

## **From Translation to Cultural Responsiveness: A Garden Program's Evolution in Understanding Educators' Perceptions of Spanish-Language Resources**

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**Abstract:** *Addressing needs of the increasing Latino population in the United States necessitates adequate support and resources for Extension educators. Even if a program has identified the need for resources and programming, how does it determine the specifics of that need and better understand the perceptions of educators engaged in programming? What is the starting point? Cornell Garden-Based Learning delved into an initial exploration of these questions using a dual approach: assessing perceived needs of educators using an online survey and personal interviews. Here we offer our findings, a snapshot of the varied and complex perceptions held by NYS educators.*

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### **Understanding Educator Perception**

The diversity in today's society makes it imperative that Extension programs consider whether their efforts are addressing the needs of all community members. As a part of land-grant institutions, Extension offices must provide programming that is accessible to all state residents. The Latino community has been a focus of recent Extension efforts. The justification for these efforts is well founded in the following.

#### **Increasing Latino Population**

The 2000 Census recorded that about 13% of the United States population identifies itself as Latino, a 142% increase from the figures reported in the 1980 Census (Pew Hispanic Center/Kaiser Family Foundation, 2002). The 2010 Census reported that 16% of the population is of Hispanic or Latino origin and that the majority of growth in the nation's population was due to an increase of Hispanics. (Ennis, Ríos-Vargas, & Albert, 2011).

#### **LEP Executive Order**

In 2000, President Clinton signed into effect Executive Order #13166, which established standards to guarantee that "the programs and activities they [recipients of Federal financial assistance] normally provide in English are accessible to LEP (Limited English Proficiency) persons and thus do not discriminate on the basis of national origin." (United States Department of Justice, 2000) This order provides a federally mandated impetus to create Spanish-language resources.

#### **Culturally Responsive Programming**

In an effort to provide a welcoming environment for Latino participants, Extension educators must first learn about the cultural values of this population. Awareness and sensitivity are instrumental in promoting programming to a diverse population (Sawer, 2006; Schauber & Castania, 2001). Language is the most transparent cultural difference; communicating in one's native language is a basic yet powerful tool for establishing a comfortable environment.

## Existing Spanish-Language Resources

Current online resources exist but are limited. For example, the "Extensión en Español" website at <http://extensionenespanol.net/> lists "lawn and garden" as an article category, yet the subsequent number of topics is minimal. Oregon State University's Extension 4-H Latino Outreach Project and University of California Cooperative Extension are unique exceptions.

In response to these realities, the Cornell Garden-Based Learning Program acknowledged a need for more Spanish-language resources for educators working with gardening audiences. We needed to know whether our perceptions of the need mirrored the educators' perception, in turn, the actual need; discover the gaps in our resources; and avoid haphazard translations. This article is an account of a snapshot in time—the steps we followed to begin and to formulate a plan for responding to the needs of the communities we serve.

## Methods

A needs assessment of resources calls for an appraisal of Extension educators' current practices and needs with regard to materials. We combined personal interviews and a widely distributed survey to provide an initial understanding of educators' perception of Spanish-language use in their community.

### Personal Interviews

The following list provides the question template we used to interview selected educators and community leaders with respect to Spanish-language resources:

- Please describe your role and responsibilities, including a background on the organization/department for which you work.
- Describe the community with which you work, focusing especially on Latino members of that community.
- Do you see a need for Spanish-language resources? If so, what types of resources would be most useful?
- How is your organization perceived by the Latino community? Are there any cultural sensitivity issues to be aware of?
- Has your organization done any translating? If so, what successes/failures have you faced?
- What would be the best way for us to alert you to any resources we develop?
- Could you review and provide feedback on X? / Could you take the survey found at link X?
- Can you think of anyone else to contact about this topic?

### Survey

To sample a broader group of educators, we created an online survey. The questions were developed and reviewed by a team at Cornell. A pilot survey was sent to three Extension employees, located throughout New York State, to test for appropriateness of the questions. We distributed the finalized survey by emailing the online link to Extension and gardening e-lists,

which sampled a population that consisted mainly of educators located in New York State.

Figure 1 provides a sample of the questions in the survey, "Assessing the need for Spanish-language resources."

**Figure 1.**  
Survey Questions

<p><b>My role is</b> Cooperative extension educator • Educational volunteer • Teacher • Non-formal educator (e.g., nature center) • Other (please specify)</p>
<p><b>Are the people who participate in your programs of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin? (check all that apply)</b> No • Yes, Mexican or Mexican American • Yes, Puerto Rican • Yes, Cuban • Yes, all other Hispanic, Latino, Spanish origins (please specify) • Yes, but I am not sure of what specific origin</p>
<p><b>What RACE(S) are represented by the people who participate in your educational programs? (check all that apply)</b> Black/African American • White • Asian • Native American (Indian or Alaskan) • Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander • Other (more than one race)</p>
<p><b>What options do the people who participate in your educational programs have for INTERNET ACCESS? (check all that apply)</b> At home • At work • In the community (e.g., library) • Other (please specify) • Unsure</p>
<p><b>Please rank order the resources you use, with 1 being the resource you use the most. Leave the box blank if a specific resource is not used.</b> Textbooks • Interactive websites • Videos/DVDs • Handouts • Online lesson plans • Online audio/video recordings • Social networking sites • Other (please specify)</p>
<p><b>Please indicate your own level of Spanish-language ability, with 1 being "I do not have any Spanish-language ability" and 5 being "I am completely fluent in Spanish."</b></p>
<p><b>Please use the space below to elaborate on your response to the previous question, if you would like. For example, "I can read and write Spanish but not speak it."</b></p>
<p><b>Based on your community, how necessary are Spanish-language resources and programming? Please indicate using the following scale, where 0 means "Spanish-language resources and programming are not at all relevant or necessary" and 10 means "Spanish-language resources and programming are extremely necessary."</b></p>
<p><b>Considering the resources that you ranked in a previous question, which ones would you like to have available in SPANISH? (check all that apply)</b></p>

Textbooks • Interactive websites • Videos/DVDs • Handouts • Online lesson plans • Online audio/video recordings • Social networking sites • Other (please specify) • None

**For each of the following materials, please indicate how likely you would be to use a Spanish version of it.**

Lesson plan/curriculum • Stand-alone activity • Vocabulary pages (e.g., crop names) • Video/audio recordings in Spanish • Training manuals (e.g., Master Gardener Volunteers) • How-to manuals (e.g., Starting a Community Garden)

**Are there any Spanish language resources you already use? Please list your top resources and if possible, provide the website link.**

## Results

### Interview

Thirteen interviews were conducted, and the responses were recorded in the notes taken for each interview. These notes were reviewed for patterns or recurring themes and for illustrative or comprehensive examples.

#### ***Recurring Theme #1: Generational Language Ability Differences***

Educators who interact with Spanish speaking populations often cited how language abilities vary greatly between generations. Children speak the most English, commonly acting as translators for their parents and grandparents, who may have more limited or no English language abilities.

#### ***Recurring Theme #2: the Importance of Developing Trust***

Bilingual educators who conducted programs in Spanish indicated an "intangible sense of trust" that quickly formed in Latino communities. By speaking the native language of the Latino community, Extension educators were able to create a level of comfort that facilitated future interactions. This sense of trust helps dispel the uneasiness that some community members may feel when working with land-grant universities (Hassel, 2004), while moving toward cross-cultural engagement (Hassel, 2005) and a more inclusive extension approach.

#### ***Recurring Theme #3: the Need for Providing the Link between Urban Immigrant Communities and Nature***

Many Latino immigrants have expressed how they feel disconnected from the land, after living close to nature in their homelands. Even if resources such as community gardens exist in the area, immigrants often face challenges to access, such as language differences.

Other notable educator perceptions included:

- "If we could offer the same cultural, gardening, and cooking programs (Garden Chefs) entirely in Spanish, that may be very enticing to some families... [they] know English as well but they want to encourage their native language as much as possible."
- "Providing Spanish resources is a tricky area because some programs enforce speaking English so that immigrants learn English, either by nature of the program or by government mandates; other times, providing Spanish language resources is necessary to ensure that participants comprehend the information."
- "Delivery to Spanish speaking audiences is not as flexible, fluid or responsive as it needs to be."

## Survey Results

Survey responses were tallied for each question. Statistical analysis of the data included calculating percentages or means. One complication that arose during analysis pertained to the number of respondents and responses for each question. All questions were optional, and respondents could often mark more than one response for a question. Therefore, totals provided by the survey software often did not match and had to be recalculated.

- The total number of respondents was 114.
- 59% of survey respondents indicated having program participants of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin.
- Currently, the resources most used by survey respondents are handouts (mean 2.02, variance 1.80), interactive websites (3.00, 1.61) and videos/DVDs (3.28, 1.31). Means are calculated from a 1-8 scale; a lower mean indicates a more popular resource.
- The mean Spanish-language ability of survey respondents was 1.81 (on a scale of 1-5, where 1 indicates no Spanish-language ability and 5 indicates fluency).
- 23% of survey respondents marked a response in the 5-10 range, on a scale in which 0 means "Spanish-language resources are not at all necessary" and 10 means "Spanish-language resources are extremely necessary."
- Of the possible resources to have available in Spanish, handouts (27%) were most commonly selected by respondents. Interactive websites, videos/DVDs, and online lesson plans were all the next most selected, at 16% each.
- Survey respondents indicated they would be most likely to use Spanish versions of vocabulary pages and how-to manuals, selected from a provided list of resources.

## Discussion

This initial inquiry into the perception of educators regarding Spanish language resources indicates varied and complex perceptions. A sense of appreciation and recognition of the importance of Spanish-language resources was shared by respondents. One survey taker expressed that although she does not think the resources are presently needed in her community, "knowing that they are available... is encouraging as demographics can and do change." Some educators expressed a need for the resources, stressing how overwhelming that need is. The majority of respondents (54%) indicated that "Spanish language resources and programming are not at all relevant or necessary."

Although this majority response seems to contradict the initial impetus for this article's inquiry, the authors believe it is a call to investigate the need further. Fifty-four percent is not a decisive majority, particularly when one considers the excitement other educators conveyed when presented with the possibility of Spanish-language resources. Perhaps educators simply are not aware of Spanish speakers in their community because current programming does not directly address these populations. The low mean Spanish language ability among survey participants supports the perspective that current programming is not offered in Spanish, thereby not attracting Spanish-speakers.

Considering the range of opinions and perceptions about the need for Spanish-language resources, we will need to examine current population patterns and demographics. Concurrently, the most feasible, effective approach for developing Spanish language resources to address the immediate need would be to create stand-alone materials, such as activity guides and informational handouts. These materials would require fewer resources to produce than a curriculum, and they also may better address the current situation, as supported by the following.

- **Educators' level of Spanish language ability**—The vast majority of survey respondents (over 80%) indicated having little to no Spanish language ability themselves. If they did have some understanding of Spanish, they indicated not being able to speak it very well. One would conclude that our educators most likely would not feel comfortable providing instruction in Spanish. Rather, educators could use simple handouts to supplement their instruction and help Spanish-speakers in their classroom, project, or program to better understand the content.
- **Indicated resources**—Survey results indicate that the most popular resources currently used are handouts, interactive websites, and videos/DVDs. Furthermore, educators marked handouts, interactive websites, videos/DVDs, and vocabulary pages as the resources they would be most likely to use in Spanish. Simply but intentionally designed materials would meet the needs identified by these patterns.

## **Recommendations for Future Planning**

### **Continued Investigation of the Need**

To address whether educators and Extension programmers are accurately perceiving the need for Spanish-language resources, a detailed review of demographics should be conducted. This review should compare population and geographical trends with current programming offered in each region.

### **Culturally Responsive Cooperative Extension Programming**

If longer-term approaches include training educators to speak the language and available funding for developing Spanish-language resources, Extension should ideally become more diverse throughout the system. As one interviewee indicated, "Demonstration and observation are the most effective means of educating in horticulture." Greater diversity will model culturally responsive values; for example, Spanish-speaking staff could be more effective in reaching Spanish-speaking community members if they provide the demonstrations in Spanish (Hobbs, 2004). Moreover, as programs look toward opportunities for collaborative efforts, bilingual Extension employees could share translation responsibilities, facilitating translation that is adaptive to local dialects and responsive to educators' needs. Understanding that making sweeping changes takes time and funding, we began with steps and translated some basic one-page gardening supports, as well as a "Seed to Salad" project for teachers and youth educators.

### **Tangential Application of Resources**

Spanish is taught in middle and high school classrooms across the country. Gardening resources in Spanish could be relevant and applied language exercises that build cross-curricular connections. One survey respondent explained how she could use the Spanish resources we develop "to reinforce the learning [her] students received in their other classes as [she] teach[es] them their Spanish vocabulary and even grammar skills." Classroom work based on cross-curricular lessons grounds the teachings in real-life scenarios and practical applications. Given the enthusiasm for school gardening in New York State, the opportunities for these connections seem promising.

Although this article addresses the garden-based learning arena, we believe that these findings can translate to other disciplines in Extension, ranging from Family and Consumer Science to Agriculture and Natural Resources. It is imperative that Extension educators take the necessary steps to reflect on how to better strengthen cross-cultural awareness to address diverse populations, whether working with growers, farmers, school children, families, or community organizations. As the authors learned as a part of this process, this begins not with "what to translate," but with assessing educator perceptions.

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