

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A SPANISH HERITAGE LANGUAGE PROGRAMM FOR CHILDREN IN GERMAN SWITZERLAND AND ITS IMPACT ON COMMUNITY PERCEPTION OF LATIN AMERICAN IMMIGRANTS

EL DESARROLLO DE UN PROGRAMA DE ESPAÑOL COMO LENGUA DE HERENCIA PARA NIÑOS EN LA SUIZA ALEMANA Y SU IMPACTO EN LA PERCEPCIÓN DE LA COMUNIDAD SOBRE LOS INMIGRANTES LATINOAMERICANOS

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Abstract

If heritage languages are defined by their local sociolinguistic status and situation (Montrul, 2016), the case of Latin American Spanish in Switzerland was defined, at the start of this investigation as practically inexistent at the state level.

Though Latin Americans in Switzerland seem to be larger in number than Spanish migrants, they face more obstacles when trying to be taken into account by heritage language development policies, especially in early childhood. The reasons are diverse, but perhaps the most important one is that they are not perceived as a group in need of special integration policies.

The aim of this paper is to provide evidence of the impact a heritage language and culture development program which includes mixed

groups (heritage and foreign language) had on the Swiss society's attitude towards Spanish speakers, especially (but not exclusively) Latin Americans living in the city of Wil and surrounding areas in the canton of St. Gallen. This work also presents evidence of the identity reconstruction process in migrant families.

To this end, several impact indicators are defined and the creation process of the program together with the data record that took place between 2013 and 2020 are explained.

Keywords: heritage language development, Latin American in Switzerland, social inclusion.

Resumen

Si las lenguas de herencia se definen por su estatus y situación sociolingüística local (Montrul, 2016), el caso del español latinoamericano en Suiza se definía, al principio de esta investigación, desde el nivel estatal, prácticamente como inexistente.

Siendo el grupo migrante latinoamericano mayor que el español, presenta sin embargo mayores dificultades al momento de acceder a políticas de desarrollo de la lengua de herencia, sobre todo en edades tempranas. Las causas de esto son diversas, pero quizás la principal de ellas consiste en no ser percibidos como un grupo que necesite políticas estatales de integración.

Este trabajo intenta registrar indicios del impacto producido por un programa de desarrollo de la lengua y cultura de herencia que incluye grupos mixtos (lengua de herencia y lengua extranjera) en la percepción que la sociedad suiza tiene respecto de los migrantes hispanohablantes, especialmente pero no exclusivamente latinoamericanos en la ciudad de Wil y alrededores en el cantón San Galo, así como también indicios del impacto que dicho

programa produjo sobre el proceso de reconstrucción identitaria de las familias migrantes.

Con este fin se definen diferentes indicadores de impacto y se desarrolla el proceso de creación de dicho programa junto al registro de datos realizado entre los años 2013 y 2020 de dichos indicadores.

Palabras clave: desarrollo de la lengua de herencia, latinoamericanos en Suiza, inclusión social.

1. Introduction

Switzerland is a country with a known multicultural and multilingual history. It has the uniqueness in Europe of possessing four official languages. The four linguistic communities that built the country determined in 1848 first three official languages (i.e., German, French, Italian) and in 1938, Romansh was added.

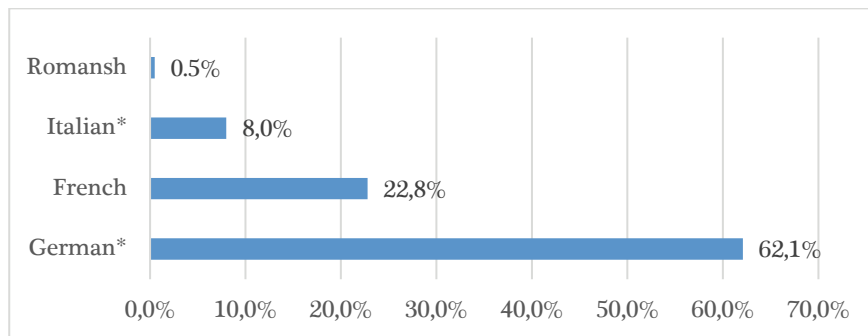
German is the majority language with 62.2 % of speakers, while French (22.9%) is the second majority language, followed by Italian (8%) and Romansch (0.5%) (Figure 1). The remaining 6.4% are immigrant that predominantly use their origin language.

In the German- and the Italian-speaking regions of the country, there is a diglossic relationship between the language that is taught at school (Standard German and Standard Italian correspondingly) and the language spoken at home (Swiss-German and Ticino-Italian).

Switzerland is also a country with a growing migrant community. In 2013, 35% of the population had a migrant background growing to 37.7 % in 2019 with 30.5% first generation migrants and 7.2 % second generation migrants (*Bundesamt für Statistik*, 2019).

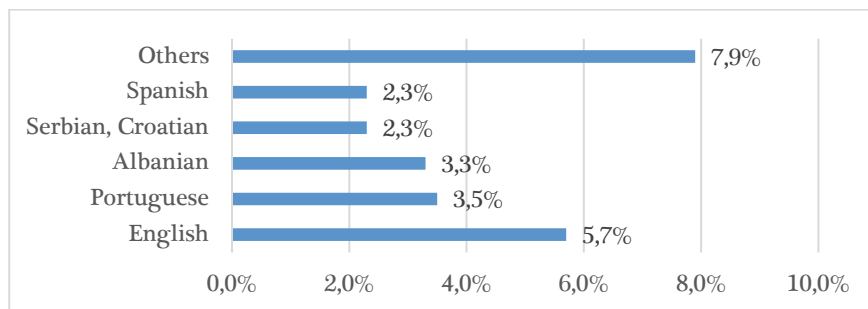
The Spanish speakers conform the 2.3% of the migrant population, being one of the two smallest migrant communities in the country (cf. Figure 2).

Figure 1: *Number of speakers in each official language in percentage*



Note: German* includes standard German and Swiss-German Speakers, Italian* includes standard Italian and Ticino-Italian. The inquiry was made to permanent residents who answered which language they considered to be their predominant one. The interviewed subjects could give more than one language as an answer. (*Bundesamt für Statistik, 2021*)

Figure 2: *Distribution of foreign languages in percentage (Citizens that acknowledge to speak other languages, also in addition to the official ones)*



Note: The interviewed subjects could give more than one language as an answer. (*Bundesamt für Statistik, 2021*).

Most of the cantons start teaching two foreign languages in primary school: English and one of the official languages. In some of them, English is introduced first, in others second.

Spanish is not present in primary education but is taught in 70% of the high schools, being possible, in several of them, to take a bilingual education program that finishes with a DELE B2 examination (*Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte. Subdirección General de Cooperación Internacional, 2014*).

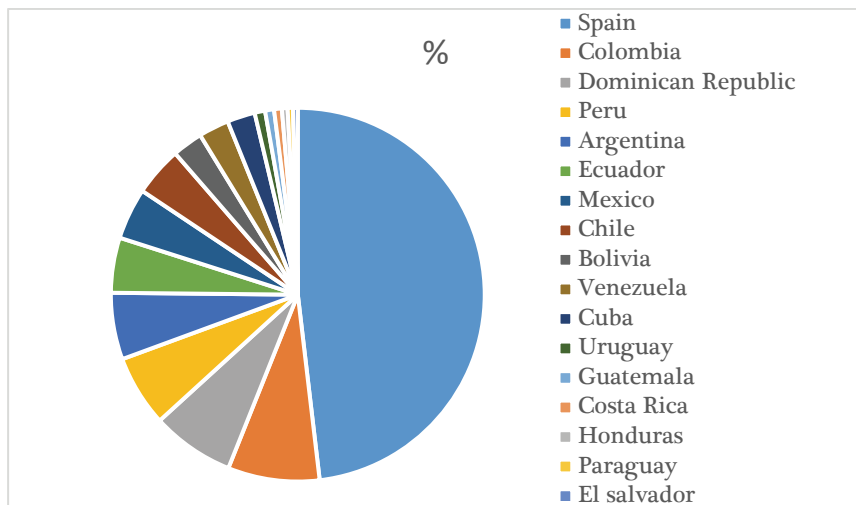
In the last years, the number of immigrant children has increased considerably. For example, in Zürich-Canton, one third of the students do not speak German at home, in Zürich-Town one half. At an international level, Switzerland has the third largest number of students with migration background relative to the population of the OECD-Countries, after Canada and USA and clearly bigger than Germany, France and the United Kingdom (Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2008). This situation has driven the Swiss Government towards an increasing interest in the implementation of different strategies to improve the school performance of this group. These strategies cover extra classes of German, French and Italian as a second language for the students and their mothers and playgroups for toddlers.

The students with migration background are distributed in three groups: the biggest group are from Southern Europe and the Balkans, a second, strongly increasing group, comes from North and West Europe and an also strongly increasing group from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The Spanish heritage speakers are a small community (2.3%) in comparison with the English (5.5%), Portuguese (3.6%) and Albanian (3.1%). Most of them come from Latin America (66.45%)

with the Colombian community on top (5.53%) and a quite uniform distribution of the remaining Latin American countries. The Spanish is the largest community (33.55%). Figure 4 and Table 1 show the complete country distribution (Sanchez Abchi, 2018).

Figure 4: *Spanish as a heritage language.*



Note: The distribution is based on the origin country of the parents.

Table 1: *Spanish as a heritage language in percentage*

Country	%
Spain	33.55%
Colombia	5.53%
Dominican Republic	5.00%
Peru	4.30%
Argentina	4.02%

Ecuador	3.32%
Mexico	3.10%
Chile	2.97%
Bolivia	1.84%
Venezuela	1.83%
Cuba	1.68%
Uruguay	0.63%
Guatemala	0.53%
Costa Rica	0.47%
Honduras	0.35%
Paraguay	0.32%
El Salvador	0.28%

The Spanish-speaking community is well integrated and has acquired the majority languages of their region into their linguistic repertoire in a functional and sometimes even a high functional state, sustaining nevertheless an important loyalty to their origin language (Lüdi and Py, 2013 quoted by Sánchez Abchi, 2018).

The minority language remains strong in the early childhood years, but some studies show that starting at kindergarten age, children start to mix Swiss-German words and syntactic structures into their discourse (Sánchez Abchi, 2015).

2. Programs for Heritage Language development

Given the multicultural and multilingual character of the Swiss society, the term heritage language varies in each linguistic region. Sánchez Abchi (2018) remarks the difference between the French “*langue d’origine*” or German “*Herkunftssprache*” (origin language) that refers to a speaker’s origin language or family language, and the Italian term “*lingua dei paesi d’origine*” (language of the country of origin). We consider that, in practice, all the terms refer to the language of the country of origin. In all the current programs, the term culture is noticeably absent, and they always refer to a minority language spoken at home that is not original from the corresponding region of Switzerland.

At this point, it is important to establish the difference between the terms origin language and heritage language.

Montrul (2016) defines a minority language as the language of ethnolinguistic minority groups that may or may not have co-official status. These languages are, for different reasons, often marginalized within nations or territories. The reasons may be demographic, or due to lower social, cultural, and/or political status related to factors surrounding immigration or colonization.

Furthermore, Montrul (2016) defines a heritage language as a minority language inherited from the parents. This definition includes immigrant languages, national minority languages and aboriginal languages. On the other side, the term origin language refers to the country of origin of the speakers and is used more often to define a minority language spoken by

an immigrant community. As such, it does not include internal migration speakers from different linguistic regions within the country. This difference is important because the term origin language refers specifically to the foreign origin of the speakers.

In this paper, the term ‘origin language’ will be used for the illustration of the Language and Culture of Origin (LCO) government programs and ‘heritage language’ in the explanation of the *Ronda redonda* program because one of the intentions of this program is the dissolution of the walls constructed by the idea of ‘otherness’ implicit in the term ‘origin language’.

The history of the migrant guest workers and refugees in the country is bonded to the first attempt to care for and protect the immigrant’s languages.

The programs for origin language development were born as Language and Culture of Origin (LCO) courses in the 1930s, organized by a group of Italian political refugees for their children (Giudici and Bühlmann, 2014). At different times, the purpose of these courses changed according to the necessity of the migrant community and the support of the state. In the 1940s, with the explosion of temporary foreign workers, the purpose was to prepare the children to reintegration in the origin school system.

In 1966, the canton Zurich introduced the LCO classes at primary schools as a pilot, originally only in Italian. Later in 1972, the Education Board permitted the school communities to integrate Italian and Spanish classes in the regular plan. In 1983, all the nations were added in this pilot and only in 1992 the

Board started to recognize private institutions for the LCO courses.

In the 1980s, Spain, Italy and only a few more countries were giving these courses. In 2010, the number of recognized promoters ascended to twenty-two (Giudici and Bühlmann, 2014, p.11-13).

Today the purposes of the LCO courses are primarily two: the students with migration background should be supported at learning their origin language and the recognition of the origin language in the school should, in addition to the application of didactic methods that integrate the language competences in several languages in a classroom, help the identity development, the handling with multilingualism as well as intercultural and interlanguage competences.

Giudici and Bühlman (2014) remark that the development of the first language (L1) could facilitate the learning of the school language (SL).

The principal ideas of the program are:

1. To encourage the learning of the origin language.
2. To strengthen the consciousness of bilingualism as additional strength and the plurilingualism as a positive social good.
3. To help children and teenagers interact in several identity projects connecting the Swiss and origin culture. The transmission of religious or political ideology are not included.

4. To help the students resolve conflicts, grow their intercultural competences and judgment, encouraging an open, nondiscriminatory, and tolerant position.
5. To promote the integration of foreign children with a migration history in the public education system.
6. To create an environment that prepares the students to use their plurilingual and intercultural abilities in their future professional life in Switzerland or in their origin country.
7. The LCO courses are guided by the ten basic principles that the canton Zurich developed for the public compulsory school: interest in the ability to learn and find a way, the intention to be responsible, the willingness to be efficient, the ability to negotiate and be solidary, the awareness to tradition and the environment, the capacity to judgement and critic, honesty, free time. (*Rahmenlehrplan für Heimatliche Sprache und Kultur (HSK)*, 2011,(p.7) *our translation*).

In the German cantons, these courses are separated in two groups:

1. Courses starting in the first grade until ninth grade.
2. Playgroups starting at the age of two years old.

The LCO courses for Spanish speakers starting at the primary school are provided by the Spanish government for Spanish citizens and do not have any cost (except for the books). The Latin American families on the other side don't receive any help from their original countries and have to opt to send their children to NGO's programs with a monthly cost.

The Playgroups are in part organized and partially funded by the Government (there is only a few in Spanish) but most of them are provided by private organizations, sometimes at a high cost for the families.

3. Objectives of this investigation

The intention of this paper is to register the impact of an early childhood heritage language development program that includes mixed groups (heritage and foreign language learning families) in the perception of the Swiss society about Spanish speaking, specially but not exclusively Latin American immigrants in the city of Wil in the German canton Saint Gallen, and the impact of this program in the identity reconstruction process of the migrant families.

The reasons to start this investigation were triggered by the contact with three institutions:

1. The Latin American Association 'Latin Connection' (in Spanish *Conexión Latina*) conformed at the time where the study started with ca. 60 families, fifteen from them with small children, 95% binational, with interest in developing the heritage language of their children and lack of resources.
2. The Integration Office of the city with a lack of awareness about the need of heritage language development of the Latin American community due to several factors.
3. The administration of the municipal public music school with a strong interest to extend their musical offer for migrant families and for toddlers in general.

One of the reasons of the lack of awareness of the Integration Office was the high number of binational families in the region. The

children of these families do not appear in the migrant statistics because they have a Swiss parent. The government considers these children to be Swiss citizens without considering their binational origin. In the official statistics, only those that go through the process of obtaining the citizenship of the other parent are considered. Other reasons are the very good integration of the Latin American immigrants and the achievement of high competences in the German language that avoids them being perceived as in a situation that needs state intervention in comparison to larger migrant communities with more urgent needs.

Most of the families expressed however, the necessity of resources to develop the heritage language, to preserve tradition and heritage culture and to stop acculturation. The General Learn Program – Language and Culture of Origin courses express as well that integration is not a subject of importance for bicultural families, but the bilingual education and the development of intercultural abilities.

4. Methodology

The methodology was structured in three different stages, being the first one the development of the heritage language program and their goals, the second the implementation of the program and the third the definition and gathering of indicators that could show the impact of the program in the perception of the Latin American migrant community and in the reconstruction process of identity in the migrant families.

Furthermore, this method subscribes to the model of Participatory Action Research (PAR) because it establishes a horizontal and non-hierarchical relationship between the subject and

the object of the investigation and enables the object to be an active and conscient part of the social change (Alcocer, 1998). This investigation was started and conducted from a Spanish and music teacher from Argentina with experience in heritage language development and recognized credentials to teach in the Swiss public school system, permitting a good communication and understanding of the migrants and institution's needs.

4.1. Development of the Heritage Language Program *Ronda redonda* (Rounded circle)

Taking into consideration the several conversations with the Integration Office, the migrant association and the music school, two different kinds of goals were decided to be the north of the program.

Social goals:

1. Generate a contention, connection, cultural recovery place for migrant and binational families and cultural exchange with Swiss families.
2. Change the perception of the city Wil SG about the Spanish speakers (positive recognition of the existence of the group).
3. Place the program in a state educational institution to reduce the cost for the families and involucrate the state.

Linguistic goals:

Generate a space outside home to:

1. Achieve a holistic early development of the heritage language.
2. Create the possibility of interaction with peers of the same age group in the heritage language.

3. Become several linguistic inputs (diatopic variation).

Target:

The target groups of the Program *Ronda redonda* (rounded circle) where Spanish speaking migrant families and Swiss families with interest to learn Spanish together divided into two age groups:

1. Families with children between two and four years old.
2. Children between four and six years old.

To address the social and linguistic goals it was necessary to develop different methodologies that are explained in the following sections.

4.1.1. Language development-oriented methodology

The elected timetable for the classes was to have one class once a week fifty minutes long. The younger group would start with thirty-five minutes and progressively increase the time. The pedagogical approach selected aligns with the 'learning by doing' theory from Brunner (1983) and focuses on vocabulary learning, the incorporation of highly contextualized linguistic structures through meaningful activities and active communication.

The didactic units are articulated through a holistic methodology where the acquisition of language is comprehended as a global process with special attention to the reinforcement of the affective bond with the language and cultures and involving the families in the process.

The holistic methodology approach includes activities oriented to an integral childhood development. At a young age, when the children acquire a language, they develop at the same time their physical and emotional system, their hearing and speech systems, motor skills, autonomy, self-esteem, etc.

Language development in early childhood is therefore never about vocabulary or grammar only but about the integral development of the human being.

The natural follow-up of this thought is to include musical and movement activities as a substantial part of the program.

Music represents, from an anthropological point of view, and independently from its ornamental or functional aspects, a special form of communication with the environment and is inherent to the human essence (Cross, 2001).

From a sociological point of view however, the collective music practice requires the development of social skills, negotiation of goals, learning to keep distance and identify oneself with the group, tolerance in frustrating situations, empathy, originality, creativity and at the same time, recognize one's own capacities and limitations (Demkura 2014, p. 11).

Furthermore, there are some factors that benefit the acquisition of languages in the early childhood:

1. the hearing is not yet shaped with the marks or filters of the mother tongue or the majority language (in the case of a bilingual child) and therefore presents more plasticity to capture, process and distinguish new phonological sounds.

2. there is a natural predisposition of the infants to learn a language, which is unconscious and is bind to physical and emotional needs (Rodríguez Suárez, 2003).

Additionally, language is a code that allows us to share our experiences with our peers, rebuild meaning and our life in narrative form. There is again a second aspect, a subjective one, the internal fantasy, that cannot be completely rebuilt through language. This aspect is the *dynamics of vitality*, a behavior manner, a narrative aspect that communicates the emotional internal world of the subject (Stern, 2010). This particular aspect of the human communication can be expressed in an individual or collective way through dance, music, art and as poetry through language (Lorenzer and Orban, 1978).

Likewise, viewing the physiological aspect related to speech development, music can operate as a mean, because it contributes to the development of the hearing (pitch, rhythm and intonation differentiation) and communicational competences (Mahns, 1996; Laabs 2005; Koch-Temming and Findesein 2006, a.o.).

Additionally, musical vocal experimentation and improvisation allow the infant to explore new possibilities far from the mother tongue and use this for the development of the second language.

Considering all the items explained above, the efficiency of a heritage language program could be sustained through an instrumental understanding of the language, respect for the children's mother tongue, the inclusion of the families, the selection

of holistic activities and the creation of learning situations proper to the first language (Demkura, 2016).

4.1.2. Social development-oriented methodology

A very important function that a migrant collective has to fulfill is to create a space for the identity reconstruction, a 'cultural shock absorber' (Aliaga Sáez, 2009) that resists or avoids the complete assimilation and acculturation and works as a protection shield against the complexity of the new environment, supplying tools to improve the inclusion and accommodation process. Several studies also indicate that a bicultural child that becomes a balanced input of language and culture from both parents has better chances to have less conflicts with them (Rumbaut, 1994), show lower stress levels (Berry, 2003), have less intergenerational familiar conflict (Coatsworth et al., 2002) and a better mental and physical health (LaFromboise, Coleman, & Gerton, 1993).

The decision to work with mixed groups of migrant and Swiss families was based on the concept that such an environment presents a possibility for languages and cultures to switch roles, permitting the immigrants to recover the 'discourse asymmetry' (Sepúlveda, 2001), grow their self-esteem, rediscover and value their cultures again.

Immigrants go through a complex process where they first lose the feeling of social competence that they have in their origin countries. The new language, the new social environment with different interactional rules presents a challenge for most of them. To have a space where they can be the 'experts' again and are able to 'teach' the host families makes a recovery of self-esteem possible. Additionally, the possibility of exchanging experiences with other

migrant families presents an opportunity to share resources and mutual assistance.

Sepúlveda (2001) emphasizes that the active participation of the families in the classroom strengthens the intercultural perspective, fundamental for the migrant children's development. Furthermore, these spaces allow 'diversity' to change from 'communicational obstacle' to mutual enrichment and understanding, promoting the ability to participate in intercultural encounters, search consensus and grow respect between cultures (Demkura, 2016).

In connection with the development of the language, several studies have shown that the simultaneous work on linguistic and personal skills (improvement of self-esteem and confidence, creativity, the capacity to reflect on one's own learning process and to work with autonomy, the ability to speak in public and to cooperate, the knowledge of oneself and others) lead to a statistically significant improvement in the motivation to learn a language, showing a growth of the intrinsic motivation (Arnold, 2001).

In resonance with these ideas, the classes were conceived as an open oriented environment that should encourage to 'startup' new cultural and social projects that empower the migrant families and promote intercultural exchange. Furthermore, chat groups and after class group activities should also encourage the families to take the relationship started in the class outside the classroom.

The second stage of the investigation was the implementation of the program *Ronda redonda*.

4.2. Implementation of the program

The program was implemented in a three-stages process:

4.2.1. Selection and creation of materials

The creation of a curriculum was an investigation of its own (Demkura, 2014) and therefore, in this paper we will only describe shortly the significant points.

After a careful review of existing materials for teaching Spanish, English, and music in the early childhood, the following criteria were taken into consideration for the analysis and creation of materials:

1. Instrumental understanding of language acquisition.
2. Respect for the mother tongue of each group.
3. Favor L1 similar situation of acquisition.
4. Involve the families on the process.
5. Provide a holistic learning.
6. Promote the mother-father-child bond.
7. Reinforce the self-esteem of the students.
8. Facilitate pleasant learning situations through game-oriented activities.
9. Provide a multi-norm vision of the language (due to the diversity of Spanish varieties in the classroom).

4.2.1.1. Description and typology of materials

The following typology of materials were selected and created based on the criteria mentioned above:

1. Rhymes and poetry: nursery rhymes, finger plays, and rhythmic poetry due to their potential to train motor skills, equilibrium, rhythm skills and musicality at the same time that they provide a space to deepen the parental bond and develop the language.
2. Songs to introduce routines, songs with movements, songs with movements to recreate the text, songs of the popular repertory to play with percussion instruments.
3. Voice improvisation games to experiment and grow the children vocal and phonetical possibilities.
4. Easy dance and movement activities to promote the self-esteem and corporal assurance.
5. Formats as a playful way to learn and practice very meaningful linguistic structures.
6. Crafts to deepen the understanding or practice vocabulary.
7. Flashcards specially designed to help the understanding of the formats, songs and rhymes.

4.2.2. Creation of a Curriculum

The elaboration of the curriculum was also part of the investigation mentioned above and gave as a result the confection of a first didactic guide to teach Spanish as second- and heritage language in the early childhood through music and movement. This guide included five units of two sessions each. The core of each unit is always a format

(short story with repetitive sequences and linguistic structures) accompanied with several total physical response (TPR) activities, songs, dances and crafts.

4.2.3. Evaluation

The evaluation of the linguistic progress took place in every session with the objective of measuring the level of understanding and assimilation of the contents. It was conducted through direct observation of the participation and ability to replicate the contents of the students in communication situations and during activities in the classroom. Furthermore, this was a tool to recognize difficulties and challenges, and rewrite the following session according to the necessities of the class.

4.2.3.1. Description of the Target Group:

The program was started with a beta mixed group (SL and HL) of six families with children between two and four years old (four girls and two boys) during ten sessions in the municipal music school of Wil city in canton St. Gallen in the German part of Switzerland in August 2013. Four of the six children had German as their strong language, two had Spanish. Four families were binational (two Argentinian-Swiss, one Columbian-Swiss, one Venezuelan-Swiss), one Spanish family, and one Swiss family.

During this period, a global evaluation took place observing the following criteria:

1. Participation: increasing, decreasing, stable along the evaluation time.

2. Contents acquisition: Frequency in the use of the presented vocabulary, relevance in the usage, intent of utilization of the presented grammatical and functional structures.
3. Self-evaluation of the language and culture (re-construction of the identity): comments of the parents about the effect of the classes in an intrafamily and personal level.

After this evaluation, several adjustments took place to create the next units, such as simplification of the graphics in the flashcards to avoid distraction from the central subject, simplification of dance sequences and the decision to repeat each session with adequate variations.

A second group started after a year with this beta group, with children between four and six years old without adults in the class. Due to the good results, the program was incorporated into the stable offer of the music school and expanded to open a German group to give migrant families the opportunity to develop the second language and interact with Swiss families in the process using a similar approach as in the Spanish group.

At the start of the year 2020, the program had an attendance (German and Spanish) between six and twenty-five families per year.

The third stage of the investigation was the definition and gathering of indicators that could show the impact of the program in the perception of the Latin American migrant community and the reconstruction process of identity in the migrant families.

4.3. Definition of indicators and data collection

It was decided to take the following indicators:

4.3.1. Indicators of the impact of the program in the perception of the Latin American migrant community

The register of official publications from the Integration Office and from the city and any Swiss institution that recognized the presence of the Latin American community.

4.3.2. Indicators of the reconstruction process of the identity in the migrant families

The register of initiatives born in the *Ronda redonda* Program, conversation with the families about their feelings and experiences towards the program.

4.3.3. Data collection

Data collection involved direct observation of the language development of the children during the classes, recollection of parent statements about the increase of heritage language use at home, and collection of registers about the presence of the Spanish speaking community in the media and in the official campaigns of the city government.

5. Results

5.1. Result in the educational and linguistic areas

Every year, the evaluation of the groups shows an increase in the utilization of the heritage language in the classroom and at home. Some of the Swiss parents of binational families spoke about how different and gratifying it was to see their children interacting with

other children in the heritage language and get to know a whole new part of their identities.

In relation to the reconstruction of the identity of the families, several parents commented that the experience of singing and sharing stories in the heritage language started a remembering process of their own childhood. Some of them started to remember nursery rhymes and others started to speak with their own parents (most of them living in the country of origin) about songs, rhymes, games and traditions.

One very significant event in the classes is when the grandparents of the children travel from their origin countries to visit them and are invited to participate in the class. For the grandparents, the class represents an opportunity to be part of the routines of their grandchildren in their own language. They also represent an enrichment to the class and make each visit a special moment for the whole group.

The program waked up interest from the beginning from other institutions and teachers of heritage languages. As a result, a book with theoretical and practical content was published in 2016 and since then, teacher trainings have been taking place in Switzerland, Germany, Nederland, Israel and Argentina regularly.

Several private institutions have implemented the program in a partial form in the cantons Bern, Basel, Zürich and St. Gallen and in public and private institutions in Germany, Finland and Nederland.

5.2. Results in the social area

In 2017, after several efforts from parents and teachers of the program, the initiative Imagine – Stories and songs (*‘Imagina –*

Cuentos y canciones in Spanish) (Figure 5) was started in the public library of Wil. This initiative has a bimestrial frequency and, during one hour, families with children between 3 and 6 years old seat together to hear adaptations of children books from Spanish-speaking authors, singing Spanish songs and making crafts related to the stories. The participation is without charge and voluntary donations serve to buy new Spanish children books for the library. In 2019 and because of the good experience with the children initiative, the library decided to open an adult Spanish section and every two years host an event with Spanish literature and music.

Figure 5: *Flyer of the 'Imagina Cuentos y Canciones' in the Public Library of Wil SG.*

CUENTOS EN ESPAÑOL
KINDERGESCHICHTEN AUF SPANISCH

CLAUDIA Y MÓNICA LOS INVITAN A CONOCER EL RINCÓN DE CUENTOS Y CANCELACIONES EN ESPAÑOL DE LA BIBLIOTECA MUNICIPAL DE WIL.

PARA NIÑOS DE 2 A 6 AÑOS ACOMPAÑADOS POR UN ADULTO.

FEBRERO	ABRIL	JUNIO	AGOSTO	OCTUBRE	DICIEMBRE
23	27	22	24	26	07
VIERNES	VIERNES	VIERNES	VIERNES	VIERNES	VIERNES
16.30 HS	16.30 HS	16.30 HS	16.30 HS	16.30 HS	16.30 HS

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IMAGINA

In 2014, a Latin American choir started with a number of parents (both Latin American and Swiss) from the *Ronda redonda* program. The goal of this choir was to promote the Latin American and Spanish music and language in a space of intercultural exchange. Slowly the choir started participating in several multicultural events in Wil and other cities. In 2018, the choir was invited to an intercultural exchange weekend in Lisbon with a Portuguese choir. In 2019, the first Open Air Choir festival took place in the historic city center (Figure 6). The Latin American choir was selected to be one of the 6 choirs that would be representing the Wil choir community and was the only migrant choir.

Figure 6: Flyer of the 1st Open Air Choir Festival in the Historic Center of Wil SG.



From 2014 until 2017, some mothers from both groups (Spanish and German) started an intercultural initiative in one of the primary schools of Wil (St. Gallen canton). The initiative, called '*Länder Nachmittag*' (Countries Afternoon), seeks to present one country in the school every year in a social open afternoon at the Allee School in Wil (*Schule Aktuell*, 2015,1).

The process of organization was carefully discussed within the mother's group which decided to take a committed intercultural approach.

Once the country to be presented is chosen, the person or persons from the selected country would lead the event organization. The group would meet regularly during a six-month period to learn about the country. This meeting included collective cooking, reading of children stories and historical papers, learn typical dances, singing of children songs, playing traditional games and investigating about touristic facts. On the event, the whole group would present the country through different interactive activities distributed among several rooms of the school, like board games-room, visual presentation-room, storytelling-room, buffet, i. a.

Through active participation and intercultural communication, each member of the group was able to learn the characteristics of the language and culture that matter to the leading person and friendships started between women of very different backgrounds and education.

At the start of this investigation in 2013, the perception of the Swiss society was that the Latin American migrant group was nonexistent.

In the year 2019 in the city of Wil took place an anti-racist campaign. This campaign was aimed to raise awareness on the multicultural composition of the community social fabric. This is shown in the flyer on Figure 7.

“Swiss-German, Spanish, Arabic, English (...) the city of Wil doesn't speak only one language and stands for diversity” (our translation).

Figure 7: *Flyer of the Anti-racism initiative of the Integration Office of the city Wil 2019*



And on Figure 8:

“African, Latin, Albanian, Swiss (...) The city Wil doesn’t think in boxes, it sees diversity” (our translation).

Figure 8: *Flyer of the Anti-racism initiative of the Integration Office of the city Wil 2019*



After six years of the *Ronda redonda* Program and the initiatives born from it, the perception changed from non-existent to be placed first in the list of migrant communities in two different flyers from the Integration Office. Without the program, the words 'Spanish' and 'Latina' would most likely not be present at all.

At a national level, the repercussion was unexpected and very welcome from the author, the city and the music school.

The Swiss association of music schools organizes a National Music Forum every two years. One of the main events is the recognition of innovative programs that participate in the 'Good Practice' competitions. The Competition award initiatives started in music schools that have focused on one of the following subjects:

1. New teaching forms.
2. Work with digitalization.
3. Integration or, respectively, inclusion of persons with migrant backgrounds.
4. Improvement of learning access for new groups (seniors, people with impairments).
5. Cooperation with outside institutions.
6. Other projects for the development of the music school conducive contexts.

In 2020, the program *Ronda redonda* was selected among several other projects from music schools in the whole country to be one of the nine finalist of this competition and was the only finalist program started from a migrant teacher.

Despite not having won the first price, the competition and the finalist instance put the program, the music school and the city on the

local newspapers and brought attention from other music schools that started to plan the implementation of similar programs for other migrant communities.

In each of the selected categories of indicators, some kind of development could be observed. The perception of the city about the Latin American community improved in the selected period and new initiatives, oriented not only to the Latin American, but to other migrant groups started to take form and collaborate towards a better intercultural exchange between migrants and state offices.

6. Conclusions

Initiatives started from the migrant communities to create classes, groups, and events to develop the heritage language and bring it closer to the host culture are very important. They can start a change of perception and open opportunities for new intercultural and collaborative projects.

Furthermore, these initiatives open an opportunity to change the asymmetry of the discourse, placing the migrant actors in an active role in the inclusion process. These families can develop a different relationship with the main culture, a relationship where they can be seen as experts in several areas and not only helpless subjects.

The Ronda redonda program showed us that early childhood heritage language and culture programs which include migrant teachers and involve the active participation of the families can start a whole inclusion process that not only opens chances for the migrant communities but also for the host society and their institutions. They can convert the perception of immigrants in the host society from

being a problem to be solved to an opportunity for mutual enrichment.

These initiatives need to be helped through public social policies to grant access to larger groups and minimize the cost for socially and financially disadvantaged families. Moreover, migrant social policies should be developed through collaboration between institutions and migrant communities to enable an actual inclusion. The inclusion of more professionals with migration background in the integration offices and programs can enhance and upgrade the relationship, possibilities, and communication between state and migrant communities. On the other side, the migrant groups need to realize that the only way to make the rest of the society aware of their needs is through self-organization, networking, and social participation. Inclusion is a two-way street.

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