

# Reality Spanish for the Workplace

## The Opportunity: To Connect with Workers in Spanish

When local plant managers, teachers, and healthcare providers in Clinton County are asked what skills training they'd like Purdue Extension's Learning Network to provide, conversational Spanish always tops the charts. They want to be able to communicate safety concerns in the factory, hold a parent-teacher conference without an interpreter, or calm Spanish-speaking patients involved in emergency medical situations. In general, language barriers prevent economic and community development from taking place--to its fullest potential--in Clinton County.

## The Response: Reality Language for Healthcare, Teachers & All

Thanks to grant funding from the Indiana Minority Health Coalition to cover my training and the expenses for up to 30 participants of Reality Spanish for Healthcare classes, Purdue Extension's Learning Network was able to invest in a new method of language instruction, called Reality Spanish. After being trained in May 2009, I

organized a community conversational class (Reality Spanish for All), two Reality Spanish for Teachers classes for the Community Schools of Frankfort and Area IV Head Start, and two Reality Spanish for Healthcare classes—all of which were IRB approved through Purdue University. A total of 54 participants met for 12 sessions each—for a total of 648 total contact hours. 9 of those Reality Spanish students participated via IP video from off-site locations, including Rochester, Flora & Monticello, Ind. From August 2009 through May 2010, students used the Reality Spanish program to help them in very practical ways—to recall functional bites of language needed to make communication possible. The program, which emphasizes connection not perfection, uses a method pioneered by Dr. Gaye Jenkins called COLA, or context-based optimized language acquisition. Trainers seek to make connections for learners by using gestures, repetition, and storytelling to encourage rapid recall. Reality Spanish uses the “natural learning approach,” a theory that people are more likely to learn a second language when the teaching methods mimic how they learned their first. It’s a multi-sensory, total engagement approach that results in spontaneous speech triggered by various situations. This program makes it possible for people to connect at the human level of exchange—without memorization and word lists, which inhibit conversation.



## The Impact: Better Communication in Local Healthcare Facilities (Hospitals/Clinics/Doctors' Offices/EMS), Schools, Churches & Businesses

Adult students of Reality Spanish reported much more positive outcomes with this method than traditional classes I've taught in the past. Students were given a pre- and a post-test to self evaluate their progress. Eighty-five percent of participants reported a "level gain," meaning one number higher on a Likert scale of 1-5 between their pre- and post-test scores, measuring their proficiency in Spanish. Specifically, students gained a level in their ability to: (1) consistently connect effectively with Spanish-speaking clients, (2) comprehend much of the Spanish that they hear, (3) understand Hispanic cultural beliefs and family values, (4) give basic instructions in Spanish, and (5) empathize deeply and personally with the fears and insecurities of Spanish-speakers. Overall, these 54 Reality Spanish students were much more pleased with the outcome of this course—and their personal success at grasping the language—than my previous course graduates. Some particularly striking comments made on the evaluation forms, include the following.

- 1) "I feel more confident when communicating with a Spanish-speaking family. I can understand more of what they are saying, and they can understand me. It was a wonderful class."—Cheydelle Simpson, OB/GYN nurse
- 2) "My memory was refreshed about Spanish! I got more out of these classes than 4 years of high school Spanish and one semester in college. I can communicate more effectively now."—Leslie Douglass, owner Preservation Partners
- 3) "I feel like I have a great start and a strong personal commitment to keep learning. I don't feel so unprepared when I meet someone who needs some assistance and their only language is Spanish."—Betty Ramos, dental assistant
- 4) "I had a limited base of Spanish to build on, but the motions and exercises have helped me retain the words more effectively. I liked the fact that it was relational, conversational, and common usage of words."—Timothy Grasham, pastor Community Christian Church
- 5) "I have used my new skills often in my classroom. I feel as though I have a way of communicating my expectations to my ELL students. I have even heard some of my Spanish-speaking students using some of the words they have heard from me."—Kristy Stockberger, substitute teacher
- 6) "I have taken many Spanish classes, but this one was definitely the most practical and helpful. I can't wait to take Level II. All teachers in Clinton County should take this class."—Louisa Hoffman, kindergarten teacher
- 7) "I have a love for diversity and creativity but was apprehensive about taking this course. At the end of this course, I can listen to a conversation between Latino students and often understand the meaning. They were excited that I was learning their language; it shows them in a tangible way that I care."—Marcella Holmes, school counselor