





CONSEJOS

A PROCESS GUIDE
FOR CENTERING
DECOLONIZATION
IN THE
TRANSLATION OF
BURKE BOXES
FROM ENGLISH TO
SPANISH



Acknowledgements

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the Burke Box Educational team, June 2025.

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ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Note from the author

Before 2024, the Education Department at the Burke had limited translation experience. Most of it came through the BurkeMobile program, for which staff had begun translating materials in 2021 using translation services and community input. This marked the start of my involvement with the Burke, where I contributed as a community member to the translation of one of the BurkeMobile's educational resources. In Spring 2024, Devin Leatherman, the Burke Box Manager at the Burke Museum of Natural History and Culture, submitted a proposal to sponsor a thesis in the University of Washington's Museology Master's Program. This proposal was motivated by the growing demand for Spanish-language educational resources at the Burke and the introduction of new legislation supporting Spanish dual-language schools across Washington state. As a second-generation Mexicana, the daughter of immigrants, and a native Spanish speaker, my lived experience positioned me as the right person for this work. Being part of the community I aimed to serve, I understood that translation is not just a text-based practice, as it's often traditionally viewed—it's about language as a cultural representation of the Latine community. I chose Burke as my sponsor, and Devin Leatherman welcomed and supported the perspective I brought to the project.

In Fall 2024, BurkeMobile staff launched a Teacher Advisory Committee (TAC), supported by a Boeing grant, to collaborate with Spanish-fluent educators from Pre-K to middle school Dual Language programs. The committee members advised on best practices, program development, implementation, and evaluation. I had the honor of being invited to help select the educators and attend all the sessions. My involvement meant I could build relationships with everyone in the committee. It gave me a holistic introduction to Burke education and the privilege of working closely with the Latine community.

That same fall, I began my thesis project planning, and I identified that a comprehensive needs assessment was deemed essential to guide a Spanish adaptation of Burke Boxes that addresses the specific needs of the Latine community. In this process, the Burke Box program would serve as a case study and create a precedent for future translation efforts across Burke Education. This was the beginning of Consejos.

Michelle Alejandra Villagomez

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES

This project aimed to develop a process guide for translating Burke Boxes from English to Spanish—framing language as a cultural practice, centering decolonization in the translation process, and grounding the work in the voices and input of the Latine community.

THE BURKE BOX EDUCATION TEAM WILL...

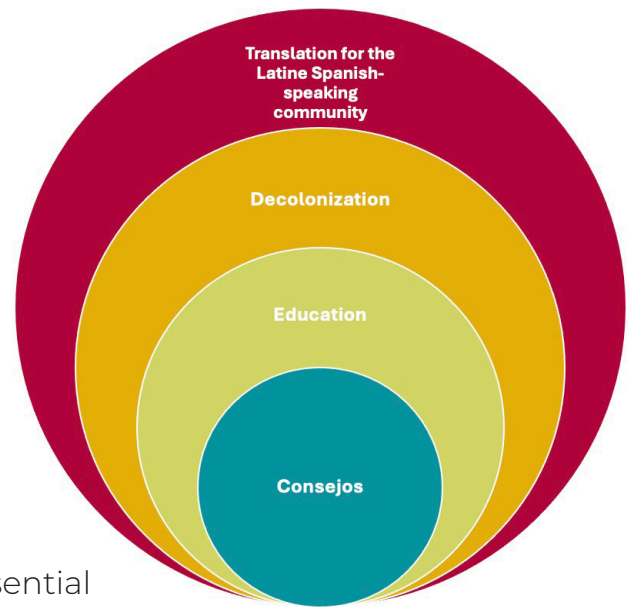
Gain awareness and challenge the problematic legacy of translating material from English to other languages, including colonial methodologies and approaches to translation.

Consider the needs of educators who will use the Spanish Burke Boxes with their Spanish-speaking students.

Uphold and value the Latine-rooted methodology of consejos to intentionally guide and translate material for local Spanish-speaking communities.

A GAP IN THE MUSEUM FIELD: LANGUAGE ACCESSIBILITY

As we approached the translation of educational materials at the Burke Museum, prior research provided essential context for understanding the intersection of translation, language, culture, decolonization, and education—and how these collectively informed the foundation of this project.



Museums, as informal learning spaces, play an essential role in serving multilingual audiences who increasingly seek information and programming in languages other than English (Fuentes, 2023). While there has been a growing effort to improve accessibility, the American Alliance of Museums notes that many institutions still rely on literal, English-centered translation practices that overlook important cultural nuances (Bishop, 2022). This highlights the need for more inclusive, culturally responsive translation strategies—ones that move beyond linguistic accuracy to actively reflect the lived experiences and values of the communities they aim to serve.

Translation

Translation, at its core, is the act of conveying meaning across languages. In the museum context, Min-Hsiu Liao outlines both an informative function—focused on linguistic accuracy—and a social-inclusive function, which emphasizes accessibility and the role of translation in shaping who feels represented within museum spaces (Liao, 2018). This shift underscores the political nature of translation, where each choice reflects a museum's underlying values and priorities. Similarly, Steven Yalowitz argue that language is not a neutral system but a sociocultural practice shaped by relationships and context, highlighting how translation in museums actively constructs—and is constructed by—broader worldviews (Yalowitz et al., 2015).

WHAT THE RESEARCH SAYS

Decolonization and practices that center Latine culture

Today's oral practices among Mexican and Mexican immigrant families stem from rich Indigenous storytelling traditions that predate colonization (Reese, 2012). These oral forms—used to transmit knowledge, values, and cultural identity—have long served as tools for both survival and resistance in the face of colonial oppression (Reese, 2012). Decolonization, in this context, centers Latine culture by recognizing these traditions as living knowledge systems. When museums integrate them through storytelling and community-based translation, they actively challenge colonial narratives and affirm cultural continuity. Building on this, Shawn Wilson emphasizes that Indigenous communities must have the power to decide how research and cultural engagement are conducted, following their own “codes of conduct [that] honor [their] systems of knowledge and worldviews.” (Wilson, 2008). This means that decolonizing efforts are not only about including Indigenous voices but also about upholding Indigenous authority and respecting how knowledge is shared and interpreted within each community.

Education through a Chicax Lens

Cultural and linguistic colonialism, often reinforced through school policies and standardized curricula, can hinder the healthy development of students' cultural identities (Aparicio and Jose-Kampfner, 1995). Traditional educational methods frequently overlook the lived experiences of Latine communities, leaving many young Latine students feeling disconnected and unsupported within the system. In response to this, *consejos*—a culturally rooted practice among Latine families—offer a powerful, alternative approach to supporting Latine youth in education. The work of Concha Delgado-Gaitan, which deeply informs this project, highlights the power of cultural narratives within Latine families. She defines *consejos* as “nurturing advice” that often takes the form of informal yet meaningful conversations, through which caregivers pass on values, guidance, and life lessons to their children (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994, p. 298). For parents and guardians who may not speak English, especially recent immigrants, *consejos* are essential for staying involved in their children's education (Delgado-Gaitan, 1994). Through these personal and culturally resonant exchanges, caregivers foster emotional support and affirm their children's identity, contributing to their educational journey in ways that traditional systems often fail to recognize or validate.

WHAT ARE CONSEJOS

Consejos are narrative advice grounded in cultural wisdom, lived experience, and collective responsibility.

For Latine communities, consejos are more than advice — they're relational offerings passed down by elders, parents, or anyone in the community. Consejos are a tool to care for one another and a reminder that collective knowledge has the power to create opportunities for our comunidad.

Consejos as a methodology

In this project, I engaged with the concept of Consejos as both a methodology and a way of being, grounded in Indigenous and Latine epistemologies. Consejos are informal, in-the-moment conversations shaped by trust and mutual respect. Rather than treating participants as subjects, Consejos created a space for mutual exchange, where all involved—including myself—shared authentically from lived experience. Because they arise organically and are deeply personal, Consejos cannot be standardized or replicated—they are unique to the people and context from which they emerge. This approach aligns with Michael Yellow Bird's (2005) definition of decolonization as the active resistance to colonial structures and the upliftment of traditional knowledge. As a Latine researcher, I was able to use Consejos not only as a methodological tool but as a cultural practice that honors my community's ways of knowing. This guide does not aim to replicate that methodology, but to reflect the insights shared by community leaders and educators. Far from being a limitation, my personal involvement in this process deepened the work and will inform the findings discussed throughout this guide.

Who participated in the Consejo sessions?

The use of Consejo sessions was intentional and designed to resonate with the community leaders and educators I collaborated with on this project. These sessions were held with ten Latine leaders and educators from the greater Seattle area, each bringing diverse, firsthand experience working closely with the Spanish-speaking Latine community.

CONSEJOS

2

2.5-hour listening session with multiple educators

5 ELEMENTARY EDUCATORS

Who currently teach in Spanish and therefore have translation experience. Their consejos provided targeted insights related to translating Burke Boxes.

5

1-hour individual interviews with community leaders

5 COMMUNITY LEADERS

Who had prior experience translating and/or creating resources for the Latine community. Their consejos provided general guidance on engaging with Spanish-speakers.

Community leaders were selected by spreading the work of my thesis project through different community avenues and word-of-mouth. These leaders were in various fields: Museums, Arts and Culture, Anthropology, and Linguistics. Educators taught across multiple subject matters and were either part of the Teacher Advisory Committee (TAC) at the Burke or came directly recommended by an educator in TAC.

It should be noted that the Consejo sessions were recorded but not shared with any Burke staff. Additionally, no specific consejo is tied to a participant to ensure that community members felt safe and comfortable sharing their experience and stories.

THREE GUIDING PRINCIPLES

From the Consejos—advice and insights shared by community leaders and educators—I identified three guiding principles as pillars for supporting ethical, community-centered Spanish translation. Remember, these are not rigid rules but a foundation for thoughtful practice as you begin your work creating with and for the Latine community. I invite you to read with care, reflect on your own role in this work, and return to these pages often, not just for answers, but for deeper understanding.

1. RELACIONES Y LA COMUNIDAD

2. CULTURA Y LENGUAJE

3. IDENTIDAD

What you will find in each section:

- Principle and a definition
- Practical guidance for each principle
- Community leader and educator voices

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE: RELACIONES Y LA COMUNIDAD

In this translation work, it is important to center the Latine cultural value of strong community and family bonds, recognizing that interdependence, mutual care, and collective responsibility are core to how we show up and thrive together. This principle, Relaciones y Comunidad or Relationships and Community guides us to nurture relationships that are rooted in trust, respect, and shared purpose.

1. SHOW UP WITH PURPOSE

“If I can make it happen, I will ” – Community leader

To show up with purpose in Latine communities means leading with care, humility, and accountability. Purposeful engagement looks like:

Trying with intention: As many community leaders shared in the consejo sessions, effort matters. Showing up—especially when resources are limited—is often seen as a sign of commitment and care, with the attempt being viewed as an opportunity to build deeper relationships. However, tread lightly regarding effort, especially as you balance intent with impact. Translating into languages beyond dominant English demands the same accuracy, care, and resources — good intentions are not a substitute for doing it well.

Being honest about limitations, while refusing to accept them as excuses: It’s important to acknowledge when resources are scarce, but not to use it as a reason to fall short on equity—especially with translation, accessibility, and representation. Latine and BIPOC communities deserve to have resources made for them. Translation, for example, is not a privilege—it’s a right.

Being transparent with goals and open to feedback: Listening deeply—without immediately acting or “solving”. Check back in and invite input, not just during the project but after it concludes. Be prepared to revise or pause a project if the intention isn’t aligned.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Hear directly from community leaders and educators

“What Indigenous communities ask the most for is for you to show up. If they invite you somewhere, you go. But go and do something; don't just be there.”

“I might not have the staff, I might not have the money, I might not have the hands but when somebody is interested in serving the community, invite them to the table to do that.”

2. CO-CREATE WITH THE COMMUNITY

“Every person that participates has ownership and has investment in whatever it is that you are doing because it is so important to empower individuals wherever you can.” – Community leader

In honoring the principle of Relationships and Community, we must recognize that creating meaning with the Latine community means engaging them as active partners in shaping their narratives, ensuring their perspectives are integral to the translation process.

From consultation to co-creation: Move beyond extractive practices where community members are asked for input but excluded from decision-making. A partnership means the comunidad shapes their narratives, not just responds to them. Remember the audience for any translation endeavor is the community; therefore, let their words and perspectives remain intact—translated with them, not for them.

Meet the comunidad where they are at: This not only refers to physically meeting them on their terms, but can also be extended to include the extent of their participation in the translation work. Ask the Latine comunidad how they want to participate in projects that involve them, and be willing to say yes.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Hear directly from community leaders and educators

“The Latino communities here [greater Seattle area] still have a very heavy mistrust in museums and so my work is about saying yes. It’s okay to be you, it’s okay to have events, it’s okay to participate. It’s about building trust.”

“Consider having ambassadors/representatives that come from the community you are working with and let them be the leaders. It is comforting to see someone that looks like you and talks like you.”

3. TRANSLATION AS RELATIONSHIPS, NOT TRANSACTIONS

“Any translation effort has to come from profound love and a want to know the other...yes, I know you—but also, you know me.” – Community leader

When translation work is relational, it builds the foundation for deeper collaboration, shared ownership, and more authentic communication across communities.

Staying in relationship: Build long-term relationships, not one-time engagements. The deep relational bonds the Latine community holds as a strong value manifest in collaborative work. Understand the commitment such a relationship might require and be prepared to nurture the relationship even when there’s no immediate project benefit.

Be Open to New Ways of Relating: Relationships with Latine communities may not mirror familiar models of other professional or organizational partnerships. Expect and respect different rhythms, values, and communication styles rooted in the comunidad’s ways of being.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Honor Protocols and Practices: Each community has protocols and cultural practices that signal respect and trust. Take the time to learn and honor these, even if they are unfamiliar or require you to move at a different pace. When it comes to translation work, it is particularly important to check in with the community about compensation and acknowledgement, and approach the two on their terms.

Hear directly from community leaders and educators

"[Working with the community] is work that we do daily... something that we are committed to, not just superficially. We really believe in those values."

"Interculturalism is a political movement that supports cross-cultural dialogue and challenging self-segregation tendencies within cultures. Interculturalism involves moving beyond mere passive acceptance of multiple cultures existing in a society and instead promotes dialogue and interaction between cultures. What this proposes is spaces and curriculums where we can integrate, value, and engage in different ways of knowing."

PRINCIPLE: CULTURA Y LENGUAJE

Honor culture and language as inseparable foundations of translation work. The principle *Cultura y Lenguaje* or Culture and Language serves as a reminder that translation can carry worldviews, relationships, and histories, not just words. For Latine communities in the United States, the Spanish language reflects survival, resistance, and belonging.

1. LANGUAGE AS A CARRIER OF WORLDVIEWS

*" [When thinking about translation], I think of the word *descomponer* in mathematics which is separating a number into two parts. You can tell they translated something from English because of this concept. The idea here is to break down a number, and it's not that it doesn't work, but this is also destroying it and that's not the point."* –

Educator

Recognizing language as an extension of the diverse cultures within the Latine community, this principle calls us to center cultural nuance in our understanding when working with the *comunidad*.

Embrace the richness of regional diversity in Spanish: There is rarely a single, universal way to translate a word, phrase, or sentence. Be open to incorporating multiple regional variations that reflect the cultural differences of the language, and always communicate these distinctions clearly according to the specific cultural context.

Respect everyday language: Translation should speak the language of the people, not just “formal” or “academic” Spanish, which can alienate and intimidate bilingual and first-generation Latine communities. Community connection often happens through informal and everyday Spanish, such as sayings, humor, and expressions.

Be intentional when selecting a qualified translator: A translator must deeply know both cultures because they translate worldviews, not just vocabulary. It is also essential to honor the integrity of the material since specialized language within fields carries its nuanced meanings that only culturally-rooted translators can navigate.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Hear directly from community leaders and educators

"There are words that, in theory, would work, but for someone who is a native speaker, it would not sound right. People assume that the kids have the background knowledge of the Spanish language you are using, but the reality is that our kids come from everywhere in Latin America, and they have different backgrounds and knowledge. Language differs with region and socio-economic experiences. Keep in check assumptions that the curricula has about this."

"Translating from English to Spanish is very practical and lacks that personal approach, while translating from Spanish to English involves many expressions because that's how [Latine people] are...As Spanish as my first language, I know what the intention is, so I try to translate the best I can. If Spanish is not a language you speak, you will miss a lot of it because you don't know the intention behind the phrases."

"When thinking about creating for the diverse array of students that come from all over Latino America, think about language diversity and find info and issues that can highlight this. Incorporate words that would be used if you were talking about that specific region... It is not just about linguistics when translating but also about things like lexicon and intonation."

"Joy is at the heart of education. If kids experience joy in learning, the content matters very little. I feel that Latinidad as a culture has so much joy that isn't necessarily reflected in the curriculum. If there were a way to reflect this element of culture explicitly in curriculum, I think that kids would benefit."

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

2. HEALING LANGUAGE LOSS AND VALUING RECLAMATION

"Translation is not neutral; it carries power." – Community leader

Language carries the histories of the Latine community. Healing language loss means reclaiming and honoring bilingual and multilingual realities rather than allowing dominant languages to erase them. Translation is not neutral — it has the power to restore voices displaced by colonization and assimilation. Reclaiming language is reclaiming identity, memory, and collective strength.

Language Preservation as Resistance: Recognize that every act of Spanish translation is political, especially in the United States, where English dominates public and institutional spaces. Spanish translation challenges linguistic hegemony, asserts cultural identity, and acknowledges the resilience of Latine communities who have preserved their language and culture despite pressures to assimilate.

View Language Reclamation as Healing Work: Frame translation not just as a technical task, but as part of broader healing from historical erasure, colonization, and displacement. Consider how direct, decontextualized translation erases meaning, distorts values, and displaces community voices.

Hear directly from community leaders and educators

"Unfortunately, with all this displacement of languages, the dominant language that is becoming global is English. This is detrimental because look at how this has made us view the world."

"There tends to be a lack of support to strengthen Spanish within the community. There is a trend of not being able to retain Spanish and weaponizing learning English, which is a form of language discrimination. So translation holds weight in many regards."

"As a minority person that comes from la comunidad, you might have this activism inside of you, but the consequences and the punishment you get from this are real"

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

PRINCIPLE: IDENTIDAD

This principle of *identidad* or Identity calls you to engage in culturally responsive translation by acknowledging that working with community means people bring their own lived experiences, cultural backgrounds, and identities as they internalize educational resources. It emphasizes the importance of designing towards the specific needs, values, and interests of the Latine community.

1. HONOR ALL WISDOM

“Sabiduría Indígena [Indigenous wisdom] is one way to create knowledge. This work is horizontal because we all come into this world with different forms of wisdom” –

Community leader

At the heart of this guide is a commitment to work that uplifts community-rooted knowledge, and resists hierarchical structures of power and expertise. In Latine communities, wisdom is shared, lived, and carried through generations.

The comunidad as sources of knowledge: Language is closely linked to identity, so trust and listen to opinions, requests, and feedback. When community members provide *consejos*, it is not only their story, but a culmination of experiences from other people in the *comunidad*. Honor what is being said and acknowledge that storytelling is a form of expertise.

Spanish holds emotional and cultural weight: It's essential to translate with care. Unlike English, which can often feel more distant or formal, Spanish frequently carries a greater sense of intimacy, community, and heart. This difference means translators must go beyond literal accuracy to capture the warmth and relational depth that Spanish speakers expect and deserve. Resist the urge to flatten or neutralize language for the sake of formality and instead translate in a way that feels familiar and personal.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Hear directly from community leaders and educators

"Spanish is not just another language; it's a part of who you are."

"Reach out to our community because we have so many resources. Listen to not just educators but families because they know so much that you never thought of. We as educators, think of translation from the perspective of the academy but these kids come from families that look at this from many perspectives. This will feel more authentic"

"Whenever I schedule workshops and programs, I always look at it with a personal lens: like a mom y tambien as an adult community member who thinks about what is lacking in the community for the kids and elders."

2. LET THE COMMUNITY HAVE CONTROL OVER THEIR REPRESENTATION

"Create so that students feel seen and validated" – Educator

Translation is more than transferring words from English to Spanish—it is a practice of representation.

Invest in translation that is responsive to the comunidad: Too often, translation is treated as a direct process, failing to consider what the material communicates, whose voice is prioritized, and how that message will be internalized by Latine audiences. Design so that there is room for the comunidad to see themselves in the material you create.

True representation must be self-determined by the comunidad: A lack of thoughtfully translated resources signals exclusion, while inclusive, culturally rooted translation says, "I value you." When you see educational content created not just for you, but by and with people who look like you, speak like you, and carry similar histories, the impact is powerful.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Hear directly from community leaders and educators

"Representation as a synthesis of knowing yourself. It includes all these things that we can't communicate through language. Everything we can't say, we can represent."

"I told [the artists], I want the kids to hear you. I want them to hear you with your accent, even if you are speaking English. I want the kids to feel positive and okay about having an accent."

"In East LA everyone is Chicano and everyone is Black or Brown. Spanish is the norm, you know? You walk around and you see these beautiful murals: La Virgen, Aztec warriors every day all around you, surrounded by cultura...As a kid, it would have been great to be represented, feel like you belong, and not feel that otherness."

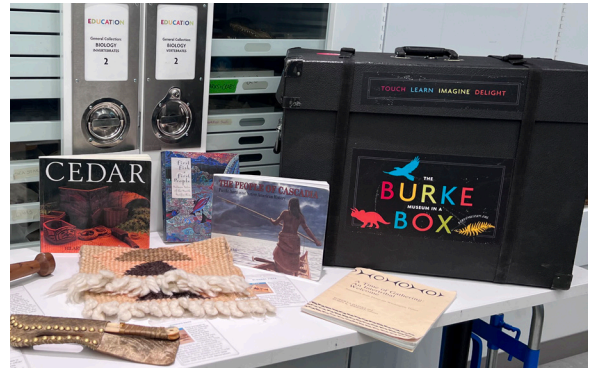
"There is great impact to seeing each other represented. We need to see Washington Latine folk in different fields and jobs. There is lots of history but having the resources would be useful."

CONCLUSION

These guiding principles—rooted in community, culture, and identity—offer lived wisdom to ground us and challenge us. These consejos remind us that translation is a deeply intentional process that must consider the cultural, emotional, and social context of the Latine community. Language accessibility is not simply about making content available—it's about ensuring it resonates, reflects lived realities, and honors diverse worldviews. While these principles do not provide step-by-step solutions, they offer a meaningful starting point for translators and teams to reflect, adapt, and grow. By centering these values, we move beyond mere words toward deeper understanding, authentic connection, and equity.

TRANSLATING BURKE BOXES

Insights shared by educators during the listening sessions not only helped shape the guiding principles, but also offered specific consejos on translating Burke Boxes. *The Native Peoples & the Environment* Burke Box was used as a reference point when discussing translation efforts. Therefore, the advice offered was mainly through the lens of looking at a culture box to address the needs of Latine Spanish-speaking students.



Native Peoples & the Environment of Washington Burke Box displayed for educators in one of the listening sessions, 2025

One of the session’s first questions—how many educators had translated their own materials—sparked discussion on how often they already invest time and resources into translation due to unavailable or inaccurate resources. With no Burke Boxes currently available in Spanish, the program remains inaccessible to Spanish-speaking educators and their students.

100% of educators have experienced translating their own materials into Spanish.

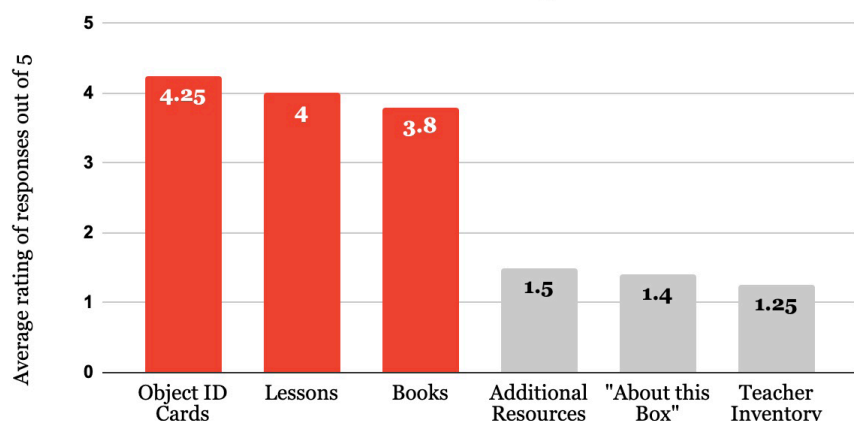


● Yes

Later in the session, educators were asked to identify which components of the Burke Box should be prioritized for Spanish translation. Their responses revealed a clear trend: materials directly used by students were seen as more urgent to translate than those intended solely for educators.

CONSEJOS FOR THE BURKE BOX PROGRAM

What Burke Box components should be prioritized when translating?



Object ID cards, lessons, and books emerged as the top-rated components—markedly higher than the rest. In the bar graph, the numeric value of 5 indicates the highest priority.

Object ID cards were seen as critical to translate because they often contain subject-specific terminology and concepts. Another teacher shared that translating books herself would be a heavy burden and emphasized that they are essential for introducing new ideas. Consider which resources would be most difficult and time-consuming for educators to translate on their own.

RESOURCES EDUCATORS NEED IN A SPANISH-LANGUAGE BURKE BOX

Videos: Include a 5-minute introductory video in Spanish about the box and other videos that explain the museum objects. These should feature someone from the Latine community speaking directly to the viewer, asking engaging questions, and inviting them to explore further.

More visual aids to understand concepts: Provide posters, maps, and diagrams to help illustrate key concepts, especially when Spanish translations may vary. Visuals can clarify meaning and support comprehension by connecting abstract ideas to culturally relevant imagery.

Connections to Latin American countries: With the ID cards of museum objects, highlight cultural ties and shared traditions. These don't need to cover every item—starting small is fine—but they can help build meaningful links beyond the U.S. and reflect the diversity of Spanish-speaking communities.

CONSEJOS FOR THE BURKE BOX PROGRAM

Acknowledgement of Indigenous ties: Nearly all educators emphasized that culture Burke Boxes should recognize the deep Indigenous roots within the Latine community when translated, calling for stronger connections between Indigenous peoples across the Americas to better reflect students' lived experiences and to challenge the misconception that Indigeneity exists only in the U.S.

A short-term solution

Since translation efforts will take some time to get underway, in the meantime, educators requested the following:

- Provide early digital access to the Burke Box curriculum for Spanish-language educators, enabling preparation without extra rental costs.
- Create a system to share Spanish translations already developed by educators using the Burke Box.
- Kickstart translation efforts by inviting bilingual educators to volunteer in exchange for waived Burke Box rental fees.

A Latine-centered Burke Box

In both listening sessions, educators emphasized that while translating existing culture-themed Burke Boxes should take precedence over science-focused ones (such as earth or life science), creating a dedicated earlier—centering Spanish as a language of origin rather than merely a target for translation. As one educator powerfully expressed,



“How are our Spanish-speaking students represented through the box? This can be [Burke educators’] filter of processing: Do and can Latine students see themselves? Hear themselves? See their family, culture, connected? What cultural linguistic connections are there for our Latine students through the Burke Box work? ”

Developing a Latine culture Burke Box would reflect a decolonized translation approach and affirm Latine students' identities and experiences through intentional and culturally resonant educational materials.

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THE
BURKE
MUSEUM IN A
BOX