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PERSONAL STATEMENT

The Value of Language and Culture

Developing cultural competence for all learners

To learn another language is to discover that the world can be understood and expressed in more than one way. As a Spanish educator for more than twenty years, I have seen language learning do far more than build vocabulary or grammatical accuracy. It gives students the confidence to connect with people, the curiosity to explore unfamiliar perspectives, and the empathy to recognize the humanity they share with others.

Growing up in Costa Rica taught me that language and culture are inseparable. Words carry histories, traditions, humor, values, and ways of seeing the world. When I teach Spanish, I want my students to understand not only what people say, but also the experiences that shape how they communicate. I invite students to examine similarities and differences with openness, rather than making assumptions or treating another culture as a collection of celebrations and facts.

I believe cultural competence begins with curiosity and grows through reflection and respectful interaction. In my classroom, students ask questions, consider multiple viewpoints, and learn that differences deserve understanding, not judgment. Through authentic stories, conversations, music, art, and cultural traditions, they begin to recognize how culture influences our identities and our communities. These experiences also encourage students to examine their own beliefs and to appreciate the perspectives of classmates and families. These opportunities matter especially for students who may never have traveled beyond their own communities or encountered another language at home.

Meaningful communication is at the heart of my instruction. I use acquisition-driven strategies, comprehensible input, storytelling, movement, and purposeful repetition to make Spanish accessible to learners with different backgrounds, strengths, and levels of confidence. Students are encouraged to take risks, make mistakes, and grow. When a student communicates successfully in Spanish, the language becomes more than a school subject; it becomes a tool for connection.

At the Academy of the Sacred Heart, our Día de los Muertos learning experience offered a powerful example. Students explored the significance of an ofrenda, learned about honoring loved ones, and shared their understanding with the school community. They encountered a tradition that might initially seem unfamiliar, but then discovered its deeper themes of memory, family, love, and respect. For me, moments like these demonstrate how language education can nurture intercultural understanding and compassion.

I also believe this work extends beyond my classroom. My experience in curriculum design, bilingual education, and teacher mentoring has reinforced the importance of helping educators create meaningful opportunities for language acquisition and cultural exploration. When we collaborate and share effective practices, more learners benefit.

Ultimately, I teach Spanish because I believe every student deserves the opportunity to engage with a wider world. Language learning develops communication skills, but it also calls on us to listen carefully, question stereotypes, and respond to others with respect. My hope is that students leave my classroom not only more capable of speaking Spanish, but also more willing to build bridges, serve their communities, and approach people with open hearts and open minds.