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Que Todos Se Entiendan

Many people these days will complain or crack wise if they hear a Latino person speaking Spanish, whether it be on the phone or in conversation with another person. Another common complaint is the overdramatized “the Mexicans are stealing all of our jobs” dispute. One cannot deny that the Spanish-speaking Latino and Hispanic population is rising in the United States. The United States of America has always hailed itself as the land of immigrants, and such a claim is left historically uncontested based off its settlement and establishment. Instead of fearing this trend, it should be embraced. In Europe, it is rather common to encounter someone who speaks two or three languages, as they are simply prepared to understand and communicate with their international neighbors. This form of multilingual fraternity is idealistic: tearing down the walls of language barriers in prospect of mutual understanding. Additionally, there is the strong essence of situational irony that those in the land of immigrants so oppose the means by which their nation came to be. With the ideal of complete mutual understanding in one hand, and the introspection of true American nationalism in the other, let it be proclaimed that it is time to eliminate the xenophobia and arrogant ethnocentrism that has come to plague modern America. Spanish education should be mandatory in Indiana schools to achieve fluency because Spanish is a language whose utility is rapidly growing in current times.

Spanish ought to be a compulsory second language fundamentally because the United States holds close geographical proximity and economic ties to Mexico, Puerto Rico, and other Spanish speaking nations while it is also continentally linked to South America. These facts should be taken into consideration for a multitude of key reasons. As is common knowledge, the grand majority of countries within Central America and South America are Spanish-speaking nations. Although these nations are defined as “third world countries”, or ones that are still developing, it appears as if they are on their way up. It also appears that the United States is lending a hand to help bring them up the ladder of industrialization and economic power. According to a release from the Office of the Press Secretary, President Obama aims to recognize the emerging markets of Central America and South America. Furthermore, in 2010, United States exports to Central America and South America were estimated to be \$161 billion, which supported 900,000 U.S. jobs. In these markets’ growth, the total trade for 2011 was projected to be \$300 billion (Carney). The United States is progressively increasing its trade with its Spanish-speaking continental neighbors to the south and in doing so, is inflating the significance of the Spanish language within the United States by elevating it to a status of a language of business. To further this extent, the United States’ most direct southern neighbor is Mexico; everyone knows this. What the average American citizen may not know about Mexico is that it relies on the United States for just about half of its total imports. The United States conversely is Mexico’s largest importer (CIA Factbook). With such an intricate economic relationship, the communication and understanding between parties is vital to the success and precision of the transactions. Finally, and currently an imminent topic, is the United States’ relation to Puerto Rico. The island nation has been a US territory since the end of the Spanish-American war; terms of the Treaty of Paris of 1898 forced Spain to cede the land to the United

States. The people of Puerto Rico have been designated as US citizens since 1917 and, since the adoption of the Constitution of Puerto Rico (essentially a state constitution) in 1952, Puerto Rico has identified as an Associated Free State of the United States. In Puerto Rico, the people speak both English and Spanish but the majority of speakers elect to speak in Spanish. In a referendum on 6 November 2012, the Puerto Rican people voted for a change in the nation's association status with a majority opting for statehood. If Congress were to approve the movement, the United States could admit not just a 51st state, but also a Spanish speaking state into the Union. The urgency of the Spanish language in the United States is growing in relation to the country's foreign affairs that pertain to its Spanish-speaking neighbors, from economics to the very sovereign states that compose the nation, and it is in the country's best interest to equip the youth with the proper language skills to conduct this business.

As of now, Spanish is the second most spoken language in the United States. The Spanish language has always been present in North America, at least ever since the Europeans discovered the Americas' existence in 1492. By the turn of the nineteenth century, when the budding American nation had already had two presidents, the Spanish empire held claim to much of what is now the American southwest, with many missions established in the territories. Due to this Spanish presence, many of the southwestern states bear names that are either Spanish or of Spanish influence, examples being California, Colorado (meaning "colored" or "red"), Nevada (meaning "snow covered"), and New Mexico (translated from the original Spanish "Nuevo México"). Not long after Mexico gained its independence from Spain, it found itself entangled in the Mexican-American war from 1846-1847. Mexican defeat forced the country to cede much of its territory above the Rio Grande River, as well as recognize Texas as part of the United States. This cession gave shape to the United States almost exactly as it is known today.

The Spanish language is not a sudden epidemic that is appearing; it has been in North America ever since Europeans came over and started apportioning the land. Spoken Spanish reduced as the United States admitted its new territories into the union; however, that trend is reversing in modern times. In 1980, there were 11,116, 194 people who spoke Spanish in their homes. In 2000, there were 28,101, 052; and in 2007 that number had increased to 34,547, 077. In the total time span from 1980 to 2007, the percent increase is over 200 percent (Shin 6). Those 34,547,077 people are an apparent majority out of the 55,444,485 people who spoke a language other than English in the home in 2007 (Shin 6). Clearly, more and more people are speaking Spanish these days in the United States than ever before. The language is the second most spoken in the U.S. and is also becoming more popular every day and, precisely for those reasons, fluency should be mandatory in the United States; while another looming factor that promotes fluency is the increasing Spanish-speaking population.

The Spanish-speaking population of the country is rising and is at a pace to become the majority. The United States has always been the melting pot of cultures, races, ethnicities, creeds, etc. but within the last decade, Hispanic people have become the largest minority group in the nation. They are changing the demographic makeup of many states, most primarily those on the border, through immigration and settling. In California, people of Mexican origin alone make up a solid twenty-five percent of the state's population (Valeriano 759). Alternatively, in Arizona, thirty-five percent of the state's seven million people are Latino (Kunnie 17). The numbers are smaller in states that do not border with Mexico; however, that does not mean that they do not exist. In Indiana, in 2010, the population of Hispanic or Latino people stood at five percent. While that is small in comparison to Arizona's thirty-five percent, that five percent is an increase from the mere three percent that Indiana had in 2000. At the current rate of population

expansion, Hispanic and Latino people are on track to become a majority group in the United States of America. It is imperative that we instruct our children in the Spanish language so that we can eliminate the language barrier that stands tall between a portion of citizens today. While the day may yet be far off that Spanish-speakers are a majority group in America, they have undoubtedly set themselves on due course to that end through immigrating and settling in America; establishing and raising families; and by becoming prominent members of the American workforce, so it is important that we accurately prepare our youth for the future.

Persons of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity are prevailing constituents in the modern American workforce, and, due to immigration, their presence will only increase in the future. The numbers of Hispanic people in the United States continue to rise each year and as they transplant their lives to America, they assimilate into the American work force. A vast majority of Americans thinks of immigrants as a threat to the nation and the economy, but this is simply not the case. According to Valeriano, “immigration brings in an estimated \$159 billion per year for [California] while directly supporting more than 200,000 U.S. jobs.” Now, those statistics are just for California, but the other forty-nine states must experience benefits of a proportional caliber. As I mentioned previously, the numbers of Hispanic people are continuously going up. In a workplace environment, communication is crucial. What happens when the workers are linguistically divided half Spanish and half English? Hired translators work in a small-scale situation, but for a plant of 1000 workers and 500 cannot understand or communicate with the other 500; then they have reached a critical impasse. An excellent point to impose is that concentration of Spanish speakers is higher in states with larger cities such as New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles (Shin 12). Most of the nationally important business occurs in these large cities, a prime example being the New York Stock Exchange on Wall Street. What needs

to be understood is that Spanish speakers occupy many important jobs within American society, and it is important that their co-workers understand them.

Due to population inflation, Spanish fluency would be an excellent skill to have in the evolving job market. The stereotypes are out there, but behind every joke, wisecrack and stereotype there is a nugget of truth. The truth is, as previously mentioned, that the Hispanic and Latino population in the United States is growing. Also previously mentioned, they are growing and becoming a considerable factor in the composition of the American workforce. Table 1 is from the Household Data- Annual Averages from the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics for 2010 and 2011. The chart shows the data for men and women of Hispanic or Latino ethnicity.

Table 1: Household Data- Annual Averages: 10. Employed Persons by Occupation, Race, Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, and Sex

Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity	Total	Total	Men	Men	Women	Women
	2010	2011	2010	2011	2010	2011
Total, 16 years and over (in thousands)	19,906	20,269	11,800	12,049	8,106	8,220
Percent of total employed	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Management, professional, and related occupations	18.9	19.5	15.3	15.6	24.1	25.2
Service Occupations	26.4	25.7	21.8	21.9	33.2	31.2
Sales and Office Occupations	21.2	21.6	14.1	14.6	31.7	31.8
Natural Resources, Construction, and Maintenance Occupations	16.4	16.3	26.5	26.1	1.7	1.8
Production, Transportation, and Material Moving Occupations	17.1	17.0	22.4	21.8	9.3	10.1

Source: United States Department of Labor; Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Household Data- Annual Averages: 10. Employed Persons by Occupation, Race, Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, and Sex*. 2011. Print. 15 November 2012.

As seen in the above table, working age persons of Hispanic and Latino descent were three hundred sixty-three more in 2011 than in 2010. In the context of the entire report from the

Bureau of Labor Statistics, Hispanics and Latinos had the second highest increase in the workforce, only below white Caucasians. Hispanics and Latinos are growing faster than any other minority group in the workforce, with Asians increasing by one hundred sixty-two members and African-Americans increasing by only forty-one between 2010 and 2011 (table 1). Another trend that is seen in table 1 is that many Hispanics and Latinos are moving out of blue-collar work like service and maintenance and they are moving into more white-collar type jobs like management, sales, and office jobs. Not only are Hispanic and Latino people moving in, but also they are moving up. That social mobility is the promise of America; it is a part of the American dream. A shining, and recent, example of this mobility of Hispanic peoples is found in Supreme Court Associate Justice Sonia Sotomayor, who has served since 2009. Being of Puerto Rican descent, Justice Sotomayor is the first Hispanic justice to serve on the United States Supreme Court. Hispanic people are found in every department of the modern workforce, not just agriculture and landscaping as is popularly stereotyped, and thus for communal understanding and tranquility, Spanish fluency is developing as an important job skill.

Because of the growing number of Latin Americans coming to the U.S., it is important to educate students thoroughly in the cultures of Spanish speaking nations. This should be done in an effort to reduce the shocking amount of ethnocentrism present in modern American culture. First, to be able to combat this issue, a clear definition must be stated. Something is ethnocentric if it is, according to Merriam-Webster, “characterized by or based on the attitude that one’s own group is superior.” Now, granted, every group experiences a level of ethnocentrism. That can be called pride or self-esteem. However, America has a history that struggles with racism and ethnic superiority. Caucasian and African-American children have only been educated together in the same schools for the last sixty years of the United States’ two hundred thirty-six year

tenure. Even more alarming is the frequency of which ethnocentric and racist themes are used in humor today. With the population demographics changing at such a rate, ethnocentric sentiments will only cause conflict in the coming future. This is why students should be taught in an intercultural approach. Learning the Spanish language is only half of truly being able to understand and communicate with a native person. That is what Byram et al. call the “linguistic competence”. The other aspect in need of development is what they refer to as the “intercultural competence”, which is the “ability to ensure a shared understanding by people of different social identities, and their ability to interact with people as complex human beings with multiple identities and their own individuality” (Byram 9). In other words, one who learns the language still does not know enough to interact on a real level with a native speaker of a language. To interact on a human level, with sympathy, empathy, and emotion; one must have an understanding of the culture, the experiences, what it is like to be a native person. Byram notes this necessity because of the unavoidable sociological aspects of a conversation. The social identities of two speakers manifest and they will adjust their language to be appropriate for the situation (Byram 9). This is magnified in interactions between native and non-native speakers of a language because they will recognize that one person is a foreign speaker and that the other is listening to their language being spoken by a foreigner, so their language will be adjusted to represent the linguistic and intercultural competences of both parties. The native speaker will have to limit himself/herself and base his/her speech on assumptions and given reference of the competence of the foreign speaker. With the multicultural Hispanic populations becoming more prevalent in the United States and important within the job market, it is imperative that the youth be instructed in exceptional linguistic competence while also including the key aspect of intercultural competence. This will raise an awareness of ethnocentrism and help avoid the

conflicts it can bring. However, within Indiana, the schools do not equip their students with these necessary social skills to function in the futuristic America.

The current Indiana graduation standards for Spanish education are inadequate to prepare students for the real world they will live in. Population is rising, demographics are changing, job markets are evolving on local and global scales, and students need to have the social and linguistic skills to mediate the areas in which they will work. Children are the future, as is the popular educational tagline, but they cannot operate a functional future if they are not given the proper tools and instruction to do so.

Table 2: Indiana General High School Diploma- Course and Credit Requirements
(Class of 2016 & Beyond)

English/Language Arts	8 credits -must include literature, composition, and speech
Mathematics	4 credits - 2 credits: Algebra I or Integrated Mathematics I - 2 credits: Any math course General diploma students are required to earn 2 credits in a Math or a Quantitative Reasoning (QR) course during their junior or senior year. QR courses do not count as math credits
Science	4 credits - 2 credits: Biology I - 2 credits: Any science course At least one credit must be from a Physical Science or Earth and Space Science course
Social Studies	4 credits - 2 credits: U.S. History - 1 credit: U.S. Government - 1 credit: Any social studies course
Physical Education	2 credits
Health and Wellness	1 credit
College and Career Pathway Courses Selecting electives in a deliberate manner to take full advantage of college and career exploration and preparation opportunities	6 credits
Flex Credit	5 credits Flex credits must come from one of the following: - Additional elective courses in a College and Career Pathway - Courses involving workplace learning such as Cooperative Education or Internship courses - High school/college dual credit courses - Additional courses in Language Arts, Social Studies, Mathematics, Science, World Languages or Fine Arts

Electives	6 credits Specifies the minimum number of electives required by the state. High school schedules provide time for many more elective credits during the high school years.
40 total credits required Schools may have additional local graduation requirements that apply to all students	

Source: Indiana Department of Education. “Indiana General High School Diploma”. Indiana Department of Education. 19 June 2012. Web. 18 November 2012.

Indiana’s basic graduation requirements for 2016 and beyond do not include mandatory courses in any world language. World languages are grouped as “Flex credits” in Indiana and are not given the gravity with which they deserve. All around the world a second language is compulsory (generally English). In the state of Indiana, a student can go through all of high school and be eligible to graduate without a single world language credit (table 2). With all of the previously presented facts that are currently and progressively affecting the country, it is unfathomable that the state does not require even a few years of a language. I propose compulsory fluency, for it is a solution that can only benefit the United States of America.

In the modern era, where the Hispanic/Latino population of the United States is higher than it has ever been, I propose that Americans shed their ethnocentric viewpoints and become fluent in the Spanish language. The progressing trends should not be fought, but welcomed, and the people should be prepared to welcome the future instead of afraid to do so. If one is to change the future, he/she must look to the ones that are learning. Worldviews are learned and education is a valuable tool. Spanish education should be mandatory to achieve bilingual fluency, due to the pressing and undeniable factors at work in the United States today.

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