

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative 2020 Volume II: Teaching about Race and Racism Across the Disciplines

### **Race and Racial Formation in Latin America: Racism Conscious Instruction in the Spanish Heritage Language Classroom**

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# Introduction

At my school I teach Spanish for Heritage Speakers. In the course, heritage speakers have the opportunity to learn about history that is part of their heritage and that is normally not taught in the public school system. During the past school year, the topic of race and colorism popped up a lot in our class discussions, particularly because the textbook we were using for the class did not show many famous Latinx people of color. The textbook and curriculum that is offered for this course does not have anything to teach about racism and race formation in Latin America, like they do in American history textbooks.

This unit will focus on racism and race formation in Latin America. It will focus on three different areas to demonstrate how racism and racial formation work differently in Latin America: the favelas in Brazil, Guatemala and Mexico City. This unit will focus on race and racial formation through literature and film is intended to use Brazil, Guatemala and Mexico as examples to show students how racism and racial formation is varied in Latin America. Students will explore racism and racial formation in Latin America and be able to compare it to racism and racial formation in the United States using the target language. This unit will be implemented in my 12<sup>th</sup> grade Spanish for Hispanics course.

The recent Black Lives Matter Movement has made the racial inequality that exists in the United States more prevalent than ever before. We have seen that racial inequality not only exists with police brutality, but it exists in every aspect of our society. Racism is not just an "American" thing; racism can be seen in any country that has been colonized throughout our history, it just hides in plain sight. Racial formation is used to look at race as a socially constructed identity where the content and importance of racial categories are determined by social, economic and political forces.<sup>1</sup> Race and racial formation look different throughout the world and can be studied in many different disciplines, but the language classroom is not a place to have serious conversations. It is supposed to be a fun space where we come together and learn a new language and experience new food and culture. On the contrary, I believe the language classroom is a perfect space to talk about race and racial formation.

## **Classroom Context**

I teach at one of the highest achieving high schools in the district and state. The school is a diverse school, where 37% are White, 28.8% are African American, 17% are Latinx, 8.7% are Multi-Racial, 4.8% are Native American and 3.7% are Asian/Pacific Islander. This diversity is reflected in every classroom, including my own. There are a wide range of ability levels present in my classroom, including English Language Learners and students who are on IEP's (Individualized Education Program) and many of my students are on free or reduced lunch which is based on their parents' income. Many of my students have part-time jobs, either because they need to contribute to finances at home or because they are self-supporting. While many of my students are high achieving and are reading at or above grade level, there are also students in my classroom that are barely reading at or below grade level. This can be a challenge when teaching a foreign language, and it is also a challenge when trying to assign homework in a foreign language based on vocabulary and grammar. Therefore, I must be creative about how the material is taught for all my students to understand and get creative about how I assign homework.

What is unique about my school is that it is a historically African American high school and they also offer African American Studies. In my school district, African American Studies is taught at most of the high schools. The largest demographic in my school district is 34% Latinx. The demographics in my school district are changing and are not reflected at my school yet. Currently, there is no course offered for students in Latin American Studies.

Many of my heritage speaker students are sharp and are interested in learning about their heritage and sharing their knowledge with their peers. Many of my students have become advocates of anti-racism and have protested the killing of unarmed Black and Brown people in Tulsa. My students are becoming aware of the racism and racial formation that exists in the Latinx community in the United States. This is the opportunity to talk about the racism that exists in Latin America and is not acknowledged. Through the study of literature and film, students will be able to see how the effects of colonialism are still felt today through racism in Latin America. This unit will expose students to content that is not normally taught in the school system and make a connection with the racism they see in the United States.

### **Content Objectives**

In the language classroom we can see that the structure of the classroom and teaching language has roots in colonization. As teachers, we are told to emphasize vocabulary and grammar charts and drills. There is a hierarchy of the way a language is taught; you begin with basic vocabulary, learn the verbs "to be", "to go", "to make", etc., and then you start to build on to the basic knowledge that has been gained. In the Spanish language classroom, we see roots of colonization every day. For example, most Spanish textbooks teach a one dialect of Spanish, specifically Spanish as spoken in Spain. These textbooks often ignore the variance that exists from one country to the other and do not expose students to regional vocabulary. By presenting "one type" of Spanish as the standard to which all others are measured, textbooks are showing the underlying racist tones that exist in the way we teach language to our students, specifically heritage language learners.

Colorblindness is just one of many examples that allows for racist tactics to exist in the classroom. According to George Lipsitz, "Colorblindness does not do away with color, but rather reinforces whiteness as the unmarked norm against which difference is measured."<sup>2</sup> In the education system, we can see colorblindness come into play in many ways, for example, Advanced Placement courses can be seen as colorblind courses. They are typically offered to white students in order to gain college credit, but these courses have used white students as a way to set the norm for the courses. McKay believes that "colorblind racism enables whites to justify the current gaps in educational attainment, wages, health, and wealth between them and everyone else through ideologies of individualism and the placing of blame on cultural tendencies without acknowledgment of historical context." <sup>3</sup> A better way to explain colorblindness is a way for racist tactics to exist without explicitly naming race. In the wise words of Aileen Moreton-Robinson "While appearing to be color blind and power evasive, patriarchal whiteness is a system that protects the privileges of whites through diminishing Indigenous entitlements."<sup>4</sup> Colorblindness inhibits our ability to understand and respond to racism. James Baldwin and Milton Reynolds both suggest that colorblindness also distorts white people and their consciousness. This is not a benefit for white people when it comes to tackling colorblindness in any discipline.<sup>5</sup> An example of this in the education system is the school to prison pipeline that mostly affects poor, students of color. As educators, we must work to dismantle the colorblindness that exists within our teaching disciplines and acknowledge that race does exist in our classrooms. We also must acknowledge the colorblindness that exists in our teaching methods. Reynolds states that "teachers who embrace colorblindness tend to skip over troubling moments in American history, misrepresenting them entirely or downplaying their significance.<sup>6</sup> As educators, we must be able to talk about the good and the bad without downplaying the significance of the bad. As educators we also must acknowledge that colorblindness privileges comfort, which can impede a teacher's ability to that classroom safe and inclusive for all students. Reynolds states that "the practices and behaviors associated with colorblind teaching generate cues that erode the safety of students of color and other marginalized students." 7 As educators, we must be aware that our practices and behaviors benefit a certain type of student; usually a white student. In the Spanish language we see that the teaching methods of grammar charts and teaching "Spain Spanish" are forms of colorblindness that are inherently racist towards heritage Spanish learners.

Ethnic Studies are beginning to appear in many schools throughout the country, primarily because it is important for students who are not white to learn about their history. De los Rios, Lopez and Morrell believe that "Ethnic Studies centers race and racism as the primary terrain of academic inquiry and interrogates the construction and deconstruction of racial projects."<sup>8</sup> The goal for this seminar is to demonstrate that we can bring any conversation that is non-traditional and dealing with race into any discipline. In the language classroom, Ethnic Studies can play a role in Spanish Heritage courses that would allow for heritage speaker to learn about their history in the target language. "Ethnic Studies scholars and K-12 teachers also attempt to counter that inequity by tapping into the untold and untapped knowledge production of communities of color that is often absent from mainstream curricula at the secondary and postsecondary levels."<sup>9</sup> Tapping into the untold knowledge that is absent from many students of color is why Ethnic Studies exist. By bringing Ethnic Studies into the language classroom, you are allowing for students of color to learn a history that otherwise would not be taught to them, but you are allowing to students to talk about this history in their heritage language and allowing for students to tap into more "untold knowledge."

Indigenous Studies is usually studied in the American History classroom, but there is room to talk about indigenous studies in the language classroom. The way indigenous studies is taught in the classroom needs to change. Dr. Brian Klopotek suggests starting with contemporary indigenous culture like music and art to demonstrate that indigenous people are coproducing contemporary culture. As an educator, you must always acknowledge whose land you are on, whether it be your school or your community. Acknowledging the land you are on helps students understand that race is not seen in indigenous communities, rather people are seen by the nation they belong to.<sup>10</sup> As educators, we need to do a better job of making sure our students are seen in the classroom, specifically native students. Many native students are invisible in our classroom and we must not make assumptions that there are not any native students in the classroom. In the language classroom, we must remember that the language we are teaching was imposed on indigenous people and the racial tones of colonization that exist within our own instruction.

It is important to note that "teachers may have mastered the content needed to be a teacher, but teachers are not required to have complex or critical understanding of institutionalized racism and how it shapes the realities of different communities. Also, the content standards do not require insight into the shared struggles of Black, Latina/o, Asian American or Native American peoples, or the contributions of women of color in historical movements. Thus, teachers with a Social Science credential who end up teaching Ethnic Studies are not required to have content knowledge or a perspective that is aligned with Ethnic Studies." <sup>11</sup> As educators, we must be aware of the content knowledge we bring to the classroom is aligned with the Ethnic Studies curriculum we are teaching.

# **Teaching Strategies**

The following strategies will allow students to easily access the complex information that we will be tackling in class.

#### **Direct Instruction**

Before we begin, I provide 1.) a short overview of race and racial formation in Mexico, Guatemala and Brazil, and 2.) a short introduction to colorblindness, indigenous studies and ethnic studies. This is necessary because my students will not be familiar with any of these things that are necessary for them to have a chance to understand the complexity of the topics we will be tackling in class. Students will need a great deal of scaffolding with the target language in order to grasp these very difficult concepts. This can be done in person or on a Zoom call with students. The strategies below are essential for this to happen.

#### **Dialectical Journal**

Students in my language classes will have an interactive notebook. An interactive notebook can be used for in-person classes and distance learning/virtual classes. In the appendix there are resources on how to create an interactive notebook online.

These notebooks will be required and there will be a section for a dialectical journal. In dialectical journals, students write responses to specific parts of a text, perhaps a line or phrase or even a short passage. These entries allow students to "dialogue" with novels, to question, to challenge, to analyze, to make connections. The journals serve another purpose by allowing students who are normally hesitant to jump into the fray that can characterize lively discussions to have something ready to discuss or to use in response to a classmate's comments.

### Class Discussions: Whole Class, Socratic Seminar, Fish Bowl

I was the student that always talked in high school and always made my opinion be heard. I loved when teachers has discussions in class. I know that many of my students are not excited about having discussions or even hearing their name be called in front of the class. In the language classroom I have learned that it is important to learn to express their ideas verbally and written. Boggs reiterates that it is important for educators to get away from the "command and control" model and allow students create a new model that allows "for the human and social need of young people to be creators of knowledge and social change."<sup>12</sup> Class discussions allow for students to be the leaders in the classroom with a little push from the teacher. Class discussions allow for students to get them thinking and talking about difficult concepts like race and racial formation in a meaningful way. To ease students into graded, formal discussions, we begin with an informal whole class discussion with me as the discussion leader. I pose questions and ask follow up questions that require more specific, detailed responses than the general, unsupported ones that students are accustomed to providing. I provide students with a list of phrases in the target language to use during discussion. At first they are uncomfortable with the introductory phrases; however, they come to appreciate them and find them useful for framing comments in thoughtful ways. They especially come in handy when we transition to Socratic seminars and fishbowl discussions.

These class discussions are designed to be an open space where heritage students can feel free to have open discussions about hard topics. In my experience, students of color do not participate as much as their white counterparts. The conversation is then taken over by white students in some instances and if the teacher does not do anything to keep the conversation balanced it leads to colorblindness practices. In order to assure this does not happen, we must be hyper vigilant of this. Pelak advocates for instructors to be critically self-reflective and to use sociology classrooms as sites of decolonization. <sup>13</sup> Decolonizing our classrooms is just one way that instructors can make students comfortable in sharing their ideas with their classmates. Navarro believes that "students of Colour benefit from instruction that is grounded in young people's cultural orientations and classrooms that feel like home."<sup>14</sup> If we can bring this type of environment into the classroom, students of color will be successful in these discussions.

The Socratic seminar is an exercise in endurance. Because students are required to remain in the discussion circle for the duration of the period (on a regular day a minimum 45 minutes and on a block day 85 minutes), students must come to class ready to discuss the topic, generally based on a reading or a movie. Their homework the night before is to generate at least five questions for the discussion. These must be open-ended questions that move discussion. Having these questions ready is especially useful for the first few times they participate in Socratic seminars. Since students are generally uncomfortable with silence, the questions give them something to fill the void in discussion that is inevitable, especially during their first forays into this kind of discussion. The discussions will be in the target language. The journals allow them to ground their comments, questions, and observations in the text or movie. As they gain more experience with the seminar, the conversation becomes more organic. They learn to sustain the conversation with questions that are authentic to what is being discussed at that moment. They learn to move more fluidly from one topic to another, and to draw connections between them. It is an amazing thing to see students speaking organically in the target language—when it works.

The fishbowl discussion begins with 10-12 students in a circle. As in the Socratic seminar, they bring their questions and journals. However, rather than remain in the discussion circle for the duration of the period, students may only leave when they are "tapped out" by another student not currently in the circle but who wants to enter the discussion, where they must remain until they are tapped out and replaced by a classmate.

Students must be in the circle at least once in order to get a grade for the day. Students become better listeners because they must be able to join the discussion with as little disruption to the discussion as possible.

All three types of class discussion require students to become adept at putting their thoughts in order quickly and articulating them clearly, and when someone does not understand, to find different ways to say them. And they learn to do this using academic language.

# **Classroom Activities**

This curriculum may be used in any high school Heritage language course. Depending on the skill level of students, it may span seven to eight weeks in the first semester.

Weeks One and Two: I will begin with an introductory history of the origin of the Spanish language and recognize the impact of bilingualism and a short introduction to basic concepts of sociolinguistics, and the role of organizations like the Real Academia Española. These lessons come from the Empowering Learners of Spanish website. <sup>15</sup> This is a start to get students thinking of colonialism in different ways and how it can be embedded in their daily life. I want to make students feel comfortable knowing there is not a "right way" to speak Spanish. From our introductory history of the origin of Spanish language lesson, I will do a short introduction to colorblindness, indigenous studies and ethnic studies to prepare students for our conversations about Brazil, Guatemala and Mexico.

Weeks Three and Four: During this time, we will be focusing on Brazil. While Brazil is not a Spanish speaking country, it is important to take note that it is still part of Latin America. Brazil is a unique case because many Brazilians consider themselves Black but there are a lot of racial disparities. We will be watching Black in Latin America in Brazil while also discussing African influences on Brazilian food. We will also watch Netflix's Street Food: Latin America episode on food in Salvador, Brazil and have conversations about food and African influences on Brazilian cuisine and the role street food plays in favelas in Brazil. This is a great opportunity to have a "food day" in class. Students will have the opportunity to cook traditional Brazilian food that has African influences and bring the dish to class to present about and share with the class.

Weeks Five and Six: We will move on from Brazil to talk about racism in Guatemala. We will be reading "The Long Night of White Chickens" by Francisco Goldman. The novel that deals with the Guatemalan Civil War from the perspective of someone living in the United States. It is the more accessible text, making it possible for me to assign some reading of the novel as homework and be assured students will read. They will be required to keep a dialectical journal of their reading that will put added pressure on them to read. Beginning with a novel, students are more likely able to read independently, but it will also allow me to conduct whole-class close readings of the Guatemalan Civil War that will provide background information to students while reading the novel. The genocide of the Mayan people during this civil war is rarely taught in high school history classes and students need to know that the repercussions of this genocide are still felt today. Racial tensions with the indigenous community are too common in Guatemala. The indigenous community is often ignored and victims of racism. Students will learn how race played a role in the Guatemalan Civil War.

Weeks Seven and Eight: We will end the unit with Mexico City and how racism is interwoven in the economic

classes. A great example of this is seen in the Academy Award winning movie, *Roma*. While the film is rated R, permission slips will be given out before the film is seen. *Roma* is the perfect example of race and classism in Mexico City. The film is in black and white, which is supposed to make it difficult to distinguish race, but it doesn't. Instead the film will allow students to see how race and classism are intertwined in Mexico City. I know this is the country we will spend a lot of time on because most of students' parents are from Mexico. I know that students will have their own stories about racism and classism from their experiences or their parents' experiences and want to allow a space to share these stories. Socratic seminar, fishbowl and the dialectical journal will all be used for our discussion about how racism and economic class are tied.

## **Resources for Teachers and Students**

Alfredo Corchado "For Mexico, 'Roma' is a dark reminder that racial, class issues remain" https://www.dallasnews.com/news/mexico/2019/02/23/for-mexico-roma-is-a-dark-reminder-that-racial-class-iss ues-remain/

AmigoFoods "Signs of the African Influence on Brazilian Cuisine" https://blog.amigofoods.com/index.php/brazilian-foods/african-influence-on-brazilian-cuisine/#:~:text=Though %20Africans%20were%20stolen%20from,rice%2C%20and%20spicy%20egg%20stew.

Anna Matis with John Seidlitz 7 Steps to a Language-Rich, Interactive Foreign Language Classroom

COERLL's Heritage Spanish Website- https://heritagespanish.coerll.utexas.edu/

Empowering Learners of Spanish- https://sites.google.com/a/cas.uoregon.edu/els/

Kayla Zamora's Tik Tok Videos on how to create a distance learning interactive notebook.

https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMJMSc3rP/

https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMJMSpHon/

https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMJMSGrNe/

https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMJMAJkvL/

https://vm.tiktok.com/ZMJMSGfYj/

Netflix's Street Food: Latin America Episode 2, Salvador Brazilhttps://www.netflix.com/title/81249660?s=i&trkid=13747225

PBS' Timeline: Guatemala's Brutal Civil Warhttps://www.pbs.org/newshour/health/latin\_america-jan-june11-timeline\_03-07

Real Academia Espanola- https://www.rae.es/

### **Discourse Sentence Starters and Classroom Activities Starters**

#### Ms. Mejia

Spanish for Hispanics

Academic Discourse and Classroom Activities Starters Sentence Starters

Nueva Idea/Expandiendo una idea

- Me gustaria proponer...
- Tu punto me recuerda...
- Eso surge la pregunta de...
- A tu punto, agregaria/discutaria...
- Ese es un punto interesante que haces. Me hizo pensar en...
- Me gustaria explorar esa idea que...

#### Desacuerdo

- No estoy de acuedro en...
- Quiero rechazar tu idea de que..
- Tu tienes un punto valido; sin embargo,...
- Tengo que estar en desacuerdo con [nombre] que... yo creo que...

#### Acuerdo

- Tengo que estar de acuerdo con [nombre] en que...
- [Nombre] hace un buen punto...
- Me gusta la idea de [nombre] de que...
- [Nombre] tenia razon cuando dijo...

#### Clarificacion

- No estoy seguro/a de entender tu punto... ¿Me lo puedes aclarar?
- Creo que estas diciendo que...
- ¿Estas afirmando que...?
- Me puedes aclarar...
- Permitime pedirte que entres en mas detalle sobre...
- Explicame lo que quisite decir cuando dijiste...

Invitar a alguien a la discusion

- [Nombre], puedo ver que estas pensando. ¿Que piensas?
- Me gustaria escuchar tus ideas, [nombre].
- ¿[Nombre], tienes algo que anadir?

# **Appendix on Implementing District Standards**

Tulsa Public Schools implements the State of Oklahoma's World Language Standards throughout the district. Oklahoma's World Language standards are broad and give room for teachers to be creative and give more flexibility for teachers to meet the standards.

Goal 1 Communication; Standard 2 Interpersonal Communication Students can participate with ease and confidence in conversations on familiar topics. Students can usually talk about events and experiences in various time frames. Students can usually describe people, places, and things. Students can handle social interactions in everyday situations, sometimes even when there is an unexpected complication.

Goal 1 Communication; Standard 3 Presentational Communication Students can make presentations in a generally organized way on school, work, and community topics, and on topics students have researched. Students can make presentations on some events and experiences in various time frames. Students can write briefly about most familiar topics and present information using a series of simple sentences. Students can write on a wide variety of familiar topics using connected sentences. Students can write on topics related to school, work, and community in a generally organized way. Students can write some simple paragraphs about events and experiences in various time frames.

Goal 2 Culture; Standard 1 Relating Cultural Practices to Perspectives Students can interact using culturally appropriate patterns of behavior in everyday informal and social situations. Students can explain different traditions and customs of the target cultures in simple terms. Students can reflect on cultural experiences and social activities common to a student of similar age in the target cultures. Students can identify and discuss some perspectives typically associated with the target cultures' belief systems and social, economic, political, and professional practices. Students can discuss and evaluate some commonly held generalizations about the target culture.

Goal 2 Culture; Standard 2 Relating Cultural Products to Perspectives Students can explain the significance of objects, images, symbols, and products of the target cultures. Students can describe major contributions of influential figures, past and current, from the target cultures. Students can identify and explain the influence of the target cultures on the products of my own culture. Students can explain how geography impacts the products of the target cultures. Students can explain how geography art, literature, music, and dance.

Goal 3 Connections; Standard 1 Making Connections Students can transfer and apply information and skills from other content areas to experiences related to the target language and cultures. Students can apply information gathered through target language resources to other content areas in order to supplement learning.

Goal 3 Connections; Standard 2 Acquiring Information and Diverse Perspectives Students can seek out authentic target language sources, analyze the content, and acquire unique information available only through the target language and its cultures. Students can use authentic sources to explore the distinctive perspectives of the target cultures.

Goal 4 Comparisons; Standard 1 Language Comparisons Students can explore the historical and cultural reasons for cognates and borrowed words when applicable. Students can use knowledge of sound and writing

systems in the target language to better understand their own. Students can compare and contrast identified structural patterns of the target language to structural patterns in their own language. Students can use appropriate idiomatic expressions in limited settings.

Goal 4 Comparisons; Standard 2 Cultural Comparisons Students can give simple descriptions of the similarities and differences in verbal and nonverbal behavior between cultures. Students can give basic descriptions of cross-cultural similarities and differences in the practices of the target culture. Students can give basic descriptions of cross-cultural similarities and differences in the products of the target culture. Students can give simple descriptions of cross-cultural similarities and differences in the perspectives of the target culture.

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