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FIU and MDPLS: Engaging our community in language learning at public library spaces

Four years ago, I started a community language teaching internship program in partnership with Miami-Dade Public Library System (MDPLS). The problem: there are enormous benefits to learning and being able to use another language. However, language learning is not accessible to everyone. For example, most job postings in our city require Spanish language proficiency. This context is exclusive of those people who do not have the resources to study Spanish or other foreign languages.

In my practice as a teacher trainer, I was also seeing that my student teachers similarly faced hurdles when they applied for teaching jobs. Most positions required experience and they had none. And so I thought, what if we start teaching foreign languages to the community for free?

The solution: I contacted MDPLS, and the community language teaching internship program was born. For this, student teacher interns meet with me once a week to lesson plan and ‘practice’ teaching. They then teach one Spanish class a week at a public library site. Since its inception, this program has grown from two to seven simultaneous student language teachers (reaching 350 language students total in our community). “Students” have included nurses, policemen and women, businesspeople, and even grandparents. Our student teachers feel incredibly empowered because they have their own classroom autonomy and are gaining genuine, real-world experience. MDPLS has asked me to expand this to other languages and we are considering it! I am ecstatic to share about this program with you all.

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