
Deborah E. Bender, Christina Harlan, Linda Ko, and Irwin Stern. *Spanish for Mental Health Professionals: A Step by Step Book*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006. 124p.

ANA ISABEL CARBALLAL
UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA-OMAHA

Spanish for Mental Health Professionals is one of the volumes of the “Paso a Paso” Series for Health Professionals that incorporates manuals for health, mental, and dental professionals. The book with a CD is a series of six lessons or steps that introduces professionals in the fields of mental health to the language and culture of Hispanics as well as providing expressions related to that field. The purpose of the volume is to bring awareness of the problems that many immigrant communities face when entering another country like the United States and also to help these professionals to reach out this part of the community with an understanding of its background and context. To do this, the book is structured not so much as a classroom textbook for college students but as a manual that is intended to be used in the workplace, requiring the presence of a facilitator who should know how to communicate in the language. In this regard, each lesson is structured in the same way.

In the first part students have to listen to a dialogue or dialogues related to the lesson. After listening to the dialogues several times, the manual recommends the learner repeat the phrases she or he heard until becoming familiar with them. Once the learner has internalized these expressions, the next step is to read a story and answer several questions regarding the listening, the reading and each one of the pictures at the beginning of the chapter. After this introduction, each chapter comes divided into seven other parts: a grammar lesson, new vocabulary and expressions, an assessment tool to help the professional get to know his or her patient, assignments for the following week, fun activities to review the concepts learned in that chapter, activities with the community, and finally a transcript of the dialogue from the beginning of the chapter for review.

Although the book will be very helpful to professionals who need a refresher course in Spanish, some points should be kept in mind. The manual is intended for working in groups with a facilitator. Somebody in the group needs to have a more than basic understanding of the Spanish language and cultures in order to grasp all the grammatical as well as cultural concepts. Also, it would be convenient for the learners to have a background in Spanish language in order to assimilate the grammatical concepts and memorize all the new expressions. Learners should not assume either that this is all the Spanish they will need to know to communicate with their patients. First, the manual is specifically for mental health professionals, and second, although the authors did a superb job in putting together the most important

vocabulary and expressions that can be used in this context, the fact is that every day, learners may encounter many words that they do not know. They will have to follow the advice of the book: remain willing and open and use Spanglish.

Nevertheless, this book may become a wonderful tool in many offices. It is interesting to notice how each chapter is devoted to different situations that the patients or the doctors may encounter in their interactions. Through the chapters, clients meet with social workers, talk about their feelings and their problems adapting to the new country, and open up to their doctors regarding the memories or even the trauma that they had to go through in their former countries. The book addresses some of the problems that immigrants may encounter in the new country—including alcoholism, anger, and domestic violence—and even considers the resources that many use to look for and find help. These readings and dialogues will not only be useful to raise the cultural awareness of the learner but also act as a window to show some of the issues that professionals may encounter. Another wonderful feature of this manual is that it is completely bilingual: the lessons, activities, dialogues, and readings are both in Spanish and English. Although some of the concepts may be still difficult to grasp, the fact that the explanations are in both languages should help end anxiety about learning a new language. Other useful features are the vocabulary lists and questions at the end of the reading.

This book encourages the learner to immerse himself or herself into the world of Spanish and Hispanic cultures. Leaving aside the fear of saying something wrong, the authors advise bluntly to use Spanglish, to try to communicate with the client even if it cannot be in perfect sentences, and with this objective in mind, each chapter is filled with vocabulary lists related to the most important topics and also questions that may be answered in English or Spanish regarding pictures and other materials. It is important to notice the presence of fun activities: crossword puzzles, Lingo, maps, memory games, even recipes that the learner may try to make for the following week. These fun activities are linked with one of the most exciting features of the chapter explaining the relationship with the community. At the end of each lesson, the authors give several suggestions to the reader on ways to immerse himself or herself in the Hispanic community of the town. In this regard, there are assignments such as going to a Hispanic restaurant and observing a family there, coming up with theories about what they are talking about, going to a supermarket to try a new type of international food or drink, asking clients about the holidays in their country, becoming aware of the mental health services that the community offers for Spanish-speaking individuals, and many more activities.

Finally, two other important parts of the book are the assessment tools, where the student is going to find a great variety of forms, applications, and other documents

in English and Spanish that the doctors may use to evaluate their patients, and appendixes, where the student may find a guide on pronunciation and accentuation in Spanish, answer keys, and vocabulary cards.

This little book may become an invaluable tool for all the practitioners of the mental profession. With certain guidance and a lot of courage, it will help both doctors and clients overcome the frustrations and dangers of failed communication. ✱