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Partnership with community brings bilingual reality to college's Spanish program, while strengthening campus and community ties.

Including Latino Communities in the Learning Process: Curricular and Pedagogical Reforms in Undergraduate Spanish Programs

Felisa Guillén

Abstract

Since the fall semester of 2003, the Spanish program at Occidental College has been incorporating a community-service learning component in its intermediate and advanced language classes, as well as in all literature and culture courses. Based on the idea that culture-sensitive language instruction should include frequent and meaningful interactions with a language community, the Spanish program has developed a strong partnership with two local schools that have predominantly Latino enrollment. This mutually beneficial relationship helps college students improve their communication skills in Spanish while rendering a service to the Latino community through tutoring and mentoring programs, along with cultural presentations and artistic performances. Integrating the numerous activities resulting from this collaboration into the Spanish curriculum required rethinking program objectives, course structure, and responsibilities of the college, the faculty, and the students in the service-learning process. This article examines the pedagogical implications of embracing this teaching model at the departmental level, as well as the civic impact of the gradually increasing connections between the department and the neighboring Spanish-speaking communities. It also describes the program's evolution during four semesters of instruction; analyzes students' reflections, community partners' feedback, and

departmental assessments; and evaluates the results, challenges, and benefits of becoming an engaged department.

Introduction

Occidental College is a small liberal arts college in a residential area with a large Latino population. Its mission is anchored by four cornerstones: excellence, equity, community, and service. Consistent with its mission, the college has a long history of mutually beneficial interaction with Los Angeles, dating back to the mid-1960s when the College opened its Community Literacy Center and one of the country's first Upward Bound programs. These initiatives provided high school students with greater opportunities to succeed in their pursuit of higher education. Today, almost half of Occidental's students participate in some kind of community service through the Center for Community Based Learning and through the different academic departments that offer courses that incorporate community outreach and service.

Thanks to the leadership of the center's director and a grant from the Mellon Foundation, workshops in service-learning have been offered to the faculty every summer since 2002. It was precisely one of these workshops in 2003 that inspired the Spanish department to embrace this teaching model and to attempt to incorporate it across the curriculum. The workshop provided

us with the theoretical framework and the pedagogical motivation to revise our curriculum in order to create opportunities for meaningful and mutually rewarding interactions between our students and the community. Given greater than ever enrollments in Spanish classes and the increasing needs of the Spanish-speaking population, we felt compelled to open the new experience to a large number of students, faculty, and community members. Also, we chose not to conceptualize service-learning in terms of individual course design only, but to explore its potential as a vehicle of curricular reform (Zlotkowski, 2001). Therefore, instead of offering one or two courses with a service-learning emphasis, we decided to completely adopt this teaching model and to work together as a department toward the incorporation of service-learning across the Spanish curriculum. This decision has had many different repercussions, which we address by analyzing data collected during two academic years and by evaluating the objectives, results, and challenges of becoming an engaged department.

Theoretical Background

Following the recommendations of the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language in its *Standards for Foreign Language Education* (ACTFL Special Project, 1999), many Spanish instructors are working toward greater connections with their neighboring communities. Their experiences, methods, and models of service and community-based learning have been discussed in scholarly forums and publications. Particularly relevant are two volumes of collected articles entitled *Construyendo Puentes* (Hellebrant & Varona, 1999) and *Juntos* (Hellebrant, Varona, & Arries, 2003), which provide an overview of community settings and methods while underlining the pedagogical benefits of this teaching model in the area of foreign language acquisition. The focus of these studies and many others recently published is the increasing applications of service-learning to specific segments of the Spanish curriculum. This article, however, addresses the challenges and rewards of incorporating a service-learning component across the curriculum and the different implications for the way in which courses are designed and revised. It also assesses the interaction between the students, faculty,

and community partners who participate in such an endeavor.

Program Overview

The first semester

Our initial trial took place in the fall semester of 2003. Thanks to the collaboration of the Center for Community Based Learning, the Spanish department developed a partnership with a local elementary school that offers a transitional bilingual program in Spanish from kindergarten through third grade. Toland Way Elementary School proved to be an ideal partner. Located a 10-minute walking distance from the college, Toland Way has 570 students, about 80 percent of whom are Latinos from low-income families who speak Spanish at home. Many of these students need help to improve their reading and math skills, and they require this assistance in Spanish. To meet their needs, we developed a tutoring program in which our students were able to help the teachers and the students in the bilingual program through after-school activities and a Homework Club. By becoming tutors, Occidental students had the opportunity to use their Spanish in a productive way, while learning from children who are native-speakers of the language. Both the Occidental undergraduate students and the elementary school students benefited greatly from this experience. Occidental students helped Toland Way students with learning techniques and comprehension of subject matter, and Toland Way bilingual students helped Occidental students with their Spanish skills (Table 1).

Initially, participation in this program was open to Occidental students enrolled in intermediate Spanish classes (Spanish 201 and 210). Involvement was voluntary and an alternative was provided for students opting not to engage in the service-learning activity. For instance, students had the options of going to the language laboratory for an hour each week to watch the news from Spanish-speaking countries or taking part in another service-learning activity for the same amount of time. Accordingly, the service-learning component of each class was worth 10 percent of the final grade, the same percentage assigned to language lab attendance.

In order to prepare students to become tutors, orientations were offered both at the

Table 1. Program Overview

	Activity	Spanish Level	Oxy students involved	Community Partner	Oxy Faculty Involved
	Tutoring Program 1. Homework Club	Intermediate Classes	12	Toland Way Elementary	3
Spring 2004	Tutoring Program 1. Homework Club 2. Intervention Program and Teaching Assistance in Kindergarten Class	Intermediate and Advanced Classes	51	Toland Way Elementary	4
Fall 2004	Tutoring Program 1. Homework Club 2. Intervention Program and Teaching Assistance in Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd and 3rd grade Bilingual Classes 3. Cultural Evenings 4. Windmills Play	Intermediate and Advanced Language Classes; Culture and Literature Classes	72	Toland Way Elementary	7
Spring 2005	Tutoring Program 1. Homework Club 2. Intervention Program and Teaching Assistance in Kindergarten, 1st, 2nd, and 3rd grade bilingual classes 3. Computer Classes for Parents	Intermediate and Advanced Language Classes	47	Toland Way Elementary	4
	Mentoring Program	Intermediate and Advanced Language Classes; Culture and Literature Courses	38	Glendale High School	4

college and at Toland Way in collaboration with Occidental's education department and the elementary school faculty. The orientation sessions at Toland Way presented school-specific information such as dress code, use of supplies, and safety rules. On the other hand, the preliminary meetings at Occidental emphasized the importance of assessment and reflection as essential tools in the both the tutoring and engagement processes. To facilitate this evaluation task, the Spanish department provided students with two specific forms: an "initial set of goals" form that assisted them in identifying the particular needs of their tutees and the objectives to be pursued during the tutoring practice, and a "weekly progress report" form that contrasted expectations and achievements and provided space for the tutor to determine the necessary actions for the following session (see Appendices 1 and 2).

Participation in the Homework Club consisted of 14 hours, comprised of hour-long weekly sessions for which several schedules were available. A diary entry in Spanish was filled out

for each tutorial.

During the fall semester of 2003, about 15 students from three different sections of Spanish 201 and one section of Spanish 210 (Intermediate Spanish for Native-Speakers) chose to participate in our pilot program. The students' background was very diverse, both ethnically and socially: 12 participants were female and three male; five came originally from California, 10 came from different states; there were two Latinos, one African-American, one Asian, and the rest were Caucasian.

About one-third of the students were upper middle class, one-third middle class, and one-third came from underprivileged families. Regardless of differences in their backgrounds, all these students had three identifiable and relevant things in common: most were freshmen, they had a very good command of Spanish, and they had been previously engaged in community work through their former schools or churches. As the Report from the National Commission on Service-learning (2002) stated, primary and secondary school

students are volunteering in record numbers for community service activities, but they don't seem to have the opportunity to connect their volunteer spirit to their school work. Therefore, our undergraduates welcomed the prospect of service-learning and the possibility of connecting their civic responsibilities to their studies. The 15 participants in our first service-learning activity were excited about providing a much-needed service to the community while improving their Spanish.

Preliminary Results

On a personal level, students acknowledged that the experience initially was a challenge, primarily because it was a relationship with children—something new to most of them—and it was in Spanish.

For the first time for most of them, Spanish was not a language to be studied, but a language used for the transmission of knowledge. Taking part in the tutoring program made them reflect about educational methods and their purposes, and acknowledge the difficulties involved in becoming a good teacher and in selecting the appropriate materials. While appreciating teachers' work in the school, the students did not hesitate to discuss those practices they deemed deficient or unproductive, whether in individual teachers or in the school's pedagogical organization. Those who felt drawn to teaching valued the service-learning experience as a great opportunity to sample the field of education.

Students' diaries also showed their reflections about the complexities of bilingual education and the importance of helping the Spanish-speaking children succeed in school. As mentioned before, students were asked to reflect on their experience by comparing their initial set of goals with the weekly progress report they filled out after each tutorial session. These reflections were written in the form of a diary entry collected by the instructor at the end of the week. The instructor would then include feedback consisting of questions and comments to help the student reflect on broader issues connected to the situations described in the journal. In addition to their educational value, the diaries were also used as a communication tool between students, instructors, and community partners. For instance, from the students' comments we learned that they did

not have the appropriate vocabulary to help the children with math, since the Occidental students had never studied math in Spanish before. To address this problem, we met with the bilingual faculty from Toland Way and put together a glossary of terms and expressions that could be useful to our students in becoming better math tutors. The students' diaries proved to be an essential instrument in facilitating communication and enhancing collaboration.

In short, student opinion demonstrated that this program represented a favorably innovative experience that allowed for their personal fulfillment and reinforced their Spanish language skills, while rendering a helpful service to the community. The advantages of the service-learning activities over more traditional practices like language lab exercises were also recognized by the three faculty members participating in this trial program. First, we witnessed an immediate improvement in the students' oral skills. Not only did they considerably increase their vocabulary, but they also perfected their pronunciation and showed a greater familiarity with grammar structures. Second, they gained a lot of confidence in their communication abilities and were more eager to participate in class. Most of them decided to talk about their service-learning experience in their mandatory oral presentations, showing pride in their accomplishments and a desire to instill the same interest in their classmates. Third, through those presentations and the entries in their journals, the Spanish department faculty witnessed an increase in students' civic awareness and social responsibility.

Along the same lines, our community partner, Toland Way Elementary School, expressed a high degree of satisfaction with our students' performance and attested to the positive impact of the tutoring program on the learning and motivation of the Toland Way students. All the Occidental and Toland Way faculty members involved in this project met twice during the semester, once on each campus. In addition to these formal meetings, there was constant communication by phone and by fax between the school principal and the Occidental instructor in charge of the program. Through these contacts, we learned that participation in the Homework Club had increased due to our students' efforts and that the children were very

happy to get more individual attention.

Due to the positive response, during the second semester the Spanish department decided to continue its commitment to service-learning by opening up more opportunities for student involvement and by expanding its scope across the curriculum. Consequently in spring 2004, our second semester implementing service-learning, we extended our program. In collaboration with the principal of Toland Way, we multiplied the opportunities for tutoring, helping the school develop an “intervention program” to assist the students identified as not learning on schedule and falling behind in reading and math.

Failure to attain full level proficiency in reading and math is a very critical problem in bilingual education and demands additional resources that most schools lack. Research suggests that the attainment of age-appropriate grade level achievement in a second language is typically a four to five year process and that students’ progress depends on receiving well designed, linguistically sensitive instruction (Jimenez, 2002). Therefore, it is imperative that English-learning immigrant students get as much individual attention as possible inside and outside the classroom. With this goal in mind, we also offered our students the opportunity of helping the teachers in the kindergarten classes to provide the children with a more personalized experience.

A total of 51 Occidental students chose to engage in service-learning that semester, accounting for 50 percent participation from the eligible students in the intermediate and advanced classes. Four faculty members from Occidental and three bilingual teachers from Toland Way supervised their participation in the tutoring program. Participation was organized in three ways: Homework Club, which consisted of group work on each day’s assignment; Intervention Program, which focused on individual reading to improve comprehension; and teaching assistance in the kindergarten classes. Once again, the tutoring program was regarded as a positive experience. It was evident that the students had benefited tremendously from reversing the roles that they traditionally play in the classroom. By becoming tutors, they had to assume the responsibilities of the teacher and be proactive about communication

and learning. Since all the activities in the Tutoring Program were conducted entirely in Spanish, the Occidental students also needed to overcome the language barrier. Nevertheless, as the students felt more confident about their speaking abilities in Spanish, they found the interaction with children very rewarding and they enjoyed being productively involved with the local community.

The Spanish faculty also agreed on the pedagogical value of these activities, inasmuch as they foster the acquisition of expertise and skills complementary to the classroom experience. The only issue questioned was the relevance of this program for Occidental students who were already native-speakers of Spanish. After some research and discussions on effective service-learning programs for Latino students, we concluded that for native-speaking students, too, the advantages of service-learning in terms of student ownership of the experience surpassed possible shortcomings. However, we did agree to look for alternatives other than tutoring for the bilingual students.

The Second Year

After a very successful first year, the Spanish faculty decided to continue the incorporation of service-learning across the curriculum. Since we were aware of the need of learning more about this teaching model, we asked the director of the Center for Teaching and Learning to organize a workshop specifically for our department. Ethel Jorge from Pitzer College led the one-day meeting. Every faculty member in Spanish, including part-time instructors, attended the workshop, and all of us became energized by the ideas and enthusiasm of Professor Jorge. Most of the workshop consisted of brainstorming sessions to identify additional activities that would work with the different language and literature classes as well as with the interests of the faculty teaching those courses. Professor Jorge led those discussions and answered many questions regarding logistical and pedagogical issues. She was supportive of our efforts toward becoming an engaged department and encouraged us to reflect on the challenges. One of the main concerns that we had was the potential disorder that could result from expanding our service-learning involvement by adding new activities and reaching out to

other community partners. We decided that one person had to take the responsibility of becoming service-learning coordinator in the department to set up, supervise, and evaluate a variety of service-learning activities suitable for students in language and literature classes, as well as becoming sensitive to the needs of our community partners.

Since the coordination of all these activities entails a workload similar to teaching a regular class, we asked the administration for a course release for the coordinator. Institutional support was required to consolidate the role of coordinator and to fund some segments of the program. Therefore, we submitted a proposal for Community Service-Learning Initiatives to the dean of the college and to the Center for Community Based Learning. Our proposal to the Mellon Foundation was successful, and we received the approval of the college administration to implement the planned initiatives.

One of our goals for this second year was to help spread Spanish/Hispanic/Latino culture outside the classroom while allowing our students in advanced literature and culture classes to include the community in their learning process. In collaboration with Toland Way Elementary, we created two new activities: a series of cultural evenings intended for families and a performance of a play based on the windmills episode of *Don Quixote*. The cultural evenings involved group presentations on Latin American culture prepared by students in Spanish 303 (Contemporary Latin American Literature). The academic component of these presentations was directly tied to the content of the course. The Spanish 303 instructor helped the students with the conceptual organization of the material, but the PowerPoint presentation was entirely the students' own creation. The first cultural evening was entitled "Mexican Culture: Poetry and Art," and the students analyzed the works of famous writers and painters such as Diego Rivera in the context of the Mexican Revolution. The second one, entitled "Mexican and Peruvian Culture: Handicrafts and Music," explored the connections between artistic productions in Mexico and the Andean regions. In their presentation, students showed a variety of national handicraft traditions, played Andean music, and encouraged the audience to think

about the popularization of handicrafts in the age of tourism. Both cultural evenings were successful. The audience consisted of 45-50 people, including the Spanish-speaking students at Toland Way, their parents and other family members, and some teachers and administrators. The audience was particularly receptive to the effort made by the non-native students and very satisfied with the ability of the native-speakers to maintain their language and their culture. The students in turn were gratified by the sense that they were participating in the affirmation of a culture while sharing their experience with the community.

The second project that came out of our commitment to disseminate the Spanish/Hispanic/Latino cultures was the adaptation of the windmills episode of *Don Quixote* by the students in my class, Spanish 351 (Cervantes and the Renaissance), an upper division literature class that studies most of Cervantes' narrative works, including numerous chapters from *Don Quixote*. This class consisted of 19 students, most of them seniors, who had taken many literature and culture courses in Spanish both at Occidental and abroad and who had very good command of the language.

Under the leadership of two theater majors, everybody took responsibility for one or more tasks according to their interests and expertise. Given their motivation and resourcefulness, I chose to step back and play the role of facilitator. I provided them with funds, supplies, and information at their request, but did not interfere in their decisions. Along these lines, I only revised the final version of the script for linguistic and historical accuracy, but did not make any changes in the content.

While working on the adaptation of the windmills episode, the students showed a great awareness about the needs of an audience consisting of bilingual children in kindergarten through third grade. They realized that adapting a narrative text written in the 17th century into a brief play for elementary school children was a very challenging, but also creative, experience that required them to be faithful to the literary work. All involved were satisfied with the outcome of this activity. My students were particularly proud of the children's reaction to the play, because they seemed to have both comprehended and enjoyed it. This positive

reaction was confirmed by the feedback we received in the children's thank-you letters that included pictures and comments about their favorite part of the show. Similarly, the teachers in the bilingual program sent us a collective note expressing their gratitude and satisfaction about the performance. As a teacher, I was extremely happy and proud of my students for their dedication, hard work, and, above all, for the intellectual caliber of their reflections. Overall, it was a very rewarding experience. Everybody took away a great message about learning, friendship, and the value of a bilingual community.

Finally, during spring semester 2005, we expanded the possibilities of service-learning involvement by becoming partners with another school, Glendale High School, and by increasing the number of activities at Toland Way Elementary. We were especially satisfied with the computer lessons we provided to the Spanish-speaking parents of the elementary school children. Five Occidental students committed their time to teach a group of mothers how to use computers to help their children with their homework and to access valuable information and resources.

With Glendale High School, we developed a mentoring activity that had two main components: an intellectual collaboration between high school and college students, and a practical introduction to higher education and college life. For the first part, over 40 Latino students attending bilingual classes at Glendale High worked in groups with Occidental students to enhance their literary analysis techniques in Spanish. All our students in the intermediate and advanced classes were invited to participate, and among the 80 students who qualified to participate in this activity, 38 signed up for it. The partnership evolved during three weeks in which the students got to know one another via e-mail and worked together analyzing a short story by the Mexican author Juan Rulfo. Then both groups met at Occidental for a day. They toured the campus, visited professors from different departments, and discussed their academic interests and other aspects of college life. In the afternoon, they convened to give their oral presentations. Three Spanish faculty members, the director of the Center for Community Based Learning, and the Spanish

teacher from Glendale High attended the oral presentations, and all of them were positively impressed by the quality of the analysis and by the speaking and presentation skills of both groups.

After the meeting, all of the students had to answer questions reflecting on the value of this activity in the form of an essay in order to receive credit. In these essays, they had to cover three major areas: their personal involvement in the activity; the short-term and long-term impacts that such activity can have on the community; and the value of the activity as a learning tool (see Appendix 3). Many Occidental students commented about becoming more aware of the privileges they enjoyed, from computer access to financial stability, and expressed their happiness for being of some assistance to high school students. Glendale High students, on the other hand, mentioned that being able to do oral presentations side by side with college students boosted their self-esteem. Overall, considering the information in the students' essays along with our own observations, we concluded that the activity was meaningful because it served to encourage the younger people to continue their education and increased the civic contribution and responsiveness of the college students.

In sum, more than 200 Occidental students from more than 15 different Spanish classes had the opportunity to engage in service-learning. All faculty members in the Spanish department, full-time and part-time alike, were able to incorporate a service-learning component in their classes. Over 150 community members participated in our service-learning activities, and a strong partnership was developed with two educational institutions in our area. Above all, we worked hard to promote civic awareness through our curriculum, making the Spanish classes a valuable tool not only for linguistic improvement, but also for responsible service to the community. In return, the interaction with the surrounding Spanish-speaking population made possible an authentic and meaningful use of the language, facilitated multicultural appreciation, and instilled in the Occidental students and faculty a sense of belonging in the local community.

Program Evaluation

The Objectives

Many of the service-learning activities implemented by the Spanish faculty were intended to address some of the issues that were a matter of concern in the intermediate and advanced language classes at Occidental, such as the lack of time for student oral participation and the excess of teacher-centered exercises. A recurrent problem in second- and third-year language courses is that students and teachers struggle to cover all the material, usually combining a review of grammar with an introduction to literature and culture. Owing to the fast pace of such classes, student participation is limited to answering questions prompted by the teacher, monitored group activities, and a few oral presentations. These presentations are the only opportunities students have to express themselves in a more independent and personal way, but most of the time they choose a rather impersonal topic and their delivery tends to sound rehearsed, not spontaneous. Another alternative for students who wish to improve their oral skills is to enroll in conversation classes that match their language proficiency. Although somewhat more informal than the regular course, the conversation courses still take place in a structured academic environment where students continue to play a passive role. To overcome those restrictions, interactive and context-based service-learning activities that enable communication without the teacher's presence are recommended (Hale, Mullaney, Boyle, & Overfield, 1999). Interactions with native speakers such as those promoted by tutoring programs are an ideal vehicle to facilitate a more spontaneous and authentic communication that empowers college undergraduates as well as school children, and helps both to develop new skills. Research shows that by negotiating meaning on their own, each group of students becomes more resourceful and less inhibited (Mullaney, 1999).

In that regard, Occidental students' journals contained numerous reflections on the newly acquired communicative and learning strategies. One of the students remarked: "With the children, I don't feel disoriented or embarrassed when I don't know the exact word in Spanish. I just explain to them what I am trying to say

and they help me find the right word." The students' journals also underline the additional benefits of this kind of interaction over the more traditional practices such as the language laboratory. For example, one student wrote: "I like participating in the Homework Club better than sitting in front of a computer in the language lab because I really get to talk and not just listen." By being removed from the teacher-centered setting of the class or the technology-oriented surroundings of the lab, students took ownership of the communicative process and engaged in a true collaboration with their community counterparts.

The other pressing issue our service-learning activities aimed to tackle was the impossibility for many students of Spanish to completely immerse themselves in the Hispanic/Latino/Spanish cultures. Since the option of studying abroad in a Spanish-speaking country is not available to everyone for academic or financial reasons, service-learning involvement works as an alternative to off-campus study, as well as an incentive to appreciate the richness and diversity of the local community. Research demonstrates that community-based learning opportunities also increase and diversify student exposure to cultural and linguistic material (Feal, 2002). A service-learning component may not have the intensity of a whole semester overseas, but it has the potential of promoting long-lasting interactions that are more difficult to attain in a few months of studying abroad. As a student commented in her journal: "I would like to continue to work with the same kids next semester, for I want to get to know them well. I want to forge relationships with them based on trust and respect." Of the total number of Occidental participants, at least 30 percent extended their service-learning engagement a second year, becoming a valuable resource for the children, the faculty, and the parents of the neighboring elementary school. Significantly, each of those students has also applied and been accepted to study abroad in Spanish-speaking countries, which demonstrates how service-learning constitutes a valuable preparation as well as an important stimulus for transition from local to global communities.

As mentioned before, there doubts remain among the faculty about the value of these activities for native-speakers of Spanish. The

main criticism was that the service-learning experience emphasized the improvement of oral skills, which is an aspect of the language in which the native-speakers already excel. Moreover, it was argued, talking in Spanish to younger students is not an unusual practice for many of the Latino students. However, their experience does not merely duplicate a practice that they have in their homes and communities; instead, it offers the Latino students the academic framework to re-evaluate the significance of their cognitive and linguistic skills and to reflect about the importance of their civic involvement.

For a variety of reasons, the participation of bilingual college students in projects such as the tutoring program can be extremely productive. First, given their language sensitivity and their parallel learning experience, Latino students can easily identify the more problematic areas of study for the children and help them to effectively overcome those difficulties. Second, the educational achievements of the bilingual undergraduates can be perceived by the children as a strong motivation to succeed in school and in life. Third, college-age bilingual students' retention of their language and culture proves to the elementary school students and their families the value of their heritage. At the same time, the reflections made by the Latino students' in their journals throughout the semester showed considerable increase in their self-esteem because of the positive impact that they were able to make in the children's bilingual instruction. One said: "It's really amazing how the children trust me and follow my advice. They seem to be very comfortable with my presence." Another student commented: "I usually work with the kids who have been absent during the week and help them to complete the work that they haven't done. The teacher says that without my assistance they would keep on falling behind."

According to their own words, the insecurities many bilingual speakers feel regarding their linguistic competence seemed to be neutralized by the pride, empathy, and responsibility resulting from their civic engagement. Therefore, service-learning activities give Latino students a sense of purpose and motivate them to continue their education in Spanish and their involvement with the local community.

The Challenges

Many unforeseen challenges had to be faced throughout these two years, and many valuable lessons were learned in this process. First of all, the whole Spanish curriculum had to be gradually revised in order to re-evaluate the objectives and structure of most of the classes to allow the incorporation of a service-learning component. Making service-learning an integral part of the program and not just an add-on required finding the best approach to implement this teaching model to achieve the specific goals of each class. Given the diverse content and expectations of the many classes that integrate the Spanish curriculum, it was impossible to come up with a unique solution. The main problem was to identify what segment of each course could be considered equivalent to the service-learning experience and therefore interchangeable with it. In the intermediate Spanish classes it was easy to establish a parallel between the students' participation in the tutoring program and their Language Lab attendance. Both activities consisted of weekly sessions and included a written summary. However, in the advanced language courses and in the literature and culture classes, it was more difficult to single out a class component that had a close equivalence to the service-learning activities available through the tutoring program. A connection had to be established in a somewhat arbitrary way or by creating ad-hoc activities tied to the content of the courses, such as the cultural evenings or the theatrical performance, that was relevant both for the class and for the community partner.

From a practical point of view, having interchangeable course requirements makes things more complicated for the instructor, for he/she has to collect and evaluate different assignments with various due dates. The professor must develop diverse assignment routines and acquire a new expertise in order to help the students in the reflection process. For instance, it became clear that the students' diaries should not be graded just in terms of the grammar and that the teacher had to provide meaningful feed-back in relation to the content. Therefore, the instructor ought to assist the students to transcend their particular experience and consider issues of social justice and civic responsibility by guiding their reflections and

expanding their learning. At the same time, the teacher also needs to release some control on the transmission of knowledge and trust the pedagogical value of the off-campus segment of the class. While all the instructors agreed on increasing the community outreach, not every teacher was ready to create specific activities for his/her classes. In those cases, the professors encouraged their students to participate in the ongoing service-learning departmental activities under the supervision of the program coordinator, whose role is to inform the students of the different possibilities of service-learning engagement and to work out the logistics of their participation (schedule, training, transportation, etc), in conjunction with the community partner and any other agencies involved. The coordinator also generates the reflection questions in consultation with the faculty, although determining the format in which the students' reflections should be presented—journal, essay or oral presentation—remains the responsibility of the class instructor as does the collection and grading of those assignments. Frequent conversations need to take place between the service-learning coordinator and the faculty to address any questions or concerns that may arise as the service-learning activity evolves and to assess its worth or appropriateness once it has been completed. Service-learning coordinators should be leaders and facilitators and should view the expertise in this pedagogy as an important aspect of their professional development. Participation in conferences and workshops is highly desirable, increasing familiarity with the new developments in this pedagogy. With the appropriate institutional support the position of service-learning coordinator should be consolidated with the due compensation and recognition. All full-time instructors should be granted the opportunity to become coordinators throughout the years to promote a greater participation from the faculty and to guarantee the continuity of the program. Consequently, teamwork and faculty cooperation are key elements in any attempt of incorporating service-learning across the curriculum for they prevent individual instructors from feeling overwhelmed with the methodological and practical innovations that are inherent in this teaching model.

A more active communication between

faculty and students is also necessary to ensure that the service-learning experience is truly productive and not just another course requirement to be fulfilled in a mechanical way (Varas, 1999). Moving back and forth from the classroom to the community requires that the students switch gears regarding their own position in the teaching and learning process. In class they may continue to have a somewhat passive position, but in the community they need to become agents in the transmission of knowledge. It is the responsibility of the faculty to help the students negotiate the difficulties they may face in this transition. The reflections contained in the students' journals served as a point of departure for an on-going dialog that brings the community into the classroom. In this course of action, students and faculty learn to work in close collaboration toward the betterment of the community.

All over the country, but especially in areas with growing Latino population, Spanish departments ought to become vigorous partners and embrace the main goals of the "scholarship of engagement" (Boyer, 1994). Spanish departments are potentially very valuable resources for the Latino community and ought to be open to working with the community instead of functioning as independent satellites. Organizations such as immigration and civil rights groups, health-care providers, schools, and youth groups need the involvement of Spanish-speaking people and offer innumerable opportunities for the students of Spanish to enhance their communication skills. Nevertheless a responsible interaction with the community not only requires the punctual assistance in the solution of a specific problem or concern, but also to concentrate in building relationships beneficial to all (Jorge, 2003). The association that the College Spanish department has constructed with Toland Way Elementary responds to this aspiration. For the last two years the close collaboration between both institutions has yielded very significant and constructive results. The homework club, the intervention program, the series of cultural evenings, the theatrical performance and the computer skills classes for parents are meaningful examples of the kind of projects that an ongoing partnership can produce. Thanks to all these activities, the faculty and students from College

became knowledgeable about the complexities of bilingual education and took an active role in building support for the school, the students and their parents.

While working primarily with one partner simplifies many logistical aspects of the service-learning experience—transportation, schedule, training, for example—an effort should be made to achieve a far-reaching rapport with various community groups. This is not an easy task and requires that the different partners show a similar commitment and an equivalent degree of responsibility. Not every partnership will work, some will never get started and others will have to be stop in the middle of the process for lack of accountability or miscommunication between the different groups. For those reasons, it is very important to be able to count on the assistance of an intermediary, such as the personnel of the service-learning center, in order to find the right partner for each project. Another way to build solid partnerships is to work in association with a community group that already has a relationship with another department on campus. Through this venue, most of the initial uncertainties about the viability of the partnership can be avoided and a more extensive institutional cooperation with the community counterpart can be established.

Conclusions

The need to understand other languages and cultures is one of the challenges that our society and higher education, in particular, face in the present and will continue to confront in the future. In this context, foreign language courses should be re-examined for their practicality in communicating colloquial spoken languages (Yankelovich, 2006) and colleges and universities should look at the often multilingual surrounding communities both as providers and recipients of valuable services. Spanish departments should be especially receptive to the rising number of Latinos in the nation, as well as the large enrollments in language, literature, and culture classes. Opportunities for meaningful interactions between faculty and students and the neighboring Spanish-speaking communities can be established easily with the appropriate collaboration. Though it initially may appear to be an overwhelming task, a gradual implementation of a service-learning

component across the curriculum is a feasible endeavor as long as the different participants work as a cohesive group. Faculty members must be willing to revise their course objectives and learn to evaluate the community-based activities, with consideration to their pedagogical and civic value. Institutions must recognize the academic merit that the incorporation of this teaching model entails and provide the necessary support to the departments. Students need to become more proactive about the language acquisition process, both to enhance their communication skills and to be able to render a positive service to the community. Finally, the community members should work together with their academic partners to set up relevant and long-lasting off-campus programs. Reaching out to the community is the logical path to follow in the pursuit of a culture-sensitive language instruction, for there is no language without the existence of a language community.

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About the Author

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Appendix 1. Initial Set of Goals

Tutoring program for _____ (Student's name)

School year: _____ Semester: _____

Teacher: _____ Grade: _____

Student's strengths: _____

Areas of improvement: _____

Goals for the tutoring program: _____

Action plan to help the student succeed: _____

Teaching materials and techniques to be implemented: _____

Appendix 2. Weekly Progress Report

Date: _____

Goal for the tutorial session: _____

Completed tasks _____

Additional work done _____

What the student did well: _____

Areas of improvement for the student _____

The goal for the next session is _____

While working as a tutor, what was your biggest accomplishment? _____

How has your Spanish improved during tutoring? _____

What have you learned about our surrounding community? _____

What goals do you want to set for yourself for the future? _____

Appendix 3

1. Describe your participation in the mentoring activity.
2. How active were you through the various steps of this activity?
3. What immediate effects has this activity had on you and the community?
4. In your opinion, what are the long-term effects of this activity?
5. What is the most important thing you have learned from this activity and why?
6. Has there been a positive outcome of which you did not expect?
7. In your opinion, what aspects of this activity need improvement?
8. How has this activity changed the way you view your community?
9. How has this activity influenced you to become a more active member of this community?
10. What have you learned through this experience that could not have learned in class?

Use these questions as guidelines for your reflection. You can list the answers or write them in essay form, depending on your teacher's requests. You may also include observations on other aspects of your experience in the reflection. Thank you so much for your participation in this activity!