

Special Report

Preschool Spanish: 16 Ideas that
Motivate Young Children to Learn

**Best Practices for
Building Motivation
into Preschool Spanish and
Kindergarten Spanish Programs.**

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Spanish Champs

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Young children need to be motivated to learn Spanish because they really don't care about learning a new language. If children aren't interested in learning, they won't. Adults have many motivations to learn a language such as: getting a grade in a class, enjoyment of learning, planning a trip to a foreign country, hope of better employment opportunities, or the necessity of a job. Children have none of these motivations and for them to learn effectively, there has to be some motivation to help induce them to learn. This is why you need to build motivation into your preschool Spanish program from the beginning.

What will motivate children? Here are 16 ideas that are either directly or indirectly needed to run a successful preschool or kindergarten Spanish program.

1. Pride and a Sense of Accomplishment. Set small goals of learning several songs or completing several lessons. Celebrate when you achieve them. Tell the children often how great it is that they are learning Spanish and praise them when they use it, especially if it is outside normal "Spanish" time. Have some simple rewards available for when they do (stickers, stamp on their hand, star on a progress chart, Spanish Champs of the Day designation...).

2. Certificates: The Spanish Champs teacher's resource CD has certificates of accomplishment in PowerPoint that you can fill out and print. There are two levels: Yellow and Orange (like Karate). Many sports use the "belt" concept to motivate children to learn more. Children see other kids move from white belt to yellow belt and they want to be a yellow belt too. The resource CD also has two assessment tests that can be used with children as young as 4.

3. Performances: Plan at LEAST two official performances during your school year. These can be simple performances singing one or two songs or plays with costumes, interactive games and contests with families. A fun game to play is "Speed Spanish", where you line up children single file, then ask the one in the front what a word in Spanish means, such as: hola, me llamo, uno, dos, tres and so on. You see how quickly you can get through a list of 10 or 15 words. After a child's turn, they run to the back of the line, if a child missed the word, the next child tries until someone gets it. As you progress, make a number of these simple lists to use for Speed Spanish. Beginners get a word (or phrase) in Spanish and they tell you the word or phrase in English. As they master the Spanish to English version, then you do the list in reverse order, you give the English and they have to provide the Spanish. You can time the kids to see how long it takes them to get through the list, keep the fastest time on the board for each list. Parents love watching this game. You can even play parents against kids, kids LOVE to beat the adults. You can find some Speed Spanish examples on the Spanish Champs website.

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4. Demonstrator: When a child gets good at a song let them be a demonstrator for that song. If you have a school with 5 and 6 year old children, they can help demonstrate for the 3 and 4 year old children. The sooner you can put children in the role of "demonstrator" or "teacher" the better; this will be a big motivational factor for some children. You can tie this in with getting their Yellow or Orange certificate (see tip #2). A great way to assess if a child is ready to demonstrate a song is if they can sing along with the Spanish Champs karaoke CD with few mistakes. Karaoke isn't just a fun treat for children; it is actually a great way to assess a child's progress in language production.

5. Fun: Spanish should be fun, if an activity isn't working well, skip it or change it. The Spanish Champs curriculum guide provides a variety of activities; some will work better than others with your children. If it isn't working, don't force it! Fun and laughter are great medicine; make sure they are part of your program.

6. Identify with Spanish Speakers: Bring in a special guest that only speaks Spanish, this could be a child or an adult. Have them read you a story, sing with you or join you in an activity. Make sure to "play up" this event before they come and after they leave, make sure you praise the kids for "helping" the guest. Tell them there will be another guest coming and they need to keep learning so they can "help" the new guest also. This will help children begin to identify with native Spanish speakers and can be incentive to learn more.

7. My Family is Learning: Integrate the family into the learning process. Make sure to send home the 16 "Take Home Activities" found in the Spanish Champs Coloring and Activity Book one at a time. Seeing mom, dad and siblings learn will be very motivational and help them start to be proud of speaking Spanish. Parents can purchase a Spanish Champs starter kit (song CD, Video DVD and Song Book) and have their preschooler "teach" the family the motions to the songs. Tip #4 discusses the "demonstrator" concept, this works really well at home if parents have the song or karaoke CD. The video has interactive parts to involve the family.

8. Teacher Motivation: If the teachers aren't motivated (low energy, not creative, bothered) children will pick this up. Enthusiasm is contagious and so is malaise. Make sure to invest a little time in class prep. Learning the songs well will help this.

9. Varied Learning Modalities: Since each child learns differently, it is important to tap into their particular learning intelligences, such as: spatial, musical, logical, interpersonal, and body-kinesthetic. The Spanish Champs program incorporates all of these modalities. For example, teaching songs with the suggested physical motions taps into four of the five modalities mentioned. Different modalities will appeal more to some children than another, but when taken all together, they provide the reinforcement needed to make meaningful progress in Spanish.

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10. Don't Overwhelm: The easiest way to turn off learners is to constantly overwhelm them with too much new Spanish. We want children to start to build confidence with a base of words & phrases they comprehend so they can eventually begin to produce Spanish. As children start to master even a small language set, the "foreignness" begins to lessen. Dr. Stephen Krashen, a world renowned linguist, discusses the concept of "comprehensible input". When teaching, it is best to use 90% or more familiar Spanish, so the learner can focus on deciphering the 10% or less they don't understand. They are looking for clues from the words they know and context of the situation to help "fill in the comprehension gap". This is why in the Spanish Champs program we recycle songs and stories as we progress and even repeat the complete program a second year. Remember the learning stages children pass through: distinguishing words, building comprehension and language production. There is a big time lag from the time children start to distinguish new words until they have mastered using those words in context. Recycling material helps build confidence and mastery.

11. Don't correct every mistake: Children need to experiment when learning a new language and if you squash experimentation by always correcting, children will be afraid to try. We do need to worry about correcting errors, but this doesn't need to happen every time an error is made, pick your battles.

12. Environment: Create a Spanish area in the classroom (or home) and build your resource library. Spanish Champs includes all the elements you need to begin, but it is always a good idea to build your resources. How many books, CDs and videos do you have in English? You probably have a great deal. Start to acquire songs, story, flash cards, videos and other resources in Spanish.

13. Self Selection: Give children some time to self select which song, story, activity or game they want to use. As your library of resources expands, this will be more valuable.

14. Integrate Spanish into the Classroom: The more Spanish becomes a part of the classroom the better. If Spanish is totally segregated, it will be harder for children to start to identify with the language. It is OK to have "Spanish time" that is dedicated to Spanish, but also try to include Spanish words, phrases, counting, commands, songs and stories into the normal classroom activities.

15. Frequency: Having Spanish once a week or twice a month and not reinforcing it regularly will not produce very good results. Ideally, you should have Spanish sprinkled throughout the day, or have at least a 10 minute session daily. The Spanish Champs program is set up so that there is a "lesson" twice a month, but each day there are various reinforcement activities outlined in the curriculum guide.

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By doing a little Spanish every day, it decreases the “foreignness” and provides constant reinforcement.

16. Contextual Learning: We always want to “roll-up” what we are teaching into a larger context that will provide more learning clues. For example, when teaching colors we initially go over a few colors (red, yellow, green, blue) but we want to quickly get to full sentences “Tengo un globo rojo” - I have a red balloon. We don't want to stop at lists of vocabulary. Sentences should then roll-up into stories.

One of the main principles behind Spanish Champs is a concept we call Multiple Contextual Repetition (MCR for short). The idea behind MCR is that we want to give children different contexts for understanding how a particular set of language is used. In Spanish Champs, the normal progression starts with a song. We break each song down into the constituent words and phrases. We teach these slowly and then we put them together in a song with motions. The song and motions provide a context with learning clues. The illustrated song book and the coloring book provide visual reinforcement. The Video DVD will then provide a skit, demonstration or game using the same language, but in a different context. We then incorporate the same vocabulary into a story. By providing a number of different contexts and learning modalities with the same language set, children will learn more quickly, understand faster, and be more interested. Additionally, the Teacher's Resource CD includes hundreds of images from the songs and video so teachers can create their own stories and use the images for visual reinforcement.

The bottom line is that motivation must be thought out and built into your program. When we designed the Spanish Champs curriculum, we took into account many of the ideas above, but teachers will still need to make a concerted effort to include “motivation” as a key element of their program.

Give your children good reasons to learn Spanish and they will!

Additional Resources:

To learn more about how to teach Preschool Spanish, visit the link below:

<http://www.spanishchamps.com/pages/How-to-teach-Preschool-Spanish.html>

To understand the benefits of learning preschool Spanish, please visit this link:

<http://www.spanishchamps.com/pages/Benefits-of-Learning-Spanish-in-Preschool.html>

To preview the Spanish Champs Curriculum, please watch the video at this link:

<http://www.spanishchamps.com/pages/Preschool-Spanish-Curriculum.html>

To buy the Spanish Champs Curriculum, please visit this link:

<http://www.spanishchamps.com/products/Spanish-Champs-Curriculum-Kit.html>