarly, another student also explained that “I feel that online group work can be difficult, especially for students who may not have the same access to the internet as others.” The concern of having the camera off or on is also reflected in this student’s response: “Forcing students to have the camera on is a bit too much, because they’re forced to show their face.” Hence, making sure that

students have an adequate electronic device, whether they prefer to turn on or off their cameras and have internet access should be part of the curriculum design.

Another difficulty with group work is the lack of participation from all the members. One participant said that “group work in class doesn’t work as well for the online format” and this is because, as explained by another participant, “some people do not participate or are too shy or cannot turn[the] mic on.” Another student stated that “I would not recommend online groups projects. Either some of my fellow students would either not show, not do the work, or just does not communicate with the group.” A similar concern is reflected in the following student suggestion:

Surprisingly, I believe there should be less group work because many people do not really like to work together in groups online. It seems a little awkward to be randomly put in a group online and be forced to speak to them. I think most of the work can be done together in class where time would go by faster and stuff would be understood better.

These responses show that implementing group work or dividing students in breakout rooms is not enough. Hence, it is vital to always make sure that the group work activities are effective and will engage all of the classmates. Not implementing effective group work could lead students to interpret these opportunities to interact and get to know their peers as a waste of time. Ironically, when students were asked what type of activities they would recommend implementing in the online course, a high percentage of them said group work. One student recommended to implement “more projects that involve group work so you can work with your Spanish with other colleagues.” Other students called for the need for more authentic activities and more opportunities to interact with their peers which is a request to implement the elements of individual learner and teaching presence of SP in the curriculum. This request is reflected in the students’ responses to “promote material that enhances speaking in Spanish with more confidence,” “incorporate more interactive learning,” and “include more student engagement.” Thus, one way to lead students to become active learners is by incorporating group activities where students will be able to share their prior knowledge and collaborate with their peers. It is the duty of the instructor, therefore, to design group activities that will engage all students and motivate students to interact and collaborate even when they are not being supervised.

In the recommendations, students also called for the need to increase teaching presence and wanted for their instructor to be more approachable and connect with students. Overall, the students’ responses showed a need for a more supportive instructor in the online course. Students wrote, for instance, that they recommended for the instructor to “be there for your students,” “not to grade them so harshly,” “be a more approachable teacher,” “to chill with the deadlines,” and “making sure the teacher confirms people are on the same page.” These responses point at the relevance of the instructor in a remote classroom as a key element in promoting SP. Boothe (2017) and Whiteside (2015) suggest that rather than dictating the pace, instructors’ role is to design meaningful tasks and to provide precise, as well as clear guidelines for students to meet the course’s expectations.

In summary, the results of the analysis pointed at the need for more SP in the SHL course. Specifically, students’ comments indicated that they need a curriculum that fosters teaching presence in the online SHL classroom. Likewise, participants expressed the need for more collaboration and activities to engage with their peers. Showing the importance of interaction between the instructor, the student, and their peers. Also of importance, the authors found the value to reinforce individual learner through affective expression, interactions, and cohesiveness. Students also shared needing more support from their instructor and suggested for the educator to be more compassionate with them, as well as to make sure that their students are on track with meeting their academic goals.

## 6. Discussion and implications

The pandemic and the sudden switch to remote learning was inevitable, but through this experience educators learned to adapt and grow in any circumstances and be prepared for anything. They should understand what elements could be included in an online course to retain and engage students throughout the class. This research study documents aspects that allowed students to feel connected with their peers and instructors. It also calls attention to students’ demand to increase SP in the SHL courses. At a time when Latinx, Black and Native American students’ attendance to higher education institutions has dropped 13% in just one year (Williams June, 2020), giving these students a voice to change social practices in remote courses is essential.

The two educational disparities Latinx students continue to face, even more now with the switch to remote learning, are lower retention rates and lack of accessibility to adequate technology and internet. Although the authors cannot argue that implementing elements of SP will end these disparities, they do propose that providing Latinx students the adequate support could mitigate social injustice, reduce feelings of isolation, and lack of support, which have been evident during the last year (Strong et al., 2012; Zamarripa & Roque, 2021). Thus, the researchers argue that online SHL courses could be key in addressing such issues. For instance, although educators could not possibly provide students technological devices or internet access, they can take this issue into consideration when designing their curriculum. The findings show that students reported higher levels of anxiety in online courses, but this level decreased when students were allowed to leave their camera off. Giving students this opportunity is necessary because they might feel less intimidated with their camera off, and they might also feel relief that they are not obligated to show their homes to strangers. As students mentioned, educators must get to know the needs of the students because on some occasions they cannot participate in group activities because their microphone does not work, or they do not have adequate internet access. Educators, therefore, should also design alternative assignments for those students who are impacted by the digital divide.

Increasing SP in SHL courses recognizes that students exhibit individual learning differences but could all greatly benefit from instructor involvement and investment as the central facilitator of classroom activities. Reinforcing individual learner provided opportunities to collaborate with their peers, and as reflected in the findings, gave the participants a richer and more meaningful experience which could be crucial for decreasing dropout rates in online courses (Garrison et al., 2000; Strong et al., 2014). Interactive and collaborative assignments also allowed students to build a relationship and create a sense of community among their peers, which led to higher levels of comfort in the online course, as well as a high feeling of connection with their peers and instructors. Furthermore, teaching presence, centered on authentic learning and active learning, validated students' experience because they were able to incorporate their prior knowledge and become active learners in their education. At the same time, students also asked for effective group work and more support from their instructor. Students mentioned that they needed for the instructor to be "a more approachable teacher," "to try to connect more with students," and "to be there for your students." These needs, overall, call for an instructor to be compassionate and to support their students beyond just language needs. Having an instructor who students feel connected to and can count on is even more crucial in online courses given that this learning environment can be lonely, confusing, and overwhelming. Also, as Boothe (2017) mentioned, the educator is the binding element in creating the community of learning, thus, reinforcing teaching presence will not only impact students' class satisfaction, but it will also be a crucial element for their retention in the course.

The present research emphasizes how crucial it is to increase SP in SHL courses, not only for remote classes, but also in online courses as a long-lasting key element in these courses' curriculum. The authors offer some pedagogical implications for practitioners who teach SHL learners in a virtual environment, and these are motivated by the comments students provided themselves in survey questions and open-ended answers. The authors believe the findings can be applicable to both a remote and an online format. The two key elements of social presence that must be at the center of the curriculum are individual learner and teaching presence. To reinforce individual learner, the instructor should incorporate effective interactive and collaborative activities. However, the instructor must make sure that the group work assignments are well detailed, and it requires the participation of all the group members. The central components of teaching presence are instructor support, authentic learning, and active learning. Incorporating authentic learning and active learning will provide students a sense of belonging in a classroom and build camaraderie among the students. Thus, to reinforce authentic learning and active learning, the activities should elicit students' prior knowledge, include real and relevant situations, and allow for self-paced discovery such as community projects, research projects, and debates. Similarly important, the instructor must invest time in getting to know their students, be approachable, and make students feel supported. Instructors can accomplish this by implementing elements of mentorship in their curriculum, providing personalized feedback, and sending weekly emails with reminders, resources, and encouraging messages.

## 7. Conclusion and limitations

This study illustrates the experiences of SHL students in virtual classes by drawing on Garrison et al.'s CoI (2000), and Hauck and Warnecke (2012), Fayram (2017), Strong et al. (2012), and Whiteside's (2015) SP approach in order to make sense of how SHL courses have or have not incorporated elements of SP in virtual classes. The authors centered the analysis on the following SP components: individual learner, teaching presence, and language learning presence. Through the analysis, the researchers have contributed to a portrayal of what each of these three elements looks like and could look like in SHL virtual courses. The authors have shown that although most of the participants preferred face-to-face instruction, the instances of social presence in the virtual classroom mitigated some feelings of isolation and disconnection. This study contributes to the understanding that not requiring students to turn on their cameras could lower their level of anxiety. Also, students' level of comfort and feeling of connection increased when the curriculum and instructor reinforced individual learner and teaching presence. For example, the individual learner, a social presence element, was reinforced by implementing assignments and activities that allowed interaction and collaboration among classmates. However, the students pointed out that some breakout room activities were not effective because not all their peers participated in the activities. Regarding teaching presence, students mentioned that the assignments that were the most helpful in their language learning, and increased their level of comfort, were those that included authentic scenarios and allowed for self-paced discovery such as blogs, research papers, presentations, debates, and discussions. In students' recommendations, the major themes that emerged were the need for more instructor support and effective assignments for interactions and collaboration. These two recommendations are crucial, not only for the satisfaction of students, but are also key in providing students with the necessary support to stay in the course. Thus, designing effective online courses that foster SP is essential to diminish feelings of isolation, encourage active participation, and to address one of the social injustices Latinx students continue to encounter; lower retention rates due to the obstacles and inequalities they face in education.

The current research project adds to the scarce literature of teaching online SHL courses and offers pedagogical implications for practitioners. As the researchers move forward with this type of research, in future studies, it is needed to analyze individual learner differences and their impact in a remote learning environment. They also must examine the curriculum factors that may help modulate emotional responses when a course encourages social presence. Additionally, to further explore the impact of SP in the SHL course, they must also interview the instructors and the students. The data obtained will provide an understanding of the impact that reinforcing elements of SP in the SHL course can have and how this course could contribute to increase the retention rate of Latinx students in higher education.

There is still a lot of work to be done to make remote and online learning equitable and accessible to all students, and it is essential to keep fighting for equitable education because not closing the digital divide will impact students' quality education and their retention rates (Tate, 2021). However, incorporating elements of SP is one step forward to addressing this social injustice. The pandemic brought many uncertainties, challenges, and amplified the social injustices people of color have faced throughout the years in the US, but as educators, we have the power to use the education platform to address such social injustices. As the SHL field continues to grow, we must incorporate key elements in the curriculum, such as SP, to make sure students receive the necessary resources to complete the course, and to eventually graduate and meet their academic goals. Overall, to take it a step further, implementing and fostering a strong SP in SHL online curriculum could be the cornerstone to address the challenges Latinx students have faced and continue to face in this challenging educational context. Engaging students with course materials with enhanced social contact in a virtual format and with more instructor involvement can reduce the lack of engagement and could become important factors that contribute to higher retention rates of Latinx students on higher education in both remote and online formats.

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## Appendix A

### Remote Instruction in Spanish Heritage Language Courses

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Start of Block: Default Question Block

This study has been reviewed and approved by the FSU's IRB office under the submission and study number STUDY00001785.

#### Q8 FLORIDA STATE UNIVERSITY LEHMAN COLLEGE

You are being asked to voluntarily participate in this survey. We are doing this survey to gather information about students' learning experiences with remote (on-line) instruction. If you choose to participate, you will be asked to take a survey that consists of two parts and it should not take more than 35 minutes.

We will not record your name or any information that shows your identity, and you will not be signing this form. For the second section of the survey, only your name will be recorded. Therefore, we will store your information in ways we think are secure. We will store electronic files in computer systems with password, encryption and other authentication protection. However, we cannot guarantee complete confidentiality.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Anel Brandl, [abrandl@fsu.edu](mailto:abrandl@fsu.edu), 850-284-2466, or Dr. Evelyn Durán-Urrea, [evelyn.duran@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:evelyn.duran@lehman.cuny.edu), 718-960-7727. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, or regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), you are encouraged to contact the FSU Office for Human Subjects Protection (OHSP) at (850) 644-7900. You may also contact the OHSP by email at [humansubjects@fsu.edu](mailto:humansubjects@fsu.edu), or by writing OHSP at 2010 Levy Avenue, Research Foundation Building B, Suite 276, Tallahassee, FL 32306-2742.

I agree to participate in this study. (1)

---

Q1 I agree to participate in this study

Q2 Should Spanish heritage speakers take Spanish heritage language courses instead of the regular Spanish courses for second language learners?

Strongly agree (8)

Somewhat agree (9)

Neither agree nor disagree (10)

Somewhat disagree (11)

Strongly disagree (12)

---

Q3 My current Spanish heritage language course is being delivered:

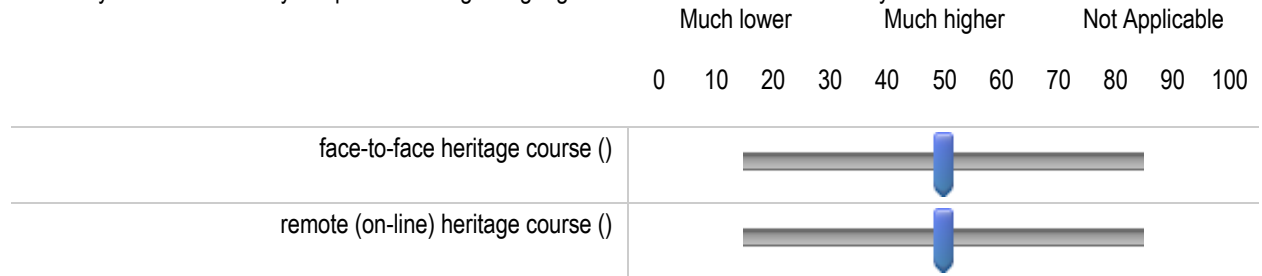
- face-to-face (1)
- remotely (on-line) (2)
- hybrid (I can attend face-to-face lectures or access content remotely via on-line lectures) (3)
- other (explain): (4) \_\_\_\_\_

Q4 Rank the following heritage-class activities based on the anxiety they make you feel (1 = I feel the most anxious when I do...)

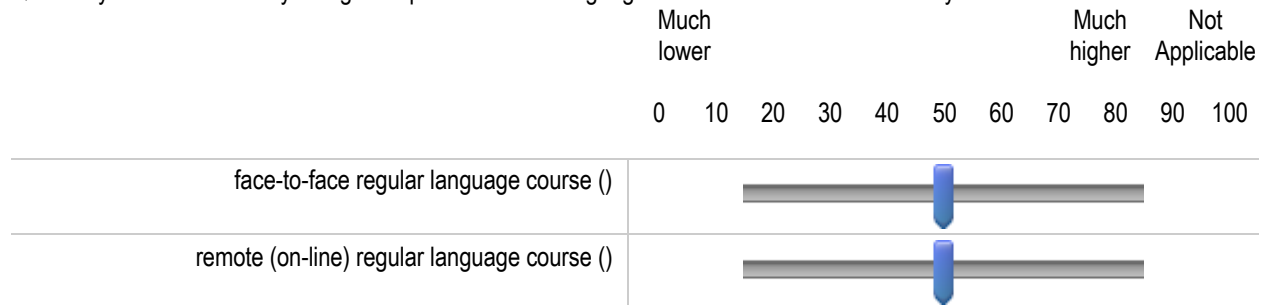
Drag the items up or down to rank them.

- \_\_\_\_\_ Exams (1)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Presentations (2)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Everyday (3)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Group work (4)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Quizzes (5)
- \_\_\_\_\_ Class participation (6)

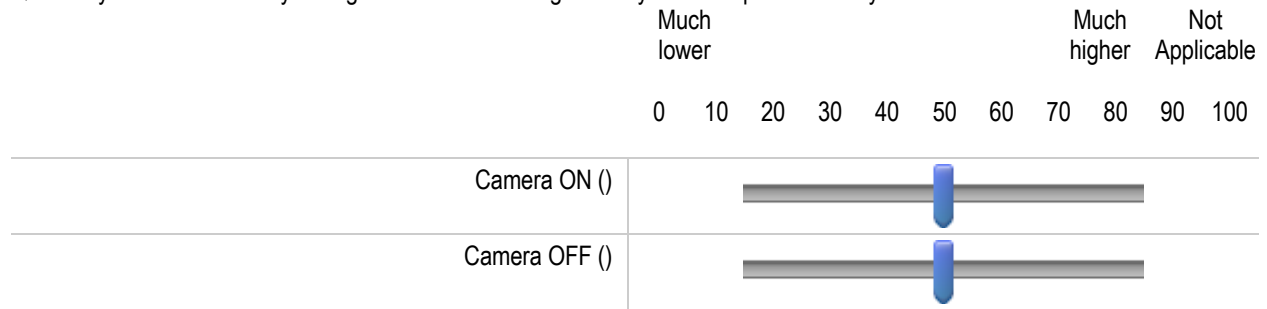
Q5 Rate your level of anxiety in Spanish heritage language courses based on their delivery mode:



Q6 Rate your level of anxiety in regular Spanish second language courses based on their delivery mode:



Q7 Rate your level of anxiety during online class meetings when you are require to have your camera ON/OFF:



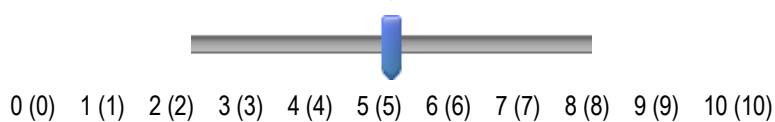
Q8 Do you like to participate in Spanish heritage courses delivered face-to-face?

- Like a great deal (1)
- Like somewhat (2)
- Neither like nor dislike (3)
- Dislike somewhat (4)
- Dislike a great deal (5)

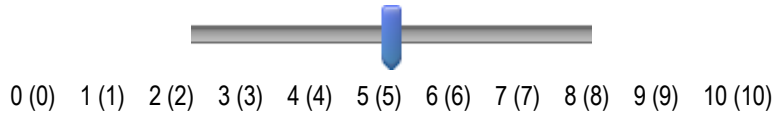
Q9 Do you like to participate in Spanish heritage courses delivered remotely (on-line)?

- Like a great deal (1)
- Like somewhat (2)
- Neither like nor dislike (3)
- Dislike somewhat (4)
- Dislike a great deal (5)

Q10 How comfortable do you feel speaking Spanish in face-to-face Spanish heritage courses? (10 = very comfortable)



Q11 How comfortable do you feel speaking Spanish in remote Spanish heritage courses? (10 = very comfortable)



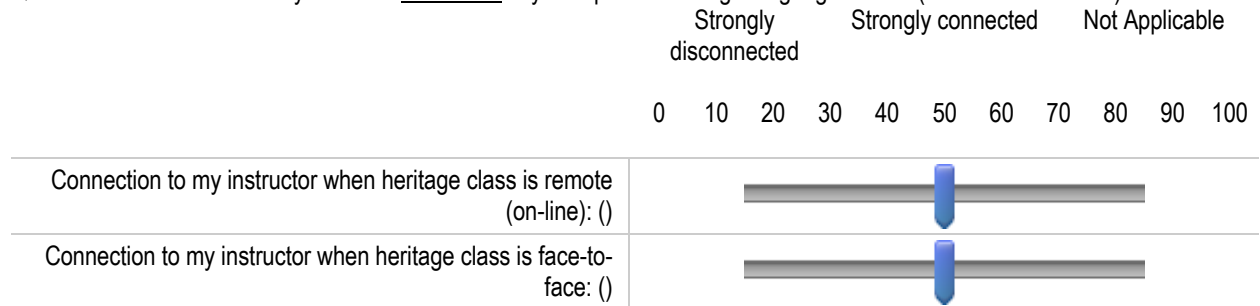
Q12 Rate your level of motivation in face-to-face Spanish heritage language courses.



Q13 Rate your level of motivation in remote (on-line) Spanish heritage language courses.

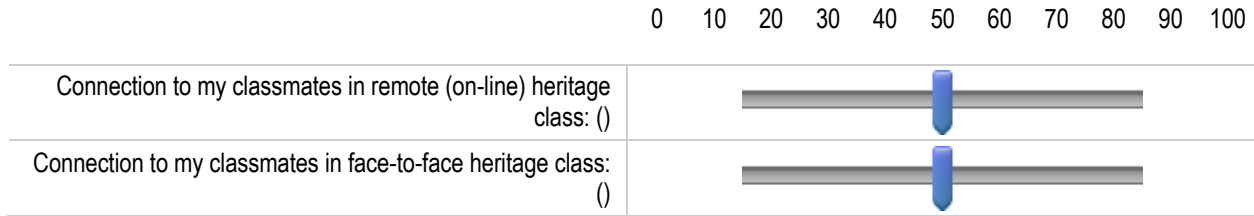


Q14 Rate how connected do you feel to instructors in your Spanish heritage language course (remote/face-to-face):



Q15 Rate how connected do you feel to your classmates in Spanish heritage course (remote/face-to-face):

Strongly disconnected      Strongly connected      Not Applicable



Q16 How well do people understand you as a heritage bilingual speaker in Spanish heritage language courses?

- Extremely well (1)
- Very well (2)
- Moderately well (3)
- Slightly well (4)
- Not well at all (5)

Q17 How well do people understand you as a heritage bilingual speaker in regular Spanish second language courses?

- Extremely well (1)
- Very well (2)
- Moderately well (3)
- Slightly well (4)
- Not well at all (5)

Q18 How much do you feel like you fit in (belong) in Spanish heritage language courses?

- Far too much (6)
  - Moderately too much (7)
  - Slightly too much (8)
  - Neither too much nor too little (9)
  - Slightly too little (10)
- 

Q19 How much do you feel like you fit in (belong) in regular Spanish second language courses?

- Far too much (6)
  - Moderately too much (7)
  - Slightly too much (8)
  - Neither too much nor too little (9)
  - Slightly too little (10)
- 

Q20 Does your sense of belonging in your Spanish heritage language course decrease with remote (on-line) instruction?

- Definitely yes (1)
  - Probably yes (2)
  - Might or might not (3)
  - Probably not (4)
  - Definitely not (5)
- 

Q21 Please let us know if you agree or disagree with the following 8 statements:

---



Q22 My Spanish heritage language course feels like an on-line community of learning.

- Definitely yes (1)
  - Probably yes (2)
  - Might or might not (3)
  - Probably not (4)
  - Definitely not (5)
- 

Q23 The instructor of my Spanish heritage language course creates a feeling of an on-line community.

- Strongly agree (1)
- Somewhat agree (2)
- Neither agree nor disagree (3)
- Somewhat disagree (4)
- Strongly disagree (5)

Q24 The classmates in my Spanish heritage language course create a feeling of an on-line community.

- Strongly agree (1)
  - Somewhat agree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Somewhat disagree (4)
  - Strongly disagree (5)
-

Q25 The instructor of my Spanish heritage language course facilitates discussions (on-line).

- Strongly agree (1)
  - Somewhat agree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Somewhat disagree (4)
  - Strongly disagree (5)
- 

Q26 The classmates in my Spanish heritage language course facilitate interaction (on-line).

- Strongly agree (1)
  - Somewhat agree (2)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (3)
  - Somewhat disagree (4)
  - Strongly disagree (5)
- 

Q27 Computer-mediated communication is an excellent medium for social interaction in the remote Spanish heritage language course.

- Strongly agree (1)
  - Agree (2)
  - Somewhat agree (3)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (4)
  - Somewhat disagree (5)
  - Disagree (6)
  - Strongly disagree (7)
-

Q28 Interacting on-line with my classmates influences the frequency and/or quality of my work.

- Strongly agree (11)
  - Somewhat agree (12)
  - Neither agree nor disagree (13)
  - Somewhat disagree (14)
  - Strongly disagree (15)
- 

Q29 Which class projects and/or assignments in your Spanish heritage language course allow you to expand your linguistic skills and confidence?

\_\_\_\_\_

---

Q30 Are there any class projects and/or assignments that you would NOT recommend for remote (on-line) instruction?

\_\_\_\_\_

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Q31 Do you have any other recommendations to further improve Spanish heritage language courses?

\_\_\_\_\_

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Q32 The last part of this questionnaire is a very brief survey to gather information about your bilingual experience. The second part of the survey will open automatically after you click on the continue button below.

**WE THANK YOU FOR YOUR PARTICIPATION!**

End of Block: Default Question Block

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## Appendix B

### Social presence coding scheme

1. **IL** Individual Learner
  1. Affective expression (value, emotions, emotional connection)
  2. **I** Interactive (social sharing): interaction and collaboration
  3. **C** Cohesive (Acknowledgment, approval from instructors and/or peers this could be in the feedback and activities where students feel supported and where they can share resources, ideas, and experiences)
2. **TP** Teaching Presence: connection between interaction and pedagogical purpose. Educator manages forms of interaction with learners for pedagogical purposes
  - a. **IS** Instructor support
  - b. **AUL** Authentic Learning
  - c. **AL** Active Learning
3. **LP** 'language learning presence': learning about the language through focus on form(s) and focus on meaning. The focus of this is whether students were able to practice the language either in grammatical activities or freely using Spanish and focused on meaning. This involves participation and collaboration.
  - a. **A** Perceptions: Awareness of language learning of self and others and of participation with others for language learning purposes
  - b. **P** Language practice: (non-active learning, mechanical activities)
4. **LNSP** Lack or need for social presence: Here we can code the times students ask for more collaboration, or activities to engage with their peers.
  - a. **NII** Need for the instructor to interact more with the students
  - b. **NC** Need for the curriculum to take into consideration the needs of the students

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- EN** **Angélica Amezcua** is an Assistant Professor of Spanish and Director of the Spanish Heritage Language Program at the University of Washington. Angélica is also a researcher, an educator of Spanish Heritage Language, and a linguistics activist who works in and outside the classroom towards reclaiming and promoting the use of Spanish in a society with low ethnolinguistics vitality. In her current research, she examines how university Spanish heritage language courses can play an important role in promoting the use of Spanish in the United States, counteracting the devaluation of minority languages, and contributing to narrowing the Latinx student achievement gap.
- ES** **Angélica Amezcua** es profesora asistente de español y directora del Programa de Español de Herencia en la Universidad de Washington. Angélica es también investigadora, educadora y activista que trabaja para reclamar y promover el uso del español en una sociedad con una vitalidad etnolingüística baja. En su investigación actual, examina cómo los cursos de español como lengua de herencia pueden desempeñar un papel importante en la promoción del uso del español en los Estados Unidos, así como ayudar a contrarrestar la devaluación de las lenguas minoritarias y contribuir a reducir la brecha académica dentro del alumnado latino.
- IT** **Angélica Amezcua** è ricercatrice di spagnolo e direttrice del Programma di Spagnolo Lingua Ereditaria presso l'Università di Washington. È anche ricercatrice, educatrice di spagnolo lingua ereditaria e linguista attivista dentro e fuori dall'aula nell'ambito della rivendicazione e promozione dell'uso dello spagnolo in una società dalla bassa vitalità etnolingüistica. La sua attuale ricerca tratta del ruolo importante dei corsi universitari di spagnolo lingua ereditaria per la promozione dell'uso di questa lingua negli Stati Uniti, al fine di contrastare la svalutazione delle lingue minoritarie e contribuire a ridurre il divario educativo di studenti e studentesse latini/e.

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- IT** | **Evelyn Durán Urrea** è professoressa presso il Dipartimento di Lingue e Letterature del *Lehman College* della *City University* di New York. I suoi interessi di ricerca comprendono lo spagnolo negli Stati Uniti e lo spagnolo lingua ereditaria. La sua ricerca più recente riguarda la valutazione e il livello degli apprendenti di spagnolo lingua ereditaria e le iniziative di Risorse Didattiche Aperte.

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- EN** | **Estrella Rodríguez** is Research Faculty in the School of Communication Science and Disorders at Florida State University. She investigates how culture and heritage language can be part of teaching and learning practices in children and adults. She has also developed courses for heritage language speakers. Her work has been published in the *Heritage Language Journal*, the *American Educational Research Journal*, in *Languages*, and in the *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research*.
- ES** | **Estrella Rodríguez** es investigadora en la Escuela de Comunicación y Desórdenes del Habla de la Universidad Estatal de Florida. Su trabajo se centra en la cultura y la lengua de herencia como parte de la enseñanza y del aprendizaje en la infancia y en la edad adulta. También ha desarrollado cursos para hablantes de una lengua de herencia. Sus trabajos han sido publicados en: *Heritage Language Journal*, *American Educational Research Journal*, *Languages* y *Journal of Speech, Language and Hearing Research*.
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