

Research for Spanish-on-the-Spot Products

Spanish is spoken by an estimated 350 million people around the world and is currently considered the fourth most commonly spoken language worldwide. As of 1995, 10% of all people living in the United States could be linked to Hispanic origin. In the past ten years, this number continues to increase. These statistics are reported by Vistawide.com (2004). With the world becoming ever more global, the importance of effective communication with people has increased tremendously.

The primary purpose of a language is to facilitate communication between people. Although learning a foreign language can be intimidating at times, the communication is essential to attaining success in academic achievement. This communication helps open many doors to students as they learn and to teachers and staff as they communicate with the parents and students that otherwise would not be possible. Communicating with students in their own language helps you know your students. Getting to know students leads to understanding them on a much deeper level than simply communicating with gestures or body language.

When educators do not speak the language of their students it is difficult to understand their precise needs. Students and their parents do not always view educators as having an appreciation for their culture when there is a language barrier. Language study, practice, and exposure to the language are vital to effective and successful communication. Becoming proficient in Spanish might take much effort, dedication, and time on the part of the learner yet the benefits for both students and teachers are great.

Delpit (1995) noted that English language learners need to be appreciated. They must feel welcomed and accepted in their learning environment. It is important that educators validate the students' native language and their culture at school as an essential part of the identity of these learners. Success and a sense of achievement are essential to the students' experiences. Classroom success is an avenue to the prevention of students dropping out of school.

The No Child Left Behind Act (2002) assesses each district, campus, principal, and teacher holding them accountable for academic performance. Teachers must not only educate minds, they must stimulate the minds of this diverse growing non-English speaking population. The *Spanish-on-the-Spot* products are imperative for those teachers who speak only English. These products provide basic communication phrases to be used with Spanish speakers. The use of the fundamental words and phrases convey that teachers and other educators value the non-English speakers.

The *Spanish-on-the-Spot Wheel* was created to provide immediate one-way Spanish language communication at a glance. Simple statements and direct commands are translated into Spanish to help educators relay specific directions and information.

Spanish for Educators Audio CD Set contains two CDs specifically designed for non-Spanish speakers who want to learn fundamental words and phrases in order to communicate with Spanish speakers. These CDs will help improve your Spanish pronunciation skills and are a perfect supplement to the *Spanish-on-the-Spot Wheel* and the *Spanish Card Set*.

The *Spanish for Educators Card Set* is a 400-card set formatted for non-Spanish speakers who want to quickly learn key words and phrases for immediate communication with non-English speakers. Each card may be used as a visual prompt in order to ensure the message is understood. The cards are grouped into categories including classroom, restroom, hallway, cafeteria, praises, greetings, discipline, and emergencies.

With the rapidly increasing Hispanic population, efforts must be made to lessen and close any achievement gap. Since there is a large majority of Spanish speaking parents who do not speak English, the *Spanish-on-the-Spot* products help educators better communicate with these parents. Having a basic knowledge of Spanish phrases shows that educators care. At the same time the communication among the school, the student, the parents, and the home is strengthened. This communication also demonstrates a respect for the Hispanic population and strengthens their pride in family culture while building skills to help them succeed in mainstream culture.

According to Schon (2005), the 2005 United States' census figures indicate one in every five children under 18 years of age in the United States is Hispanic. This census shows Latinos are the fastest growing minority group in the school-age population. The graduation rate is a low 57% for Latinos. Most dropouts appear to be poor readers which indicate an urgency for better communication so the families and students can understand teacher and school expectations.

For some Hispanic parents, there is a wide gap between the school and the home. Some view the teacher as the one who has sole responsibility for student learning. These parents usually have no idea of the role parents could have in the reinforcement of classroom learning at home. Communicating these expectations to parents and showing them what to do help them to understand the teacher and school expectations. Ramirez, Yuen, and Ramey (1991) recommended that schools explore the use of the home language of their students in soliciting parent involvement in the education of their students.

It is important that teachers take additional time to ensure that English language learners know precisely what to do. It appears that some of their parents may want to assist but they may not have the necessary English vocabulary to

support classroom instruction. Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler, and Bridsie (1987) advocate if we communicate more effectively, then students themselves understand better what the expectations are. If both the students and families understand, then educators can erase the academic achievement gaps among the ethnic groups in the United States. Thus, the *Spanish-on-the-Spot* products help educators improve communication to students and parents.

As educators, we need to question some of our school practices, which perhaps we have taken for granted, if we are going to provide equitable educational opportunities for all students. Based on the huge increase in immigration over the last five years, the language of communication between the school and a student's home should be an area where we make a concerted effort to improve. Additional research in bilingual education is needed to specifically study the effects of teachers who speak at least some of the native language of students on the performance of students in their classrooms. Intuitively, the importance of communicating with parents in their own language is recognized by educators. Communicating more systematically might help lower the number of students dropping out of school.

The *Spanish-on-the-Spot* products offer teacher opportunities to learn basic Spanish instruction. When teachers use these translations, their classrooms can be more welcoming to Spanish students and Spanish speaking parents. Educators need to be able to provide immediate communication to parents in their own language. By doing so, Spanish speaking parents and students would see that schools value their language and want to help students succeed (Kralovec, 2005).

Kralovec (2005) noted the importance of parental involvement as a key element in school success. Kralovec indicated that communication between the school and a child's home is seen as a crucial component to success in kindergarten as well as high school. Often parent training sessions, conferences, communication notices and other similar activities are conducted in a language that parents do not speak.

The *Spanish-on-the-Spot* products can make a critical difference for students. The stakes are especially high for children who are English language learners as they must master academic content and a new language at the same time. Communication with English language learners is imperative to the achievement of their success in school. Failure to successfully perform at a young age often has consequences that affect these students throughout their lives. Language Factor presents these products as a means to reduce the language barrier and increase communication with non-Spanish speakers.

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