Service-Learning for Students of Intermediate Spanish: Examining Multiple Roles of Foreign Language Study

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Abstract

Service-learning, as a form of experiential education, places students in real-life contexts not only for enhancing language skills and cultural understanding but also for performing multiple tasks that provide avenues for developing numerous academic and civic skills. It creates connections across disciplines and brings together people of diverse backgrounds. In this respect, service-learning projects can be particularly beneficial for students in intermediate language courses, many of whom do not continue on to advanced language programs. Focusing on the goals of foreign language study for general education, this paper examines the rationale for and practical issues related to designing and implementing service-learning projects for students of intermediate Spanish. Based on data collected from reflection writings and interviews from students in a third-semester Spanish language course, the paper also highlights student-learning outcomes as they relate to language, culture, personal and interpersonal development, and diversity learning desired for an increasingly multicultural and pluralistic world. Finally, the paper provides practical handouts that can be used to facilitate the coordination of community partnership, service tasks, and reflection appropriate for students at the intermediate level.

Introduction

With a growing interest in the civic purposes of higher education, there has been a surge of academic service-learning across disciplines throughout the nation since the mid-1990s (Saltmarsh & Zlotkowski, 2011). According to Campus
Compact (2012), which is the national higher education association committed to promoting public and community service by integrating civic and community-based learning into the curriculum, the 2011 survey results of its 1,200 member colleges and universities indicate that 94% of the respondents offered service-learning (SL) courses. The survey outcomes note that on average, in 2011, 69 SL courses were offered per campus with six to seven percent of its faculty teaching them, which is much more than in previous years. The continual upward trend of incorporating SL pedagogy into academic courses reflects recognition of valuable student learning outcomes for college education. These outcomes, however, do not arise simply by putting students in community contexts. Successful SL experience requires quality engagement, reflection, and reciprocity among all parties. A frequently cited definition of SL in higher education has been offered by Bringle and Hatcher (1996): “We view service learning as a credit-bearing educational experience in which students participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility” (p. 222).

In their influential book, *Where's the Learning in Service-Learning?*, Eyler and Giles (1999) shared the results of national research projects that delineate areas of student learning gains. These include: 1) personal and interpersonal development (e.g., diversity learning, working with others, leadership, and connection to the community); 2) understanding and applying knowledge (e.g., motivation to work harder, understanding complex social issues, and application of subject matter and experience); 3) engagement, curiosity, and reflective practice (e.g., becoming more curious about issues encountered in the community and connecting learning to personal experience); 4) critical thinking and problem solving; 5) perspective transformation (e.g., new perspectives on social issues and belief in social justice); and 6) citizenship (e.g., participation in community by developing values, knowledge, skills, efficacy, and commitment). Subsets of these learning outcomes continue to be affirmed in SL courses across disciplines. Indeed, in a recent publication of the Association of American Colleges and Universities, Kuh (2008) reviewed data from the National Survey of Student Engagement and identified SL or community-based learning (CBL) as one of the “high impact educational experiences” for student success.

Interest in SL for those who teach and study foreign languages has also witnessed growth. A steady number of presentations at national and regional conferences dedicated to teaching of foreign languages (e.g., AATSP and ACTFL) and publications in academic journals (e.g., *Foreign Language Annals*, *Hispania*, etc.) reveals relevance of SL pedagogy for second language learners. Indeed, practitioners of SL view the pedagogy as an effective tool for meeting the National Standards of Foreign Language Education as stipulated by ACTFL (Grim, 2010; Hale, 1999; Hertzler, 2012; Lear & Abbott, 2008; Weldon & Trautman, 2003). In particular, among the Five Cs of the Standards (i.e., Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities), SL has been identified as particularly valuable for meeting the Communities standard: helping students to participate in multilingual communities at home and abroad (Hellebrandt et al.,
Furthermore, some have offered SL or CBL as a useful pedagogy for addressing some of the concerns raised in the Modern Language Association (MLA) report (2007), “Foreign Language and Higher Education: New Structures for a Changed World” (Jorge, 2010; Pellettieri & Varona, 2008). The MLA report, for example, calls for a refiguring of foreign language departments to make translingual and transcultural competence a major learning goal, in which students deepen their understanding of others’ perspectives in order to communicate in and contribute to a pluralistic democracy.

In the case of Spanish, the growing Hispanic presence in the United States has provided language teachers and students with more community engagement opportunities than other languages. 2010 Census figures indicate that over fifty million people (i.e., 16% of the population) living in the country are Hispanic. Although high concentrations of Spanish-speaking communities are still most common in coastal states, the Southwest, and large cities, visible Hispanic presence can also be seen in many small cities in Central States. In higher education, figures from 2009 reveal that 852,781 out of a total of 1,682,627 students taking non-English language courses were enrolled in Spanish (Furman et al., 2010). This means that Spanish has come to represent over fifty percent of the total student population enrolled in foreign language courses in the nation. As a result, a significant portion of literature available on SL for foreign languages has been from Spanish.

A successful SL experience can generate numerous positive learning outcomes for students in Spanish. Among the learning gains observed in the literature are: stronger motivation to use Spanish and self-confidence in doing so; sense of fulfillment; development of empathy and intercultural sensitivity; reduction of stereotypes; connection with the Other; positive attitudes toward the language and culture; increased sense of solidarity and closeness with classmates, instructor, and community; greater awareness of social and political issues; and greater willingness to communicate in Spanish outside of the classroom (Abbot & Lear, 2010; Bloom, 2008; Caldwell, 2007; Hellebrandt et al., 2004; Jorge et al., 2008; Long, 2003; Morris, 2001; Nelson & Scott, 2008; Pak, 2007; Pellettieri, 2011; Zapata, 2011). Although these studies demonstrate that benefits of SL can be observed at all levels of Spanish, the majority of the literature deals with advanced learners of Spanish. There is a relatively small number of studies that have investigated the impact of SL for students in lower division language programs. This calls for more research into the design and the effectiveness of SL with intermediate learners.

The aim of this paper is to examine SL in the context of the intermediate Spanish classroom as it relates to the study of foreign language for general education purposes. As a form of experiential education, SL extends learning beyond the confines of the traditional classroom and can create powerful connections across disciplines, bringing together people of diverse backgrounds. In this respect, SL projects can be particularly beneficial for students in intermediate language courses, many of whom enroll to fulfill a general education requirement and do not continue on to advanced language programs. This calls for more research into the design and the effectiveness of SL with intermediate learners.

The paper describes the rationale for and the design, delivery, student learning gains and limitations of a SL component in a third-semester Spanish language course. The course was offered during Spring 2012 at a public university, located in a small city in the Midwest with a relatively small Hispanic population.
The Role of Intermediate Language Classroom and Service-Learning

The intermediate-level language classroom presents unique challenges for foreign language teachers in higher education. Unlike the first-year language courses, students who enroll in the intermediate courses come with varying degrees of language proficiency and prior language learning experience. Unlike the advanced level language and content courses, students in the second-year language classroom may not demonstrate as strong an interest in or effort for acquiring language and cultural skills as those who are pursuing a minor or major in the foreign language. They come to the language classroom with divergent educational goals, needs, and motivation levels. Classroom activities geared to prepare students to handle the language skills needed for upper-level courses may not adequately address the needs and interests of those students who enroll primarily to fulfill a language requirement for another major or as a part of the general education curriculum. Indeed, this conflicting agenda has led faculty and students to view the intermediate language curriculum as “the ugly stepsister” (Rivas, 2000, p. 342), and “tangle of divergences,” that lack satisfaction and reward (Jurasek, 1996, p. 22). Such a concern is understandable, as many intermediate language students do not go on to upper-level language study.

According to figures from 2009 for enrollment in languages other than English in the United States, the majority of language students are found in lower division language programs; in the case of Spanish enrollment, less than one quarter of students take advanced classes (Furman et al., 2010). Given the enrollment reality, a number of studies have examined the role of lower division language programs in light of goals for general education: preparing students for participation in a multicultural, pluralistic, and interdependent world. Jurasek (1996) calls for “a different kind of content rigor, one in the spirit of general education and not just foreign language learning” (p. 23). In particular, he suggests giving more instructional time to inquiry education in addition to linguistic development. Mecartty (2006) also acknowledges that the intermediate language curriculum faces “a great deal of confusion” as to the goals for instruction and stresses the need to incorporate culturally relevant course content that connects with students (p. 54). The author recommends a better utilization of the guidelines offered by the National Standards of Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century to improve the curriculum. Pellettieri and Varona (2008) argue that “[d]eveloping language proficiency can no longer be our only, or even our primary goal; teaching language as a means to personal transformation must be equally as prominent in our mission” (p. 16). They offer community-based learning (CBL) as a way to engage students affectively and cognitively in real-life contexts with off-campus community members. Through such experiential-learning, students gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the target language and the lives of the speakers of the language within their community and beyond. In places that offer limited exposure to racial or ethnic diversity, Calvin and Rider (2004) provide an example of a language requirement revision that has integrated common goals of general education and multicultural studies at Indiana State University. Emphasis is
placed on cultural critical thinking and metacognitive reflection (e.g., the use of student learning journals) for developing “communicative competency, cultural awareness, sensitivity to diversity, and a holistic application of strategies and skills for lifelong learning” (p. 11). In sum, these studies highlight the need to revisit the goals of the intermediate language classroom in order to make them more relevant to general education goals.

Faculty and student perceptions about foreign language requirements can further provide insight for better meeting the needs of lower division students. In a survey of liberal arts faculty and administrators, Wilkerson (2006) noted that faculty members in other disciplines, who play a vital role in advising students, recognized benefits of studying foreign languages. However, many of these faculty members believed that language study is limited to grammar and vocabulary instruction. Their omission of reference to cultural learning led the author to suggest more inclusion of out-of-class work, such as service-learning, which can expose students to elements of culture in the language courses that are part of the core curriculum. In a study that examined perceptions and attitudes of incoming college students toward foreign language study and language requirements, Price and Gascoigne (2006) noticed that more than half of the 155 students in the sample supported language study for reasons such as “gaining cultural understanding, broadening their personal horizons, and improving communication skills” (p. 391). In this respect, the authors highlight the importance of promoting cultural competence and understanding. Similarly, a systematic evaluation of the foreign language requirement at Duke University has revealed the need for greater attention to developing cultural knowledge and understanding and better communicating to the students that “we are teaching them much more than language skills” (Walther, 2009, p. 132).

In sum, the intermediate language curriculum has faced a conflict of agendas. While some have viewed it as a bridge course to the upper-level program, the majority of students in the intermediate program do not continue on to minor or major in the foreign language. If the intermediate course is the last foreign language course students may take in their lifetime, what do language teachers hope that students retain from their classroom experience? While developing language proficiency is important, there is a clear call for delivering course content in ways that promote the goals of general education. The literature discussed here encourages teaching practices that help students foster an understanding of their place in a multicultural and pluralistic world. Language students “must be equipped to deal with real-world opportunities for interaction and intercultural communication” (Mecartty, 2006, p. 58). SL, then, has a place in the intermediate language classroom. Indeed, a valued outcome of SL pedagogy has been students’ personal and interpersonal development, especially as it relates to learning about diversity and working with others.

Yoon, Martin, and Murphy (2012) conducted a study on the impact of service-based pedagogy on students’ learning about diversity. Their pre- and post-community service surveys (involving 106 students in one type of communication course with an SL component) indicate that service experiences not only improved
students’ perceived knowledge about diversity but also significantly increased their level of comfort in interacting with populations different from their own. Dunlap, Scoggin, Green, and Davi (2007) studied the effects of SL experience on students’ understanding of privilege, especially by white students. Given that SL tends to place students in situations where they interact with parts of society that may contrast drastically with their own life circumstances, they can learn about racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic privileges when supported by a critical reflection process. The authors further stress that “[u]nderstanding one’s own identity, including dimensions such as privilege and lack thereof, race, culture, etc., can be important to an accurate conception of oneself and crucial to functioning in a diverse and ever-changing world” (p. 19).

Additionally, in a study that evaluated students’ reflective writing, Wilson (2011) contends that SL promotes a development of students’ empathy with others, which she considers to be as a critical part of personal development and “a component of the general education goals for undergraduates in the USA” (p. 208). SL can especially be useful for teaching about multicultural perspectives in places that lack racial or ethnic diversity. For example, by having students work as tutors with second language learners of English, Fitzgerald (2009) asserts that those from homogeneous ethnic and racial backgrounds can learn about diversity through community-based partnerships, which offer “a perfect real world context for putting into practice lessons about language, race, immigrants, and ideology” (p. 218).

Finally, in the case of Spanish, effective SL programs have had an impact on developing positive attitudes toward the target language and culture. Among many studies that have investigated the effects of SL on students’ cultural understanding, Zapata (2011) examined students enrolled in intermediate Spanish courses at the University of Alberta, Canada. Students were enrolled in two different sets of courses: a regular fourth-semester course for low-intermediate students and a course for high-intermediate students who planned to minor or major in Spanish. The SL component of both sets of classes was voluntary, and students either completed SL projects or cultural presentation projects (e.g., Spanish American/Spanish music, politics, history, food, etc.). The results of the study demonstrated that students in the high-intermediate group developed more positive attitudes toward the language and culture than those in the low-intermediate group. However, students who worked on SL projects at both levels showed superior gains to those who worked on cultural presentation projects. Zapata posits that the lower outcomes for cultural presentation projects may be due to their factual approach to culture. The author observes that “this kind of presentation, though created to introduce learners to authentic material through the critical analysis of cultural values and artifacts” may provide students with “facts about the target culture, but not with opportunities to achieve a deeper cultural understanding” (Zapata, p. 940). Thus, SL can offer powerful learning opportunities for personal and interpersonal development. By developing relationships with community partners from diverse backgrounds, students can learn empathy with others, increase their understanding of diversity and privilege, and develop positive attitudes toward the target language and culture.
A Service-Learning Project in Spanish 201 at Ball State University

In her survey of K-16 language teachers in Ohio, Hertzler (2012) noted that major hurdles to SL were not lack of interest or belief in the potential value of SL but rather “not knowing where to begin and how to create meaningful and doable projects” (p. 26). Indeed, with a growing interest and support for SL pedagogy at conferences, many questions are directed toward implementation issues and how to receive support from the administration. Thus, this paper offers the details of the journey of a teacher planning and incorporating SL into an intermediate Spanish course for the first time.

*Initial Hesitations and the Plunge*

Although I had witnessed transformative student learning outcomes through SL projects in numerous upper-level courses, I had been hesitant to try it in an intermediate-level course. All of my previous ventures in SL work were with advanced-level students who were either minoring or majoring in Spanish and who welcomed a hands-on experience to connect with native speakers in the community. I wasn’t sure if students who were taking a class primarily to complete a language requirement would be as accountable for delivering quality service to community members. Developing a meaningful relationship with the community is a necessary component for a successful SL experience, and building relationships takes time. I questioned whether this group of students would make the kind of time commitment that I had grown accustomed to with upper-level students. Furthermore, an important part of SL is critical reflection that connects students’ experience in the community to learning objectives of the course. In my previous SL seminars, students submitted 10-11 weekly reflection journal entries, each 400-600 words in Spanish. Reflecting on the events that take place in the community naturally requires students to make ample use of the past tense, the subjunctive mood, and some indirect discourse, which more advanced language learners tend to manage better. Intermediate students, in contrast, come with limited writing and speaking practice in the target language. I was concerned with quality of the reflection component. Nevertheless, three events catapulted me into the experiment.

First, I became a participant in the Diversity Associates Program at my university, which brings together faculty members from diverse disciplines to incorporate more inclusive teaching practices into our own courses and disciplines. I had the privilege of working with those who were willing to risk implementing new ideas to enhance diversity learning in the classroom. But more importantly, the participation in the program for the particular year meant that I would produce a video of my own teaching practice in one course.

Second, a waiter working at a local Mexican restaurant contacted me. He had recently gotten married to a student who knew about my SL involvement with the local Hispanic community. One of the pleasures of doing community service projects is the formation of lasting relationships with students and individual community members. This Latino was a recently arrived immigrant seeking opportunities for *intercambio* [exchange] with students (e.g., students offering
English/computer tutoring to meet specific needs of the community members, who in return would provide students with Spanish language practice and cultural exchange. The word got out, and several of his coworkers at the restaurant and other Spanish-speaking community members (both new and old to this collaboration) also wanted to sign up. I had to find students to work with them.

Third, I was scheduled to teach Spanish 201 the following semester, and I thought seriously about what I could do differently to make the class more relevant for the majority of students in the class who would not continue on to upper-level Spanish courses. If the course were the last Spanish class they took in their lifetime, what would I want my students to remember? What would encourage them to engage with native speakers? If I desire my students to become more effective participants in our increasingly diverse and interdependent world, what kind of “high impact educational experiences” (Kuh, 2008) could I provide? It made sense to experiment with SL.

The University and Students in the Course

During the spring semester of 2012, a “community-centered experiential learning component” was incorporated into one section of Spanish 201 at Ball State University. The university is located in a place with limited racial and ethnic diversity. According to the 2010 U.S. Census figures, Delaware County in the state of Indiana has a population of 117,671, with 90% of the county population being white, and those of Hispanic or Latino origin constituting only 1.9% (6.2% for the state). The overall minority population of the university also remains small at 10.9% (and 2.5% for Latino students) of the total undergraduate enrollment (around 16,000 students total for the academic year 2010-2011).

Spanish 201 is a typical three-credit-hour, third-semester college Spanish language course. For a textbook, the instructors of SP201 currently use the last third (Chapters 11-15) of Dos Mundos (Terrell et al., 2010), which offers thematic units on travel, health, shopping, family and the future. Major grammatical concepts introduced include the formal and informal commands, the subjunctive mood, and the perfect tenses. For teaching of culture, beyond the cultural content offered in the textbook, instructors may show movies and/or require cultural presentations.

The 23 students who completed the course were majors from diverse disciplines such as telecommunications, journalism, nursing, architecture, political science, education, speech pathology, geology, and so forth. Only one student indicated her desire to double major in Spanish. Many of the students took the class to complete the language requirement for their majors or were interested in receiving credits for the first-year Spanish courses (those whose placement test scores allowed them to enroll in SP201 and, upon receiving a passing grade in the course, earn credit for the prior courses). Students who signed up for the course did not know beforehand that they would be required to complete a SL component. In case some students might not be able to fulfill community service work outside the campus, they were given other options that would allow contact with Latino students on campus (e.g., attending weekly Latino student organization meetings/activities).
Service-Learning for Students of Intermediate Spanish 111

Preparations for Service Placement

In his *Service-Learning Course Design Handbook*, Howard (2001) delineates three necessary criteria for academic SL: 1) enhanced academic learning; 2) relevant and meaningful service with the community; and 3) purposeful civic learning. A successful SL experience depends on factors such as quality of service placement, reciprocity, quality of reflection activities, quality feedback from professor and community partners, commitment to service, accountability, among others.

Prior to the beginning of the semester, the instructor met with two community partners who were willing to help with the coordination needs for the SL project. Unlike colleges and universities with a community service office that handles the placement and scheduling needs for community SL projects (e.g., Santa Clara University), some language instructors may not able to receive a systematic institutional support for finding service placements that guarantee opportunities to work with Spanish-speaking community members. Given the small Hispanic population in Muncie, Indiana, in past years the author had to be creative and determined to find Hispanic community partners: she consulted with Hispanic colleagues, contacted several non-profit institutions (e.g., churches, social service agencies, public schools, etc.), attended community events (e.g., a community English class for immigrants and a monthly Spanish Mass offered by a local church), and talked to waiters at a local Mexican restaurant. Eventually the author befriended a few señoritas who in turn led her to other potential community partners. These prior contacts set the groundwork for the community partnerships for this particular class.

At the preparation meeting, the community partners and the instructor discussed interests, needs, accountability, and logistic issues. These community partners in turn provided pertinent information about other community members who wanted to participate. The instructor then prepared a table for community partners that listed: 1) area of interest in working with students (e.g., studying for GED and getting citizenship, school-related help for the children, opening e-mail accounts, learning to surf the internet, English conversation skills for specific purposes such as making an appointment at a clinic, communicating with teachers of their children, etc.); 2) best meeting times and days; 3) possible public meeting places, given the location and transportation options; 4) contact information and best time and method to communicate (e.g., one employee at the local restaurant did not have a phone and thus asked to have his friend contacted). The instructor also informed the community partners about the possibility of not being able to honor their participation if their available meeting times could not be matched with students’ schedules. One week before students were matched with community partners, the instructor gave each interested community member a phone call to verify and confirm their interest, commitment, expected start and end dates, meeting place and time/date, what to do if they could not meet with the students, and so forth. In particular, the instructor stressed their role as ambassadors to the students who may not have had any meaningful contact with native speakers of Spanish in the community.

At the end of the first week of classes, students received information on community partners and possible service tasks. Then, students provided their part
of the information: (1) transportation situation (e.g., if they felt comfortable using their own vehicle to get to the service site); (2) possible meeting times and days; (3) preference for working with a classmate or alone; (4) preferences for which specific community member they would like to work with; (5) any concerns they may have regarding the assignment; and (6) confidentiality agreement to protect the identity and any information obtained in the course of service that might cause harm to the person (e.g., immigration status). The instructor also stressed their role as ambassadors to the community members who may not have had any meaningful contact with non-Latinos outside their work.

The meetings always took place at public places to ensure security for all parties. Most of the community partners working at the Mexican restaurant did not own a vehicle; students met with them at a coffee shop located across from the restaurant. Another place was a public library nearby the homes of two families serving as community partners. A local Head Start, a non-profit organization committed to providing quality school readiness support for young children from families of low-income status, also provided a classroom in their building. Finally, one community partner, who had visited the campus before, volunteered to meet at the university’s main library.

The Assignment

The goal of the assignment was to provide students with opportunities for face-to-face encounters with Latino community members on and off campus. Students would perform service tasks, through which they could document personal stories and reflect on the experiences of minority members of the community (see Appendix A for detailed instructions handout). The assignment constituted 15% of the course grade and was evaluated based on quality of service (number of hours, preparedness, community partner response, individual contribution to teamwork), quality of reflection journals written after each meeting, and a final reflection essay. Appendix B provides the Spanish language handout of evaluation criteria distributed to the students.

Most students chose to work with a classmate, which facilitated transportation needs and lessened their initial fear of having to meet with a Spanish speaker for the first time. It also made it easier to share ideas and seek resources as most students had no experience working with a Hispanic community member. Furthermore, it reduced the number of community partners needed for the class (i.e., less coordination time). Students were required to spend a minimum of eight to ten contact hours. Although this is substantially less service time than many of the successful SL courses mentioned in the literature, the instructor felt this was adequate given the coordination demands and the percentage of course grade assigned to the SL project.

By the second week of the semester, service assignments were confirmed, and students had to make the first phone call to set up their initial meeting with the community partner. In preparation, the class practiced potential Spanish conversation scenarios (See Appendix A, “First phone call” and “First meeting” sections). Due to schedule conflicts (e.g., some students worked 20-30 hours per
week in addition to taking a full load of classes), four students chose to remain on campus and attend weekly meetings organized by the Latino student group. Another four students worked with several mothers whose children attended Head Start; eight students worked with waiters at a local Mexican restaurant; and five students tutored elementary and high school children of two families as well as one of the mothers. Due to inevitable communication delays and two community partners dropping their commitment for various personal reasons, two students were left unable to complete the assignment. After discussing their interests and potential relevance to their majors (journalism and telecommunications), these students decided to interview several Latino students on campus on issues related to diversity and create a short video to share in the class.

The Reflection Component

The reflection component is central to SL pedagogy. It guides students to connect their service experience with the learning objectives of the course. Reflection fosters growth and learning in a multitude of ways: it serves as a platform for exchanging relevant information among students, faculty, and the community; leads students to develop critical thinking skills by identifying, examining, and responding to major issues related to the SL experience; provides a safe space for dealing with emotions that arise from the experience; and serves as an assessment tool to document the student learning process and outcomes (Ash et al., 2005; Correia & Blesicher, 2008; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hatcher et al., 2004; Molee et al., 2010).

Types of reflection activities may include discussions with peers, faculty, and community partners, journals, logs, papers, interviews, presentations, portfolios, and so forth. Hatcher, Bringle, and Muthiah (2004) stress that “good reflection is regular, structured, and clarifies students’ values” (p. 44). Thus, the instructor needs to structure the reflection component appropriately to meet the needs of the course, class size, nature of service and students’ backgrounds. Good reflection requires not only accountability (e.g., discussing the relevance of reflective activities, course grade, and evaluation criteria) but also some training. Correia and Bleicher (2008) view reflection as a teachable skill set that requires nurturing “students’ ability to make reflections that are meaningful and educative” (p. 41). In this respect, providing ongoing reflection opportunities and receiving instructor feedback in a timely manner are critical to student learning. Furthermore, in the context of foreign language study, reflection activities generate opportunities for meaningful language use in addition to their direct contact with off-campus community members.

For SP201, 15-20 minutes (i.e., 10-15%) of class time were set aside each week to share student experiences (e.g., ¿Qué hicieron y qué pasó durante la reunión? ¿Cómo se sintieron y por qué? ¿Qué van a hacer la próxima semana? [What did you do and what happened during the meeting? How did you feel and why? What do you plan to do next week?]). The class also solved problems together (e.g., changing meeting places and partner work and addressing communication issues), shared
resources (e.g., web sources for basic English conversation lessons), and discussed any pertinent topics that arose (e.g., immigration history and laws, underrepresented minority students and their access to education, diversity on campus, etc.). Although most of the discussion dealing with this assignment was conducted in Spanish, the instructor took the liberty of handling some complex topics in English (e.g., the history of immigration groups and laws in the U.S.) given their intermediate language level.

After each meeting with their community partner, students submitted a folder containing their recent journal entry, a log sheet that documented their activity and hours, and any resources they used at their meetings. A list of guiding questions in Spanish was provided to facilitate their journal writing. These questions led students to describe and process their community experience (Appendix B): What happened during the week? What did you and the community partner do together? What did you talk about? How do you feel about the experience? Did you gain any new information about the community partner and his/her situation, Spanish language and culture, or yourself? What are your plans for the next meeting? Do you have any needs?

Since students at this level were learning the past tense and being introduced to the subjunctive mood for the first time, they received explicit language support with sample expressions and sentences in Spanish that they could imitate. Given their minimal prior writing practice in Spanish, students were required to write only 100-130 words in Spanish, although several chose to write much more. They also had the option to include another paragraph in English to express what they wanted to say but could not express in Spanish. The journals were evaluated based on quantity of text written in Spanish, quality of reflection content, and quality of Spanish (e.g., variety of vocabulary, appropriate usage of verbs and other grammatical concepts covered in the class). If the overall quality of a journal entry was poor, students were given the option of submitting revisions, and most took advantage of this. When students completed their SL project, they also submitted a final reflection essay of 250-300 words in Spanish and another 100-150 words in English. Students were also asked to share recommendations for future students and the instructor as a way to improve the project.

In addition to these methods of reflection, 10 out of 23 students shared their experiences via interviews that were videotaped with permission. Participation in this aspect of the project was voluntary. One community partner also volunteered to share her thoughts on the project. The University provided technical support related to obtaining the consent forms, filming, and post-semester editing of the video. A brief list of possible interview questions was shared beforehand. These questions dealt with students’ reasons for taking the class, their prior experience with the use of Spanish outside of the classroom with native speakers, initial reaction to the assignment, and gains from and challenges of the assignment. The video interviews were conducted in English, each lasting five to fifteen minutes. The student comments can be viewed in a video that describes the project (see www.bsu.edu/institutionaldiversity and click on For Faculty and Staff menu). There are two versions of the video: the shorter version of six minutes and a longer version of 22 minutes with more in-depth student responses.
Students’ Voices and Learning Outcomes

“If we stereotype and judge people in our minds before actually getting to know them, that is our fault, not theirs. We have to learn to appreciate the differences in one another, and embrace what makes us unique.” (A student in SP201)

The ultimate goal of the assignment was to provide students with an authentic learning environment that would deepen their knowledge and understanding of our increasingly pluralistic and multicultural society. Intentional effort was made to create opportunities for face-to-face encounters and to reflect on the experiences of minority members of the community, especially as determined by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomics. Below are students’ voices on their SL experience as expressed in written journals and final reflection essays (marked with W) or interviews (marked with I).

Out of 23 students in the class, 17 students participated in service projects with off-campus community members, and six students worked on non-service community-learning projects on campus (i.e., they attended weekly Latino student organization meetings/events or worked on a video project to interview Latino students on campus). The quotes are from 16 students who completed the service component and who consented to sharing their reflections. Students’ comments are organized according to themes and learning outcomes as they relate to personal and interpersonal development. The quotes from reflection writings that were in Spanish have been translated into English.

Lack of prior contact with native speakers and initial fear. Most students reported that they had little prior experience working or even talking with native speakers outside of the classroom: “This has been my first real exposure with the Hispanic community” (W, Subject 12). “When we were told we had to do a community project… initially I was nervous… I wasn’t too keen on meeting someone who may or may not speak English” (I, Subject 15). “I have never really been in contact with anyone outside of my Spanish teacher in high school… I didn’t think I could do it; I was scared” (I, Subject 2).

Development of empathy and reduction of negative stereotypes. Face-to-face encounters and listening to personal stories allowed students to develop a better understanding of the lives of their community partners: “Through [community partner], I learned how difficult it is to become a citizen of the United States and how difficult the process is” (W, Subject 9). “I learned just how hard it is to try to learn a new language when you come into a new country not knowing it all” (I, Subject 15). “I have never really been in contact with anyone outside of my Spanish teacher in high school… I didn’t think I could do it; I was scared” (I, Subject 2).

Development of positive relationships. The collaborative nature of SL pedagogy has led students to form positive relationships: “We have better relationships with our community partner. We also have better relationships among people in the class because we talked about the community project every Thursday” (W, Subject 1). “I will definitely remember my partner” (I, Subject 8). “I gained a new friend. Me and my partner, we want to still keep in touch” (I, Subject 2). “I enjoyed meeting [community partner]… I don’t get a lot of contact
with people outside of the university even, and... we got to meet, a couple people through her that I wouldn't have met without it” (I, Subject 15).

Increase in motivation level and self-confidence. By using Spanish in real-world situations with community partners and beginning to take a personal interest in them, several students reported an increase in their confidence with regard to Spanish and motivation to engage with native speakers: “This project has upped my confidence in my Spanish ability and my ability to talk to new people...” (W, Subject 3). “Most of all I have a greater ability to speak Spanish than I did before and it just inspires me more in the future to utilize it” (I, Subject 5). “This project helped me step outside of my box. I am very shy and I would never have met such nice people if it were not for this project” (W, Subject 6). “I gained more confidence in my Spanish speaking abilities now that I have had a chance to use them in the real world” (W, Subject 7).

Development of cultural understanding and self-awareness. As students developed personal relationships with their community partners, they not only gained cultural information but also developed humility by becoming more self-reflective about their unfamiliarity in many terrains: “I discovered that I do not know much about the Latino culture... from this project I learned that just how unaware I am of... like the world around me” (I, Subject 16). “By participating in this community project, I discovered a lot of new things about myself...this project made me realize that I need to open up more to people” (W, Subject 1). “When [classmate] and I were helping [community partner] with her studying for the test [citizenship] we both realized that we as Americans knew very little of the information that she was required to know” (W, Subject 10).

Discovery of socioeconomic disparities and privilege. Most of the community partners were working-class immigrants with limited education and resources. As such, students were able to witness lives that contrasted drastically with their own, which led them to look at social inequalities and the concept of privilege: “Getting to know [community partner] has been practically life-changing for me...[It] has made me reflect on my own life. I hear her story about how she has to travel to... use her food stamps... and I see that I am worried about getting the latest gadget” (W, Subject 14). “[T]he project has helped me truly understand the economic struggles of the Latino community” (W, Subject 13).

View of others as someone “like me.” As students developed friendships with community partners, they began to see others sharing the same basic human values: “By conversing with [community partners], I learned that we are very similar people. In some aspects, the only thing that made us different was that we spoke different languages. But by knowing a little bit of each other’s native tongue, we all connected and could share” (W, Subject 6). “The project has shown me the community really needs to come together... and stop segregating itself... We are all human beings and need each other in order to survive “ (W, Subject 14).

Power of human contact and active learning in the real world. Despite the initial hesitations about the project, in their final reflection essays, most students welcomed the opportunity to engage in a hands-on project with people in their community: “Reading about something and witnessing something are two completely different learning mechanisms, and I feel that the latter is a much more effective method of getting the point across” (W, Subject 4). “Speaking with native Spanish speakers is a more insightful and practical method for learning
Spanish than only studying Spanish from a textbook” (W, Subject 5). “I suggest the professor continue assigning this community project… It gives students an opportunity to use what they have learned in the real world” (W, Subject 7).

**Further interest in service-learning.** The majority of students in the class were supportive of SL and its impact on their learning: “This semester, I fell in love with the Spanish language even more because I had the opportunity to practically use it every week. This project gave us a special opportunity to get to know both our community and the Spanish language better” (W, Subject 5). “Community projects are a good thing. They promote many values that are important in life like communication, diversity, kindness, and having an open mind” (W, Subject 11). “If another opportunity comes up like this in another one of my classes, then I will be very happy” (W, Subject 3).

In sum, students’ reflections demonstrate an overwhelmingly positive response to SL. Many students claimed that they had a transformative experience. Their voices give evidence to some aspects of personal and interpersonal development and diversity learning, which are important goals of foreign language education in addition to developing language proficiency. Despite the initial reluctance and fear expressed by some students, these student reflections reveal that SL can be an effective teaching tool for developing empathy with others, reducing negative stereotypes, building positive relationships, strengthening motivation and self-confidence, enhancing cultural understanding and self-awareness, discovering social inequality and privilege, and experiencing the benefit of having positive interactions with people from diverse backgrounds. It also enhanced their ability to use Spanish in real-life contexts. For example, one student who initially did not want to do the project wrote in her final reflection essay:

I learned so much from [community partner] and I am just more comfortable speaking Spanish with her… [U]p until now, I just wanted to change the culture of the Latinos. I thought, ‘well, they come here… they should expand their range of cultures to include ours.’ However, now I just think it would be better if I learned their culture. I would be a better-rounded person, and speaking two languages will only improve my intellectual abilities. I found it interesting speaking to [community partner] in Spanish; I enjoyed it (W, Subject 16).

Overall, the majority of students enrolled in this third-semester Spanish language course demonstrated gains in personal and interpersonal development and diversity learning. Students’ comments reflect the kind of personal learning and growth that is a part of the goals of general education.

**Future Directions**

Given the fact that this was the author’s first time incorporating SL pedagogy into an intermediate Spanish course, there is room for improvement. In their final reflection essays, several students stated that the assignment took a lot of time: not just meeting time with the community partner but also the time it took to prepare for each session, to get to the service site, and to write journal entries in Spanish. A few students also asked for more class time to work in groups in order to share ideas. Considering how much time students spent outside of the classroom with native speakers of Spanish and the amount of their written reflection in the target
language, the percentage of course grade for the assignment could be raised from 15% to at least 25 to 30%.

The instructor can also incorporate more course materials directly related to the assignment. Specifically, the instructor can take the liberty of omitting some of the cultural readings from the course textbook and incorporate more materials pertinent to working with Hispanic communities in the U.S. For example, there are numerous online Spanish language newspapers published in this country that deal with issues facing many different immigrant communities from the Spanish-speaking world. Also, discussions on the assignment-related issues could be incorporated into final oral interviews for the course (e.g., role plays of actual situations that arose during meetings with community partners). Additionally, the instructor may consider dedicating one entire class period in the middle of the semester for students to make informal presentations on the progress of their SL projects as a platform for sharing ideas to support each other and better connecting their community experience to the learning goals of the assignment.

The instructor can simplify community partnerships and thus, coordination needs. Since the goal of the assignment was to ensure face-to-face contact with native speakers, the initial community partnership extended to many different types of service tasks, people, and places. However, the author learned that it is possible for the class to work with just five or six community members who desire more than a one-hour meeting per week. A group of students can meet with the same community partner at different times and offer different types of services (e.g., the community partner working toward a GED needs to learn many subject areas). This would also help students to share ideas, resources, and reflections during class discussion time.

Furthermore, the instructor may need to stress several times, before and during the project, the importance of focusing on people and listening to their stories more than getting it “right” with their service tasks. For example, some students in the class felt stressed not knowing “exactly” what to do for meeting the needs of their community partner (which can take time to discern). They wanted step-by-step instructions for everything without first getting to know their community partners. Such concerns were also reflected in some of the journal entries; some focused strictly on what they did or could not do about their service tasks, without mentioning anything about what they had learned about their community partners. The instructor had to keep prompting students so that they would not miss the point of the assignment. It may also become necessary to discuss with students the inevitable feeling of uncertainty and ambiguity that comes from going beyond the comforts of a typical classroom and how to cope with unpredictable situations that arise. This discomfort, however, when combined with critical reflection activities in class, can be used to generate learning and growth (e.g., “a failure” can become a great learning moment); it can sensitize students to a greater awareness of the complexity of immigrant life.
Conclusion

The intermediate language classroom faces divergent goals and needs of students, many of whom do not continue on to upper-division courses. Some students move on to minor or major in the foreign language; however, many stop their language study at the intermediate level. While the goals of developing language proficiency cannot be neglected in a language classroom, foreign language programs must also examine how to best align their teaching practices to serve the needs of students who enroll for general education. This paper has presented the rational for incorporating SL into the intermediate language classroom as an effective tool for fostering personal and interpersonal development and diversity learning for higher education. A well-structured SL program can provide students with an authentic learning environment, in which experience and enhanced understanding lead to a more effective participation in the community. As demonstrated by students’ voices from one intermediate Spanish course, the collaborative environment of SL, the formation of positive relationships with community members whose lives drastically differ from their own, and critical reflection opportunities can help students to develop empathy with others, reduce negative stereotypes, strengthen motivation and self-confidence, enhance cultural understanding and self-awareness, discover social inequality and privilege, and experience the benefit of having positive interactions with people from diverse backgrounds.

If the intermediate language course is the last Spanish class that students ever take, what do language instructors want them to retain from their classroom experience? How can the course content be delivered in a way that will encourage them to have positive interactions with native speakers who can be found not just in study abroad contexts but also right within their own local community? What kind of teaching practices would deepen students’ understanding of an increasingly diverse, pluralistic, and interdependent world? When SL is supported by quality engagement, reflection, and reciprocity among all parties involved, it can become a powerful teaching tool, by means of which the students and the instructor can discover new terrains in our diverse, interdependent world.

References


**Appendix A**

**Sample Assignment Instructions for Students**

*Español 201 - Proyecto de comunidad* [Spanish 201 – Community Project] – 15% of course grade

According to 2010 census, over 16% of the U.S. population is Hispanic (that is more than 50 million people). 26% of the nation's population 6 years of age or under is Hispanic– consider the demographic changes that will take place in 20 years! In the state of Indiana, 6% of the population is Hispanic (8% of K-12 grade age is Hispanic).

An important goal of studying Spanish is to better prepare ourselves as participants in and contributors to an increasingly pluralistic and multicultural society. The goal of this assignment is to have **direct contact** with Latino community members...
on and off campus. We will work on service projects with local Hispanic immigrant families and/or participate in Latino student organizations on campus in order to **document personal stories and reflect** on the experiences of minority members of the community. Specific service tasks and events, meeting times and places are provided for you to sign up.

1. Meeting requirement: min 8-10 hours of contact during the semester.
2. Select your service preferences #1, #2, #3 from the list provided. Make sure you can meet with the community partner within the indicated time range and at the place once a week.
3. Decide if you want to work alone or with a classmate. Partner work is recommended.
4. Grade will be based on preparedness (reliability, creativity, total service hours), quality of **weekly reflection** journals, and final reflection essay.

5. **Important dates:**
   - **Semana 1** – service assignment preferences
   - **Semana 2** – service assignment and first phone call to the community partner or first attendance at Latino Student Union meeting
   - **Semana 3** - first meeting with the community partner
   - By April 15 or earlier – completion of the last session.

6. **After each session** – submit a **Diario** [journal] that begins with the following information:
   - **Fecha/hora de la reunión** [meeting date/time]: Ej., Martes, 24 de enero, 10:30am
   - **Lugar de la reunión** [meeting place]: Ej., Head Start
   - **Duración de la reunión** [length of meeting]: Ej., 60 minutos.
   - **Mi pareja de comunidad** [my community partner]:
   - **Nuestra meta de servicio** [our service goal]:
   - **Documentación** (Incluir una copia de los materiales usados) [include any materials used with the community partner]
   - Follow the prompt questions for **diarios** – see the evaluation sheet.

7. **First phone call** - Call your community partner and confirm your first meeting (you may have to make several calls to get through so plan early).
   If you feel nervous about speaking in Spanish, remember that you will have studied more Spanish than your community partners will have studied English!
   a. Present yourself with proper greetings and confirm the first meeting – the day, time, and place.
   b. Give your contact information.
   c. Talk about your physical traits (to recognize each other when you meet for the first time).
   d. End the conversation cordially.
8. **First meeting**
   a. Get to know each other (prepare a list of questions to get to know your community partner – e.g., you can recycle the oral interview questions for the class!)
   b. Fill out contact information sheet and the meeting dates/times for the semester.
   c. Listen to your community partner’s interests and needs.
   d. Confirm the next meeting date, time, & place.
   e. If there is time, do one activity (prepare for English conversation practice, reading…etc.).

9. **Weekly meetings**
   a. Be flexible – unexpected events happen and meetings can be canceled or changed.
   b. Always call your community partner and confirm before each meeting.
   c. Meet at public places (e.g., libraries, coffee shops, Head Start parent room…etc.)
   d. Prepare a plan for each meeting (e.g., conversation questions, websites to explore, practice sheets…etc.).
   e. Listen to the needs of your community partner and get to know his/her stories.
   f. Evaluate constantly, “Is this a good service?”
   g. Consult with me and the classmates if you need help or have any difficulty.
   h. Use the USTED form with older adults.
   i. Enjoy getting to know your community member and be prepared to share with the class what you learned about him/her.

10. **Last meeting** - interview the community members (at the end) and include the findings into your last diario.
    a. ¿Qué aspecto de las reuniones le fue más beneficioso? [What was the most beneficial aspect of the project?]
    b. ¿Cree que fueron suficientes las horas de contacto? ¿Tiene algunas sugerencias para el futuro? [Do you believe that the contact hours were sufficient? Do you have any suggestions for the future?]
Appendix B
Sample Evaluation Criteria for SL Project

Español 201  La evaluación del proyecto de comunidad

1. Servicio _____/40 ptos.
   • Número de horas de participación, responsabilidad, creatividad
   • Contribución al equipo [individual contribution if teamwork]

2. Diarios _____/60 ptos.
   • La cantidad – ‘suficiente texto (___/20) [quantity of text]
   • La calidad – contenido (___/20) [quality of content]

Preguntas para el diario - escribir de 100-130 palabras en español:
• ¿Qué pasó durante la semana? ¿Qué hicieron juntos? ¿De qué hablaron?
• Ej., Esta semana, María y yo nos reunimos a las tres el martes en la Biblioteca Kennedy. María no habla mucho inglés y por eso hablamos mucho en español. Ella es de Texas. Nos organizamos y hablamos de los planes...
• ¿Cómo te sientes con tu experiencia hasta ahora? ¿Qué aprendiste de la situación? ¿Y algo de la cultura hispana y el español? ¿Y de ti mismo/a?
• Ej., Estaba muy nervioso/a al principio porque...
• Es interesante que + subjuntivo
• Ojalá que + subjuntivo
• ¿Cuáles son tus planes para la próxima reunión? ¿Qué necesidades tiene tu pareja de comunidad y tienes tú?
• Ej., El plan para la próxima sesión es practicar la conversación en inglés sobre el vocabulario de la escuela. María quiere aprender más... También voy a ayudarla con la pronunciación de... Espero que ella/él + subjuntivo... Le recomiendo que + subjuntivo...

Opcional – another paragraph in English – what you wanted to say but could not express in Spanish

• La calidad – español (variedad de vocabulario, conjugaciones verbales y gramática) (___/20) [quality of Spanish – variety of vocabulary and grammar]

3. La reflexión final _____/50 ptos
   a. Un ensayo de 250-300 palabras en español
      ⇒ ¿Qué hiciste?
      ⇒ ¿Qué tipo de relaciones has podido formar con los compañeros de la clase, con la comunidad latina en el campus, con los latinos fuera del campus...? [What kind of relationships were you able to form among classmates and with the Latino community on and off campus?]
¿Qué aprendiste – de ti mismo/a, de la vida de algunos latinos que conociste, del español o de diversidad? [What did you learn about yourself, about the life of some of the Latino community members you met, about Spanish, and about diversity?]

¿Qué quieres/esperas que pase en nuestra comunidad (ej., tu pareja de comunidad, nuestra comunidad dentro y fuera del campus... etc.) [What do you want to see happen in our community?]

¿Qué les recomiendas a los estudiantes de futuro que hagan o no hagan? [What do you recommend for future students?]

¿Qué le sugieres a la profesora que haga o no haga en el futuro? [What do you suggest for your professor for future?]

- Un párrafo en inglés (100-150 palabras) [a paragraph in English]
  What did you discover/learn that you would not have if we did not do this project?
  Leo Tolstoy observed, “Everybody thinks of changing humanity, and nobody thinks of changing himself.” What causes transformation within us? Is there anything you learned about yourself this semester?