

¡Vamos Niños!

An Honors Thesis (HONORS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Luke". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

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Abstract

This project is a tool to be used by future Spanish secondary education majors in order to start and implement an elementary level after school Spanish club. It was created for a capstone creative project for the Honors College at Ball State University. The project begins with an extended introduction summarizing how to start a club, important considerations regarding the transition from secondary to elementary and highlighting key differences between a class and a club. The binder is then organized into themes or topics to guide each club meeting. For each theme or topic, games, crafts, songs, and practice activities are provided. Based on the information and materials, club teachers may then select materials and themes based on their own and their students' interests, although there is a suggested curriculum outline in the introduction.

Artist's Statement

While completing my secondary education program at Ball State University, I had the unique opportunity to develop and lead a Spanish club for local elementary students. Having no experience at the elementary level, I was nervous about taking on the challenge of a brand new club, but my excitement at the opportunity to share the Spanish language and the comfort of co-teaching pushed me to participate in the program. Much to my surprise, the club turned out to be one of the most valuable experiences of my teaching preparation. For a first teaching experience, the club atmosphere was highly beneficial because I was able to practice classroom management and work on my teaching weaknesses without the pressure of preparing students for testing or following a district curriculum. It also served as a great motivator because, for the first time, I was not only designing lessons plans, but also implementing them regularly. I was also able to create my own classroom environment and build relationships with students as I helped them progress throughout the semester. For my senior honors creative project, I created an artifact to encourage and guide future Spanish teacher candidates studying at Ball State University to also participate in or implement their own elementary Spanish language clubs. My goal for the project was to create a product that would make starting and leading a Spanish club more accessible to active university students. After many changes to the design of the project, caused by reflections during my student teaching experience, I am proud to pass on a resource binder containing the most useful information about elementary club functions, helpful insights about habits and abilities of elementary students, a recommended topics list for a 16 week club, and a plethora of resources specifically aimed at elementary student ability levels.

I originally proposed my creative project as a complete design for an elementary Spanish club. I planned to use the activities I had designed for my own club as a base and expand upon them in order to provide a full 16 weeks of club activities. As an education student, I had yet to design a complete curriculum and felt the experience would be valuable for me and beneficial for those who would use it in the future. A bit conceitedly, I even saw myself as a mentor and champion to future club leaders whom I believed would simply have to pick up and follow my lesson

plans in order to have a successful club. What I failed to realize at the time of my proposal is that no set of detailed instructions alone can create a successful classroom or lesson. Something else is needed, but I did not discover what until my own student teaching experience.

I worked on my creative project during my student teaching semester, which had a great effect on the development and final product. At the beginning of my student teaching, I was given a binder filled with daily lessons outlining every activity, down to the precise minute, for each day. These were my cooperating teacher's lesson plans and she expected me to follow them exactly. I struggled to teach plans that were written by and for a different teaching style. My cooperating teacher preferred a very teacher-centered classroom, but I found myself uncomfortable and bored standing in the front and presenting materials and examples in the classroom for long periods of time. Eventually, after weeks of negotiation, I was allowed to design and try out lessons and activities that I had created. In designing and implementing these activities, I came to realize I had previously felt uncomfortable because I prefer a student-centered classroom. My style is to present just enough information for students to be able to recognize or point out a grammatical pattern. I then call on them to start using the pattern while I listen and serve as a guide making sure the examples they share correctly use the new grammar. Once I proved that students were successful from my student-centered activities, my cooperating teacher allowed me to replace and alter nearly all elements of the lessons in the binder to fit my teaching style and the needs of each class. While all of this was progressing, outside of the student teaching experience, I was working on creating 16 fully detailed lessons including time allotments for the Spanish club project. Ironically, at the same time I was advocating against having to follow prescribed lessons, I was actually writing them for others.

After weeks of solo teaching, the first half of my split student teaching started winding down. As I observed my cooperating teacher return to the front of the classroom, I was excited to see that she was trying many of the teaching activities and styles I had used over the past weeks. However, for her, this style was not as successful as when she taught the lessons as outlined in her binder. The experience

of seeing her unsuccessfully attempt to imitate my teaching style showed me the importance of each teacher respecting and taking advantage of his or her own teaching style. These differences make directly following highly detailed lesson plans nearly impossible for multiple teachers. Based on this knowledge, I developed a deeper understanding and appreciation for diverse teaching styles, which I have adapted into my overall teaching philosophy. This realization also meant that I did not want to complete my creative project as originally proposed. I worried that providing excessively detailed lesson plans could create a trap, preventing future club leaders from respecting and developing their own personal teaching styles. Instead, in order to reflect my original goal of creating a product that would make the creation and leadership of a club more accessible to active university students, I began to redesign what my final product would be.

My first decision was that I wanted to make the project more personal. I wanted to put more of my own words, reflections, and advice into the product. Each future club will inevitably face its own challenges, but by sharing the challenges I faced, explaining how I tried to overcome them, and reflecting on the results, I would be giving inexperienced leaders examples, support, and, guidance for the problem-solving process, even if not for their exact problems. I also hoped to prevent future leaders from running into some of the problems I had. For example, after my first craft project, I only allowed a few minutes for clean up. None of the students started cleaning up when I asked. They were too excited about what they were working on. Since I did not ask early enough, by the time I convinced them to start cleaning up it was already time for them to go. The result of my underestimation was that I was late to my next class because I had to stay and finish cleaning. Future clubs might be completely different than my own and clean up more quickly or more slowly than mine did, but by providing my personal example, future leaders will know to leave plenty of time for the first craft and avoid being caught off guard. I wrote this section including my insights and advice as an author's introduction to start the binder. I also included information about where to look and who to talk with about starting a club, ideas to learn students' names, and characteristics and abilities of the elementary level students that were surprising to me.

Following the introduction, it was time to get to the essence of the creative project. I was no longer going to tell the future teachers which activities they should use, but instead, I would provide them with a multitude of organized resources that could all be accessed in one place. I immediately began to seek out books, Internet sites, and CDs in order to find appropriate materials. I divided the resources section into two parts. The first contains activities and games that can be adapted to nearly any topic or theme. I listed directions for creating and playing games such as *Matamoscas*, a game played on teams with one-on-one face offs and Cake Walk, a game requiring physical activity that the whole class can be involved in simultaneously. The second section of resources contains activities that are specific to a topic or theme. Themes are based on vocabulary such as days of the week or body parts. There are also two holiday themes, *Día de los Muertos* and *Cinco de Mayo*, to incorporate a holiday-based class. Within each theme are craft patterns, games, songs, and additional practice activities. In total, I was able to compile over three hundred pages of resources for over 20 topics.

All the resources included in the binder are specifically aimed at third and fourth grade ability levels and support a manageable expectation of learning for the weekly club setting. The activities support the club objective of introducing Spanish and promoting interaction with the culture and language in fun and creative ways. As an example of how the activities fit this objective, instead of including spelling activities, I chose recognition activities. A spelling activity would require students to sit at their desks, carefully writing for half of the club meeting. It is a focused, precise activity not allowing for creativity or personal interaction. Recognition activities, on the other hand, require students to signal or orally recall a word based on a corresponding picture or action. This requires students to actively interact with the new word in the foreign language. Students must physically touch their noses when they hear the word *nariz* or say *fresa* when the toy strawberry is passed to them. These activities allow the classroom setting to have a social atmosphere and for students to really enjoy the language and culture while they are learning. To reach creative students, I also favored activities that provide the students with a product such as a craft or song. These are also great activities because students can share them with their

parents or friends and, later, they will serve to remind students of how much they enjoyed learning Spanish.

The club leader will also notice that there is no evaluation system or exams included in the binder. For this type of club, it is critical to always bear in mind that the objectives of building interest and appreciation for the Spanish language and culture are greater and will better serve students than simple word memorization and grammar patterns. This is only a club, meaning students should never be asked to perform beyond their comfort level. This would be highly destructive to the club because it would create pressure, stress, and possibly negative feelings of failure that will become all associated with Spanish. The binder still includes challenges for students, but they are limited to parts of other activities and should always be accompanied by teacher hints, prompts, or review for students that need help.

All of these resources will greatly help future club leaders. Club leaders will be able to select daily activities that utilize their teaching strengths and aide their teaching weaknesses. A teacher who excels at presenting and interacting with the whole class at once will be able to use the large pictures of vocabulary words for a lesson or practice activity. A teacher who prefers to have a student-centered classroom will be able to utilize activities like the cakewalk and memory, which will deviate from the traditional classroom of the teacher in front of the students. While it is important to take advantage of teaching strengths, it is also important for the club leader to use this experience to improve their weaknesses and gain new experiences. This binder gives the teaching candidate the opportunity to do this in a guided and low-stress environment. Teachers who have never led a craft presentation will find activities from color-by-numbers to constructing Day of the Dead skeletons. Along with the activity they will find the important resources of a supplies list, necessary models, clear and concise directions and first hand advice about how to pass out materials and organize clean-up time. The club will be a great learning opportunity and sharing experience for the teacher. In addition to these benefits, the binder aids the teacher in the most obvious way of putting the basic materials for a successful club all in one binder and directly into his hands. University students are already busy with classes, jobs, and their own clubs and activities. This binder gives

busy students an opportunity to take on the challenge of the club by drastically reducing the workload it will add to their week. The binder is ready for activities to be picked out and for copies to be made. This means teachers will not need to spend hours seeking out resources and creating materials from scratch. The binder is a tool that will make taking on the club less intimidating and allow teachers to focus on their implementation of the materials, instead of spending great amounts of time seeking them out.

Once I finished my introduction and had all the resources organized, I felt it was important to add one more recommendation for the club set up as a whole. I outlined what I thought were the best themes to teach and the order they should be taught. In my own club, I discovered that this progression is important because it dictates how much previous lessons will be reviewed. For example, when planning activities, it is important to know if you will study colors or fruits and vegetables first. If the class does colors first, they should review and practice them again in an activity involving fruits and vice versa. This is an example of recycling material. It is highly useful to present new material, while simultaneously reinforcing what students have already studied. By connecting the new information with ideas already studied, students practice both sets of material and create associations between them that will make it easier to remember both sets of information. When selecting the progression for the lesson, it is important to consider this notion of spiraling material in order to teach the most important and fundamental topics early in the 16 weeks so they will be practiced, reinforced, and retained as successfully as possible. As an example, I recommend presenting greetings in the first class. I believe the club should strive to teach greetings better than any other topic because by simply greeting someone from a different culture in that person's native language, the speaker shows respect and appreciation for the person, their language, and their culture. Students will learn greetings in the first class and then, in order to recycle or keep the material spiraling, they will practice them naturally within the classroom for the next 16 weeks at the beginning and end of each club meeting and any time there is a visitor. I selected my club progression based on these teaching strategies. This is the progression I prefer, but I encourage future club leaders to consider any changes that they believe would

make the club more successful for them or their students. The progression of topics I recommended is:

Week #

1. Greetings (including names, chicos and chicas)
2. Colors
3. Numbers 1-15
4. School supplies
5. Fruits
6. Body Parts
7. Family Members
8. Days of the Week
9. Months
10. Numbers 16-31 or more
11. Me gusta + verbs
12. Vegetables & me gusta+nouns
13. Animals
14. House
15. Common foods
16. Holiday—wherever it fits, Cinco de Mayo or Día de los Muertos

Each of these themes has a section, filled with resources in the project binder. In addition to these themes, there are also sections including:

Multi-themed Songs
The Alphabet
Weather
The City
Grammar
Review

While, in my opinion, these were not the most valuable themes, it was important for my project to fully respect my educational philosophy and allow for teaching diversity. I did find valuable resources on these topics and felt it was my responsibility to make them accessible for future club teachers who might prefer to teach one of these topics rather than one I had recommended.

Upon completion, the creative project consists of a five-inch binder including my author's statement and an array of organized resources. The final product is much different than what I originally proposed, but I strongly believe it has transformed into a far more useful tool. My thesis advisor and sponsor of the Spanish club I participated in, Dr. Christopher Luke, is in charge of the binder and providing it

as a resource for future teachers in order to encourage them to participate in or start an elementary Spanish club. I am proud and honored to leave behind this small part of myself with the Department of Modern Languages and Classics and the Foreign Language Education Program that have greatly supported my passions for foreign language and teaching and made it a reality for me to pursue them both through my future career.

Teaching programs strive to provide the best preparation possible for future teachers. Starting with methods instruction and reflective observation, perspective teachers build a foundational knowledge of educational theories to guide their future lessons and classroom management. Perspective teachers are then challenged to put all they have learned into practice through monitored teaching experiences such as student teaching. I believe it is these hands-on experiences that are able to bring the materials studied at the university to life, along with all their complications and exceptions, in order to provide a deeper and personal meaning for the teaching candidate. My greatest hope is that this creative project will inspire and make it possible for more prospective Spanish teachers to enjoy the benefits and learning experiences of teaching an elementary-level Spanish club. By going beyond program requirements and participating in an elementary Spanish club, future teachers will benefit from having more diverse experiences, additional practice with their teaching skills, and more experience and in the educational field overall—all of which will lead to the most simplistic and universal educational goal of becoming a better teacher.

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