



# Effective Language and Cultural Training for Hispanic Workers and American Supervisors

tech transfer summary

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## RESEARCH PROJECT TITLE

Identifying and Implementing Effective Training for Hispanic Craft Workers, American Supervisors, and DOT Inspectors: Phase III of the Hispanic Workforce Research Project

## SPONSORS

Iowa Department of Transportation  
(CTRE Project 05-132)

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More effective language and cultural training for Hispanic and American workers can facilitate jobsite communication and reduce the high fatality rate among Hispanic workers.

## Objectives

- Develop and implement effective language and cultural training for Hispanic craft workers, American supervisors, and DOT inspectors.
- Minimize interference with daily construction operations by exploring innovative ways of delivering the course materials developed.

## Problem Statement

The number of Hispanic workers in the U.S. construction industry has been steadily increasing, with Hispanics now comprising nearly 18% of the workforce nationwide and about 7.4% of the workforce in Iowa. Hispanic workers perform a variety of important construction tasks, such as general labor, concrete finishing, and equipment operation. However, training does not appear to be adequate, especially where safety is concerned. The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that in 2000 construction fatalities overall dropped 3%, while the number of fatalities among Hispanics at construction sites jumped 24%.

Because Hispanic workers will continue to play an important role in the U.S. construction industry, a more systematic effort should be made to confront the disproportionate number of fatalities among Hispanic construction workers. Construction companies need to address the new challenges posed by an increasingly diverse workforce by training their workers to overcome language and cultural barriers at the jobsite.

## Description of the Courses

Drawing from survey data gathered to assess training needs in the Iowa construction industry and courses developed during Phases I and II of this research, the researchers created the Toolbox Integration Course for Hispanic Workers and American Supervisors (TICHA). TICHA, which is designed to facilitate integration between Hispanic workers and American supervisors, offers the following features:

- Topics that go beyond language learning to address larger issues of cultural differences and safety
- Survival phrases that immediately help participants communicate at the jobsite
- Flashcards and quick references, including English and Spanish spelling and pronunciation
- A design that minimizes disruptions in the daily operations of construction crews
- Customizable material for specific projects and crew needs

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During daily operations throughout the construction season, contractors can use TICHA to train their workers once a week for 30 minutes before the working day starts or during lunchtime. It is recommended that the course instructor be a worker in the crew, preferably a bilingual Hispanic worker and leader known as a “link” person. While a “link” person trained in course goals and evaluation can teach most sessions, the research team can step in and conduct sessions concerning cultural models and customized technical vocabulary.

## Key Findings

- Eighty-three percent of construction personnel surveyed feel that “language” and “little time available” are the two primary barriers to training.
- The course focus should be integration instruction (cultural awareness, safety standards, improved relationships, and language instruction), rather than simply language training.
- Each session should last no longer than 45 minutes to avoid disrupting the day’s operations.
- American supervisors prefer their workers to receive the training 30 minutes before the day’s operations begin or during lunch time.
- During the initial sessions, American supervisors found TICHA useless while Hispanic workers looked forward to the course. However, by the end both American supervisors and Hispanic workers found the course extremely useful and rewarding.
- The classroom version of TICHA should be taught immediately before the construction season begins to help the participants to retain the knowledge.
- The integration approach of TICHA has proven successful in achieving its goals.

Excavator  
Excaveitor

Excavadora  
Exca-vah-doh-ra



TICHA Module 7, Flashcard 5

*Sample flashcard from a TICHA module*

## Implementation Benefits

- TICHA can help facilitate communication on the jobsite and reduce the high fatality rate among Hispanic workers. The integration approach of TICHA allows crews to “break the ice,” which is necessary in crews where two or more cultures are represented.
- Training American supervisors and Hispanic workers at the same time using the integration approach is quicker, more cost-effective, and simpler than the language training approach.
- TICHA can be adapted to traditional classroom settings as well as toolbox talks on the jobsite.

## Implementation Readiness

- TICHA is now available and can be brought to Iowa construction sites by contacting Ed Jaselskis.
- A course named “Teaching How to Teach TICHA” is in development. This course intends to prepare the “link” person of different crews to deliver the TICHA course effectively and to track its contributions.

How do you say that in English? <i>Jao du yu sey dat in english?</i>	¿Como se dice eso en Español? <i>Coe-moe say dee-say eh-so ehm Ehs-pan-yol?</i>
Tell the boss <i>tel de bos</i>	Dígale al jefe <i>Dee-ga-lae</i>
I need that dowel <i>Ai nid de daul</i>	Necesito esa dóvela <i>Nehz-eh-see-toe eh-sah dóvela</i>

*Sample reference sheet from a TICHA module*