Connections

A Journal for Foreign Language Educators

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About us

Connections is an online yearly peer-reviewed journal published by the *Foreign Language Association of Northern California* and directed to the world language professional in the classroom. From its origins with SWCOLT and its continuation with FLANC since 2008, the journal has aimed at sharing meaningful research and outcomes in the field of linguistics as well as current pedagogical trends, best practices on technology-mediated tasks, and activities to integrate the intercultural dimension in language teaching and learning.

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Editors' Note and Acknowledgements

Connections. A journal for Foreign Language Educators, volume 11, brings language educators nine articles and two book reviews. The articles cover a wide range of topics in relation to the teaching and learning of languages, whether in a virtual or a face-to-face format. A broad spectrum of research types is represented (qualitative and quantitative, established and innovative), including cross-disciplinary approaches.

In this volume, language educators can find relevant research on a diversity of topics from students' preferences in language education resources to the use of peer observation as a tool to enhance quality of teaching and mentoring of pre-service teachers. Articles also focus on key topics in today's language courses such as culturally relevant community-based learning for heritage speakers, social justice and poetic expression in the L2 language, and study abroad and intercultural reflection. While a diversity of languages is represented, new teaching approaches are explored through a philanthropy project in a Japanese drama course, the reading of Leo Tolstoy in Russian from a hybrid pedagogical perspective, and the incorporation of culture through Chinese character teaching and practice. The integration of digital innovations in the classroom is examined in the implementation of computer-assisted translation tools in translation courses and, focusing on professional development, an uplifting note reminds us of the importance of peer observation and feedback for instructors of world languages to encourage students' and instructors' success. Moreover, the book review section focuses on two very recent publications on second language acquisition and research-based teaching techniques.

We deeply thank our contributors for their commitment to the profession: Faculty from California, Georgia, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, and Massachusetts, have kindly shared their research, philosophies, and best practices, bringing fresh perspectives to our language classrooms. We look forward to *Connections* continuing to evolve as it provides meaningful research and outcomes as well as current pedagogical trends in teaching and learning to world language educators.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank the members of our Editorial Board and reviewers for their contribution in the editorial process as they have been instrumental at maintaining high standards within our publication. Our special gratitude to Dr. Branka Sarac, FLANC Webmaster, who carefully revised the last version of each manuscript before publication. We deeply appreciate her support and dedication.

Editorial Team

Main Editors' Biographical Notes

Gaye Walton-Price is a highly motivated and talented university professor, with extensive experience teaching Arabic and English as a Second Language, as well as an effective administrator and executive. Dr. Walton-Price earned her PhD in Arabic language and linguistics at Georgetown University; and she is currently the Arabic instructor at University of San Francisco. Since the pandemic, she has gained invaluable experience designing and conducting Arabic classes of various levels online via Zoom, including private tutoring sessions with advanced-level Arabic students. She has lived and worked in Tunis, Tunisia, and in Cairo, Egypt, for extended periods of time, and has conducted study tours for Californian undergraduate students to Egypt. After more than 20 years' college and university-level teaching experience, she knows and demonstrates that her passion is the Arabic language, both teaching it, doing research with it and in it, conversing in Arabic, as well as enjoying the great variety of Arab cultures. Along the way, she has also gained experience and expertise in teaching university-level humanities and philosophy courses. Dr. Walton-Price has been an active member of the FLANC board for over eight years and is currently serving as the treasurer of FLANC's board of advisors and co-editor of the FLANC Journal, ***Connections***.

Sandra García Sanborn completed her graduate studies at the University of California at Berkeley, attaining an M.A. and achieving PhD Candidacy in Hispanic Languages and Literatures. She is a lecturer in Spanish and Hispanic Literatures at California State University, Stanislaus, where she also presides the Latin American Studies Reading Group and is currently director of the LAS Minor. Her main areas of research are in literature of the South Cone and Central American literatures. She has presented papers in national and international conferences, such as the NWSA, CALACS, IAS, LICE, AATSP, FLEDS/SOWLE, plus multiple times in the Congreso Centroamericano de Estudios Culturales, and has published articles and book reviews in the field of literature as well as language acquisition, while also participating as reviewer for Hispania. Her latest publication, in 2021, has been in the ACTFL Learning Scenarios for the World Readiness Standards for Learning Spanish. She was FLANC president for 4 years during the 2016-2019 period and president of the AATSP Northern California Chapter for the 2018 and 2019 years. In the field of language acquisition, she is currently working on a COIL project with faculty from the TEC de Monterrey, México, which students find exciting as they approach the language through an online intercultural experience and a blending of disciplines. She has been business and associate editor of the UC Berkeley journal *Lucero*.

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Contributors

Junko Agnew is an Assistant Professor of Japanese in the Department of World Languages and Literature at Northern Kentucky University where she teaches Japanese language, literature, and film. She has written articles on the colonial literature of Manchukuo, on comparative literature, and on the works of Haruki Murakami.

Irina Avkhimovich is an Assistant Professor of Russian at the University of North Georgia. She teaches all levels of Russian language and upper-level content courses on literature and culture. Dr. Avkhimovich received her doctoral degree from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 2017. Originally a scholar of literature and theater, she has expanded her research to the field of Second Language Acquisition. Her interests lie within the areas of content-based instruction and motivation. She focuses on building language skills from Intermediate to Advanced level, reading, listening comprehension, and multimodal pedagogy.

Maribel Campoy is an Assistant Professor of Spanish at the University of Indianapolis. She is a native from Spain, she has completed a bachelor's degree, master's degree and some doctoral courses from University of Cadiz. She taught English in Spain before moving to the United States. Campoy has recently finished a certification in Translation Studies from the University of Denver.

Oriette D'Angelo (Caracas, 1990) is currently a PhD candidate in Spanish at The University of Iowa, where she also obtained an MFA in Spanish Creative Writing. She is the editor of the literary magazine *Digo.palabra.txt* and the research digital project *#PoetasVenezolanas*. She has a master's degree in Digital Communication and Media Arts from DePaul University, Chicago. Author of the poetry book *Cardiopatías* (Monte Ávila Editores, 2016; Winner of the Emerging Writers Prize, 2014). Her research is about the representation of political trauma in contemporary Chilean novels, specifically about the work by Alejandro Zambra, Nona Fernández, and Alejandra Costamagna.

Yating Fan serves as a dedicated Chinese Lecturer at Boston University, where she is deeply committed to advancing student learning through innovative methodologies. By fostering a sense of community, Yating strives to create an inclusive educational environment. Her expertise spans curriculum development, technology integration, innovative pedagogy, and blended learning, reflecting her commitment to staying at the forefront of educational trends. Through the integration of progressive techniques, she aims to provide students with a comprehensive and dynamic learning journey, preparing them for the evolving landscape of education.

Megan Grady holds the role of Associate Director of Academic Partnerships at Butler University, where her primary responsibilities encompass the advancement of academic partnerships aimed at creating digitally enhanced for-credit programs, the strategic utilization of academic technology, and the cultivation of faculty development opportunities. In addition to her administrative role, Megan also teaches professional and public writing courses within Butler's English Department. Her background includes an Associate of Science in Broadcast Production

from Vincennes University, a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology with a minor in Near Eastern Languages and Cultures from Indiana University Bloomington, and a Master of Arts in English from Butler University.

Eden Jones is a Course Improvement Partner in the Office of Teaching, Learning and Technology at the University of Iowa. They work with large gateway courses to improve student experience and outcomes. They previously worked in the Spanish general education program and received a PhD in Spanish from UI.

Rachel Klevar supervises the elementary Spanish instructors and teaches a wide variety of Spanish classes at the University of Iowa. She holds a Ph.D. in Early Modern Spanish Literature from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Rachel's research interests include Spanish picaresque literature, cultural geography, and more recently, pedagogical best practices for flipped and online language classrooms.

Kara Mac Donald is Associate Professor, Defense Language Institute, Monterey, CA, USA with a Master's in Applied Linguistics, TESOL and a Doctorate in Applied Linguistics. She currently conducts pre-service and in-service teacher training for faculty teaching foreign languages. She maintains a close connection to the ESL through tutoring K-12 students and her positions and involvement in California TESOL (CATESOL) and EFL classroom through her continued role/s and involvement on Korea TESOL (KOTESOL), in additional to participation in TESOL International. Her recent publications include teacher autonomy, intercultural communication, professional development post-pandemic, and L2 identity negotiation.

Gabriela Muniz is an Associate Professor of Latin American Culture and Literature at Butler University. She commenced her academic journey by studying art and literature in Argentina and furthered her education by obtaining a master's degree from Texas A&M. Her academic endeavors culminated in a Ph.D. in Latin American literature from the University of California, Davis. Muniz boasts many research interests, including media studies, visual studies, documentary film, identity, and ecocriticism. She is the author of significant works, such as "Resiliencia y desecho: dos siglos de la basura como artefacto estético en Argentina y Brasil" and "Reciclando imágenes: documentales sobre arte y política en Latinoamérica."

Nichole Neuman is a German and cinema teacher-scholar, serving as Assistant Professor of German and Hoyt-Reichmann Scholar at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. She also directs IUPUI's Max Kade German-American Center. She regularly presents at national and international conferences on cinema, film history and archives, and representations of identity. Her research has been published in edited volumes and journals, including *Seminar*, *The Moving Image*, and *Applied Linguistics*.

Gabriela Olivares is an Associate Professor of Spanish and currently serves as the Associate Dean of the Graduate College at UNI. In addition, Dr. Olivares has a vast teaching experience K-16, has served as language coordinator at many institutions of higher education, and has trained future language teachers at the undergraduate and graduate level. Her research interests are second language acquisition, learner factors, non-traditional students, and cognition. She is also a co- author of Semillas- an open educational resource (OER) textbook of Spanish.

Chin-Sook Pak is an Associate Professor of Spanish at Ball State University. Her current research and teaching interests are in community engagement for second language and heritage language students. She is the recipient the Outstanding Teaching Award (Ball State University), the Brian Douglas Hiltunen Faculty Award for Outstanding Contribution to the Scholarship of Engagement (Indiana Campus Compact), and the 2022 AATSP (American Association for Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese) Outstanding Scholarship Publication Award for her article, "Exploring the long-term impact of service-learning: Former students of Spanish revisit their community engagement experiences" in the *Hispania* journal.

Sun Young Park is a Faculty Development Specialist at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center Monterey, CA, USA where she has designed, developed, and conducted pre-service and in-service training for over 17 years. She holds a Master's in TESOL and Ed.D. in Educational Leadership from U.S. universities. She maintains connection to the ESL in the U.S. and EFL classrooms in Asia through her research in both contexts to stay abreast on issues and challenges relevant to classroom teachers. Her recent publications include teacher autonomy, intercultural communication and professional development post-pandemic.

Lynne Stallings is an Associate Professor in the English Department at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. She teaches Linguistics courses and TESOL teacher preparation courses for working with multilingual learners and seeks to create inclusive and equitable learning environments where all students can thrive. Her current research interests include teacher preparation for dual language and TESOL professionals, assessment literacy, and alternative assessment practices. She also serves on the Muncie Community Schools Dual Language Immersion Committee.

Gaye Walton-Price is an expert university professor, with experience teaching Arabic and ESL, philosophy and humanities, and administrating. Walton-Price earned PhD in Arabic language and linguistics at Georgetown University; and is now Arabic instructor at University of San Francisco. Since the pandemic, she has experience teaching Arabic online, including private tutoring. She has resided in Tunis, Tunisia, and in Cairo, Egypt, for extended periods, and has led tours for students to Egypt. After 20+ years' college and university teaching experience, she shows her passion for Arabic language, in teaching, doing research, conversing in Arabic, and exploring Arab cultures. Walton-Price is a member of the FLANC board since 2015 and is co-treasurer, acting recording secretary and co-editor of ***Connections***.

Ming Wu is an assistant professor at University of Louisville, specializing in Teaching Chinese as a Second Language. As an award-winning teacher and published scholar, she is passionately committed to facilitating student learning about the Chinese language and culture. With 20 years of experience in higher education institutions, she has taught Chinese at all levels to students from over fifty countries. Additionally, she has delivered lectures on various aspects of Chinese culture.

Giovanni Zimotti is the Director of Spanish Language Instruction at the University of Iowa. He is a champion of Open Educational Resources (OER), authoring three textbooks. His research focuses on second language acquisition with a focus on technology such as Virtual Reality and

Artificial Intelligence. Dr. Zimotti's dedication to accessible education earned him awards such as the 2022 Educator Award for Open Education Excellence.

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Book Reviews

The Impact of Student Philanthropy on a Japanese Drama Course

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Junko Agnew

Department of World Languages and Literatures, Northern Kentucky University

Abstract

This study examines how the incorporation of a philanthropy project into a language and literature course is beneficial to students' understanding of the course content as well as global social issues pertinent to the country of their study. Survey data indicates that this teaching approach enhanced students' curiosity about Japanese society and increased their desire for volunteerism. It also strengthened the bond between students and improved their teamwork skills.

Keywords: Japanese, service learning, community engagement, philanthropy, drama studies

Introduction

As active learning became a more popular pedagogy in the early 1990s (Bonwell & Eison, 1991), the terms "experiential learning" and "student-centered learning" began to appear frequently in language studies. The teacher's role has changed from a lecturer who explains grammar to a facilitator who guides and motivates students to learn their target language firsthand. Nevertheless, the student-centered learning method in language classes has remained limited to the communicative (Hymes, 1972) or task-based learning (Prabhu, 1987) approaches. Experiential learning, especially community engagement projects such as service learning and student philanthropy, is often tied to courses such as sociology, psychology, social work, education, and business (Rosenkranz, 2012), and is seldom incorporated into language and literature curricula. In this paper, I examine how the Mayerson Student Philanthropy Project (MSPP) was integrated into a Japanese drama course and how it enhanced students' understanding of social issues in Japan and the United States. After completing the Mayerson project, students completed a survey to measure the benefit of philanthropy in increasing their awareness about social needs and nonprofit organizations, as well as their understanding of the course content.

Introducing Civic Engagement Into Language Learning

In order to improve the career readiness of college students, universities are promoting service learning (Kolb, 2014) because students' experiences at nonprofit organizations, public schools, and community events are quite different from what they learn from their reading, lectures, and discussions in the classroom (Keeton & Tate, 1978). The pedagogical approach with experiential and project-based learning in higher education became popular in the 1980s. By the 2000s, it began to involve more community engagement (Harkavy & Harley, 2010; Warren,

2012). According to the Carnegie Foundation, institutions that are classified as Advocate for Community Engagement (or ACE) included 4,600 campuses by 2011 (Larson, 2016), and currently, 352 institutions are classified as Community Engagement campuses (ACE, 2023).

As more universities incorporated civic engagement into their curricula, more diverse disciplines began to embed it in their courses. Today, universities employ service learning as widely as possible to maximize its impact on their students and faculty. In addition to the common disciplines associated with service learning, such as social work, education, and political science, courses less familiar with civic engagement, such as math, biology, English, and art, also embed service learning within their syllabuses (Zlotkowski, 2006).

Promoting community engagement in various higher education departments reflects the idea that service learning applies to any discipline and that students in various courses can benefit from the community-based curriculum. One study states that "limited research has investigated how service learning benefits students across disciplines and how personal characteristics affect service learning outcomes among students" (Jarret et al., 2015). Despite the efforts to promote experiential learning across the disciplines, there are still few examples of language courses with a civic engagement component. Even among those courses that incorporate service learning, they are often limited to Spanish or other Western languages, in which students' translation skills are utilized for civic purposes (Jarret et al., 2015; Zlotkowski, 2006).

In this paper, I explore the impact of student philanthropy on a Japanese drama class. The difference between philanthropy and service learning is that "the former provides monetary support to community partners while the latter may provide more hands-on support such as fundraising, donated time, or other creative assistance" (Larson, 2016). The class was given

$2,000 in grant money to award one nonprofit organization. I demonstrate how the MSPP enhanced students' understanding of the course content, including the social issues reflected in the Japanese drama and documentaries that were part of this course.

Perceptions of Japan

Many American students decide to study Japanese because of their interest in Japanese culture, especially pop culture (Abe, 2009). Indeed, the 2015 "Japan Foundation Survey on Japanese Language Education Institutions" reports that over 90% of Japanese language learners in the United States identified Japanese pop culture as their prime motivation for studying Japanese (JFLA, 2017). Due to the influence of Japanese anime, movies, TV shows, and music, American perception of Japan is relatively positive. A Pew Research Center report states that "To Americans, the Japanese are generally viewed in a positive light: Words like 'hardworking,' 'inventive' and 'honest' are what Americans use to describe them. In fact, more than nine-in-ten Americans say they associate 'hardworking' with the Japanese" (Stokes, 2015).

Japan is also seen as a homogeneous country that consists of "people who share a common language, culture, and traditions" (Dharitri, 2004). Because of the development of technology (Hu, 2022; Rikidozan, 2019) and the rapid economic boom in the 1970s and 1980s, the myth of "everyone is middle class in Japan" also still exists. Chiavacci (2008) states that "According to foreign descriptions as well as a dominant Japanese self-view, Japan was an exceptionally equal society regarding chances and outcomes in international comparison". Moreover, the author points out that, "According to this societal model, Japan had a very equal income distribution per household and was a society with an outstanding degree of social openness."

However, the experience with the MSPP changed students' perceptions of Japan. Many students knew that Japan had social issues, just like the US, but were unfamiliar with the problems and their seriousness until they took this course. This class made them realize that racism and poverty were not just American issues but also existed in Japan. It helped them see their local issues from a global perspective.

The Mayerson Student Philanthropy Project

The MSPP was introduced to Northern Kentucky University (NKU) in 1999 and implemented in 2000. It can be incorporated into any course regardless of its discipline or format (in-person or online). Each class chooses a primary topic(s) for the project and receives $2000 from a donor to invest in a nonprofit organization. Students are divided into small groups, and each group selects a sub-topic such as "immigration issues" or "women," then researches the topic. Students identify nonprofit organizations related to their sub-topic and select one they want to advocate for.

Each group is required to visit and interview the organization they select. Students work as a group to create a presentation on the organization, addressing how their experience with it is connected to what they learned from the class. Each group attempts to persuade their audience as to why their organization should receive the fund. After completing all the presentations, the class votes for the award recipient. The winning group, the awarded organization, and the professor from each class attend the Award Ceremony at the end of the semester. They all celebrate their [1]experiences with the MSPP as the philanthropy funds are handed to the organization's representatives.

[1] Northern Kentucky University Scripps Haward Center, which administrates the MSPP, maintains the record and publishes a handbook. Since the new edition of the handbook was not yet available, the data used for this study was obtained from the Center on May 19, 2023.

The primary themes of the Japanese drama class were poverty and the definition of success. There were four sub-topics related to those themes: 1) child hunger, 2) mental illness and drug abuse, 3) homelessness, and 4) the Native Americans. Each group conducted research, selected their nonprofit organization, and made a presentation. The organization that addresses child hunger was the eventual recipient of the award.

Since its foundation in 1999, the MSPP has grown remarkably. In the last 23 years, a total of 8,400 students have participated, donating almost 2 million dollars to 511 different organizations in the world (Scripps Howard Center). The objectives of the MSPP component are to enhance students' awareness of social needs and help them gain a greater sense of commitment to their community. Students also develop their research skills and deepen their understanding of the class materials.

Case Study

There were 15 students in the Japanese drama course. The class lasted for 75 minutes, and met twice a week. Students viewed one episode of a contemporary Japanese drama *Escaping from Poverty* (*Okanega Nai*) every week. They also viewed a short Japanese drama, *Born With It* (*Umare Tsuki*), and several short documentary films that addressed issues such as child poverty, poverty among older people, homelessness, people with disabilities, young caregivers who take care of their disabled family members, LGTBQ issues, racism, and social withdrawal (*hikikomori*). These documentaries and the drama were assigned to watch at home.

Since there were no English subtitles, students were given a vocabulary list before watching the videos and completed a quiz to assess their comprehension. They were also asked to answer weekly questions about the documentaries and translate some scenes from *Escaping*

from Poverty. In class, the professor gave a brief lecture on the social issues in Japan, showed some parts of *Escaping from Poverty* or the documentaries that many students had trouble understanding, and used the rest of the class time for discussion.

The objectives of the drama and documentary component were to improve students' Japanese language skills while broadening their perceptions of Japanese society by challenging their stereotypes and assumptions about Japan.

Escape from Poverty

Escape from Poverty is a Japanese TV drama that aired from July 6 to September 21 in 1994 (11 episodes). The story is about a young man, Kentarō Hagiwara, and his little brothers who live in extreme poverty in Japan. Their parents die suddenly in a car accident, leaving a large debt. Kentarō is responsible for paying the debt while supporting his brothers. After losing his factory job, Kentarō works as a janitor at a large insurance company. One day, he finds an opportunity to become a full-time employee in the sales department and gets the job. He works hard to acquire knowledge of corporate insurance, business manners, computers, and other office equipment, and he successfully gains new clients. He becomes the right-hand man of the company's Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and contributes to taking over their headquarters in Los Angeles. Kentarō becomes extremely wealthy, but his younger brothers are less happy because Kentarō is never home. One day, Kentarō is falsely accused of bribery and is arrested. He later learns the CEO used him as a scapegoat for a corruption case. Kentarō loses his trust in the CEO and his business practice. He decides to quit and starts his own business in a garage-sized office.

Although the plot of this TV drama may seem like a conventional success story of an underprivileged man, *Escape from Poverty* is not a typical heartwarming drama. The comical

tone of the show, as well as the complex character development, make Kentarō 's success questionable. Kentarō is not just a caring and hardworking character who consistently acts in accordance with his moral principles. Indeed, he is full of flaws. For example, he teaches his little brothers how to "dine and dash" and parties with his friends while his brothers wait for him at home with empty stomachs. He exploits his friends to his advantage and lies to his boss to get a contract.

Many students liked this character because Kentarō is energetic, funny, and positive. However, they also recognized his flaws and understood that he is a product of social injustice and class inequality. Students were especially interested in Kentarō 's relationship with his brothers. They discussed extensively whether Kentarō should be responsible for them. Some students said that he should play the father's role, and others that he had the right to enjoy his life as a young adult. This drama gave students an insight into how poverty affects family dynamics and what success really means.

One of the groups selected a topic related to this drama: child hunger. They selected this topic because one of the group members was the mother of a toddler, while the others had themselves experienced childhood poverty. After conducting research, they selected the local nonprofit organization called "Go Pantry." Established in 2012, Go Pantry provides free food for over 1,200 children in more than 80 schools in 6 counties of the Northern Kentucky region. The group visited the organization and interviewed one of its representatives. The group's final presentation connected what they learned from Go Pantry with *Escape from Poverty*.

One piece of information that surprised them in the interview was that the organization preferred food that children could eat without adults' assistance. Since children are often left alone in the house, the food children can prepare for themselves is better than the food adults can

prepare. For example, canned foods that children can open without a can opener are preferable to regular canned foods. One student said that she used to think instant mac and cheese or oatmeal would be suitable for donation, but she learned that this was not the case since children have to boil water for them. Those students recalled the scene in *Escape from Poverty* where the little brother could not eat the food left in the house because he could not cook it himself. He might have been hurt if he had tried to open a can or turn on the stove. The students were reminded of the reality that our assumptions about poor children can be problematic and that what we think would be helpful for them might, in fact, put them in danger.

The Hikikomori Documentary

The Japanese term *hikikomori* refers to socially withdrawn adolescents and youth who can barely leave their house or room. This term first appeared in Tamaki Saitō's 1998 book *Social Withdrawal* (*Shakaiteki Hikikomori*). It became widely used in Japan and beyond in 2000 (Bowker, 2022). Today, an estimated 1.46 million working-age people in Japan are *hikikomori* (The Japan Times, 2023). The documentary *Save Our Hikikomori Son!: A Grandson was Placed in a Facility in Another Prefecture—part 2. The Portrait of a Family's Struggles* (*Hikikomori no musuko wo sukuitai! Kengainyūsho no sobo. Dai 2 dan, Shinkoku na Kazoku no Sugata*) features an elderly couple, Katsuhiro and Yoshie, with their 48-year-old son who has been a social recluse for 27 years. When the camera enters his room, there is not one inch of uncluttered space, and the wall next to his bed has been destroyed. The son stopped attending school in middle school as he became a victim of bullying and developed schizophrenia-like symptoms. He is always suspicious that the food his mother prepares for him has poison in it. This elderly couple also has a daughter with a mental disorder and a grandson who lives in a facility due to his severe mental and physical disorders. Moreover, Katsuhiro, who is 74 years old, was diagnosed

with stomach cancer, and Yoshie suffers from pain caused by spinal canal stenosis. The entire family relies on Katsuhiro's small income, but he may not live much longer.

The MSPP group that selected the topic of mental illness and substance abuse showed particular interest in this documentary. This group chose the nonprofit organization Madi's House. Madi's House was founded by the parents of Madi Raleigh, who died of suicide aged 24 after a long battle with drug addiction. Madi's House provides free activities such as music, games, art classes, and wellness programs for young adults who struggle with mental illness and addiction. Through their MSPP experience, the group learned that, in many cases, the troubled youth are loners who greatly benefit from talking to peers with similar emotional issues. One student from the group also explained that after interviewing Madi's House, she learned that parents of troubled children needed a support community as much as their children did. She connected this point with the Japanese documentary where the elderly mother says that talking to other parents helped her endure her hardships. Madi's parents and the elderly couple in the documentary believe that sharing their stories contribute to easing the loneliness of other parents and their children. Helping others also gives meaning to the lives of Madi's parents and the elderly couple.

A Sense of Community in the Classroom

One of the objectives of the MSPP is to cultivate students' teamwork skills. According to Schlee's group work study, Generation Z (those born after 1996) have a more negative attitude toward group projects than millennials (Schlee, et al., 2019; Kendall, et al., 2014). The study reports that this is due to school shootings, disasters, and social media that influenced Generation Z's negative views on college life. Schlee points out that "Gen Z tends to be more anxious about working with others, especially in the university setting" (Schlee, et al., 2019, p. 2). The students

in the Japanese drama class belonged to Generation Z. Although NKU's Japanese language students frequently performed group projects, the number of skit assignments has been reduced in elementary Japanese courses because fewer and fewer students were willing to work as a group in recent years.

However, students in the Japanese drama class enjoyed working as a group because they shared the same desire to help their community. Students had to discuss many agendas, such as what sub-topic they wanted to research, which nonprofit organization they wanted to interview, role assignments for each group member, and presentation planning. They had to use social skills to reach an agreement and support each other. They also had to spend much time together outside their classroom, strengthening their bond. The friendships they built through the MSPP made it easier to open up and connect with their group members and classmates.

One student casually shared her experiences as a needy child in discussion sessions. She pointed out that certain school programs, including National School Lunch Program, made it easier to identify low-income children, thus humiliating those children. Another student who had a similar experience jumped in and shared his stories. He pointed out how well-intended programs could sometimes hurt children. He had been teased about participating in an after-school activity for low-income children. After this session, more and more students shared their personal stories, with occasional tears, and the discussion hour became something resembling a group therapy session.

This kind of intimacy and vulnerability had never emerged in other Japanese classes because of the students' language barrier. Speaking English is often discouraged in most Japanese classes; thus, what students can express in Japanese is always limited. In the MSPP class, however, half of the discussion time was conducted in Japanese and half in English to

allow students to better articulate their thoughts on their MSPP experiences. This also helped the professor recognize students' individuality and insightfulness more than in other Japanese classes.

Through the MSPP, students connected multiple dots: the social problems in Japan and the US, the social issues in their community, their personal problems, and their classmates' struggles with their own problems. This process made students more compassionate toward others, including their classmates. Students understood each other's struggles intellectually and emotionally by placing themselves in each other's shoes. A student wrote in the course evaluation that "It [the discussion] helped enhance my views by hearing about more viewpoints and experiences" and "seeing the experiences people go through as opposed to an abstract idea was very helpful." While students were helping nonprofit organizations and their communities through the MSPP, they were also helping their classmates and themselves heal from their issues.

Results and Discussion

An MSPP survey was conducted to evaluate students' experiences with the MSPP in the Japanese drama course. The NKU's Institutional Review Board approved the survey. Fifteen students who participated in the survey answered 15 questions with a Likert-type response (5–strongly agree; 4–agree; 3–neutral; 2–disagree; 1–strongly disagree). Although the sample size is small, Table 1 suggests that participation in the MSPP positively impacted their interest in social engagement and the content of the drama course. Of the students who responded, all but one (93%) felt that the MSPP enhanced their understanding of the Japanese drama and documentaries they watched in class. The MSPP and the Japanese drama increased students' awareness of social issues and compassion for others. One student commented in the survey, "It [The MSPP] helped me feel more active in my community and increased my desire to help

others." It is noteworthy that, in the responses to two similar questions regarding the desire for volunteerism, 60% of students felt that the Japanese drama and documentaries enhanced their desire for volunteerism, whereas 93% felt that the MSPP did. This indicates that students are more motivated to volunteer for their communities when the course materials are combined with the MSPP. The Japanese drama and the MSPP reinforce the idea that what students learned from their nonprofit organization were not just local issues but global ones, and that their small contribution can significantly improve their society.

Table 1

Table 1. Survey responses: number of students who indicated that the MSPP class experience was "positive" or "very positive".

Question	Count	%
The Mayerson Project enhanced my understanding of the Japanese drama and the documentaries that we watched in JPN 332.	11	73
The Mayerson Project enhanced my understanding of the Japanese drama and the documentaries related to the Mayerson theme that I researched	14	93
The Japanese drama and the documentaries enhanced my understanding of the Mayerson Project and the theme that I researched.	11	73
The Japanese drama and the documentaries in JPN332 increased my compassion for others.	14	93
The Mayerson Project increased my compassion for others.	14	93
The Japanese drama and documentaries enhanced my awareness of social needs, especially those related to the topics that the class researched through the Mayerson Project	15	100
The Mayerson project enhanced my awareness of social needs, especially those related to the topics that the class researched through the Mayerson Project.	10	67
The Japanese drama and documentaries enhanced my desire for volunteerism.	9	60
The Mayerson project enhanced my desire for volunteerism.	13	87
My interest in Japan was enhanced because of what I learned from the Japanese drama, documentaries, and the Mayerson project in this class.	13	87
My perspective of social issues has changed as a result of this course.	14	93
I would recommend a Japanese course with the Mayerson project to others	11	73

Conclusion

While the survey data indicates that the synthesis of Japanese drama/documentaries and the MSPP increased students' interest in civic engagement, the comments in the survey also demonstrate another impact of the synthesized approach on students. It changed students' perceptions of Japan. In their answer to the question, "If your perspective of social issues has changed as a result of this course, please explain how," one student wrote, "I knew about all of these social issues in Japan, but I think the documentaries helped me comprehend how prevalent and widespread these issues can be. It helped engage my thoughts and that can create more care for these topics," or "I really learned a lot about poverty in Japan. It is not an issue that is apparent to the common outsider."

Adding the MSPP to the course content also helped students make connections between the situation in Japan and the US. This is reflected in students' comments, such as, "It [the class] brought perspective. Sometimes it's easy to distance yourself from issues in a country like Japan that is so far away", and added "but the Mayerson Project gave us a chance to see that those same issues are still going on even in our own culture, even if we don't see it often. It helped me relate even more to the people in the videos that way," and "This project told me that American social issues are connecting Japanese social issues."

The data and the comments both suggest that this combined teaching approach enriches students' education and their college experience while at the same time helping local nonprofit organizations to be recognized and appreciated for their work. While most comments in the course evaluation were positive, one student expressed their desire to use more Japanese in the MSPP component. Since students only researched and interviewed local organizations, students used English to communicate with them. Our next project is to extend the MSPP to a global

setting and work with nonprofit organizations in Japan, increasing students' opportunities to improve their Japanese skills. This project will enhance their understanding of Japan by allowing students to communicate directly with Japanese organizations and learn about the relevant social issues firsthand.

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Reading Leo Tolstoy in Russian: Motivation, Hybrid Approaches, and Cultural Contexts

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Irina Avkhimovich

Department of Modern Languages, University of North Georgia

Abstract

This article provides a pedagogy practice report on a reading course for undergraduate learners of Russian, with a focus on teaching selected chapters from Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* in the target language. The theoretical framework is bridging various approaches to reading in L2 with motivation studies. The course presents Tolstoy's novel in the context of essential historical and biographical information, film adaptations, and relevant Internet media content. The report gives examples of successful activities and assignments that create personal connections for students and build intercultural competence. The outcomes demonstrate that the strategic application of bilingual Russian-English instruction can be a very productive path to teaching critical thinking and fostering long-term motivation for autonomous reading.

Keywords: reading, motivation, Russian, Tolstoy

Reading in L2 and Learner Motivation: Theories and Practices

In the U.S., Russian literature courses are offered almost exclusively in English, particularly at the undergraduate level (Martinsen et al., 2014, p. 1; Comer, 2016, p. 4). Russian is a difficult language that belongs to category 3 (Foreign Service Institute, 2023). Mastery of this language at the advanced level is usually beyond the standard hours of instruction. This situation creates a serious dilemma because Russian classical fiction is essential for cultural competence in this field. In modern Russia, literature exists in the nexus of historical, political, and broad cultural discourses, as an "arbiter of national identity" (Emerson, 2008, p. 2). Consequently, Russian programs require extensive academic study of Russian literature in English and offer courses that are cross-listed with the general education curricula or other majors. Such arrangements create a baffling situation where Russian literature, being so central to the field, is frequently taught in English (Comer, 2016, p. 4). As a result, the methodology of teaching literature in Russian receives little scholarly attention in Russian studies.

I am offering a pedagogy practice report based on my experiments in teaching Russian literature in Russian to third- and fourth-year undergraduate students. I will discuss the 19th-century survey course, with a focus on the segment dedicated to Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* (1867), where students read a few chapters from the novel. This regular course is required for majoring and minoring students and is offered every other fall at our institution; it alternates with a similar survey course on 20th-century Russian literature. I will demonstrate the practical applications of several content-based approaches and present a detailed account of successful teaching practices. My goal is to contribute to the ongoing discussions on content-based instruction and the language-literature divide. For that purpose, I combine research in L2 reading with motivation studies.

Dörnyei and Ushioda (2021) state that "…a great deal of L2 learning takes place outside of class over a long period of time. Therefore, students also need some form of motivational boost that will have a lasting impact beyond the classroom" (p. 123). I maintain that bilingual instruction can be highly efficient in promoting long-term motivation for reading literature and, generally, autonomous learning. L1 (English) is necessary for developing intercultural competence at the early and intermediate stages of language learning. Among the scholars, Bernhardt (2011) bases her research on compensatory theory of reading. She emphasizes "idiosyncratic variables in reading" convincingly argues in favor of using learners' "…L1 literacy capacity to the fullest." (Bernhardt, 2011, p. 39).[2] As teachers, we must remember that we introduce many of our students to the classical authors. I want to keep students engaged and demonstrate why this knowledge of fiction and history is essential for understanding today's world. If this teaching intention is successful student may explore more literature independently and stay inspired to achieve linguistic and cultural fluency.

Students pursuing the study of Russian at our institution frequently express interest in government careers, especially in intelligence, and translation/interpretation. Occasionally, they express interest in video-game localization. Most jobs in these fields require not only speaking proficiency but also refined cultural competence, advanced or superior proficiency in listening and reading, and translation skills. In the discussed course, elements of L1 instruction and translation assignments are geared toward building those skills.

Some articles from the past 20-30 years specifically discuss teaching Russian literature (and other content) in the target language. However, continuous scholarly discussions are not

[2] In further support of my argument, Coyle, Hood, and Marsh, D. (2010), Lin (2015), and Cenoz (2015) discuss the importance of bilingual instruction and the applications of L1 in K-12 education. While college-level learning is considerably different, it has a similar overarching goal of building and maitaining fluency in two or more languages.

extensive in this area. Ars Rossica (2014) is a collection of articles that engage with theories and practices of teaching Russian literature in English translation. In contrast, an earlier article by Rosengrant (2000) successfully advocates for teaching short authentic literary texts to intermediate-level students in Russian and provides many excellent ideas for interactive activities and language-building techniques. Overall, this scholar provides a rather isolated report with very brief discussions of methodologies or future directions in research and practices. Kulibina (2001) focuses on reading comprehension rather than contexts or vocabulary work and suggests that contemporary texts provide better motivation for students than classical fiction. This is a valid approach, yet I have received very enthusiastic reactions from students to the Russian classical authors. Keefe (2004) provides valuable ideas and a list of texts for intermediate-level students. Blech (2007) supports teaching short texts to intermediate-level students, and I concur with this approach. In addition to short stories, I suggest including short excerpts from the opening chapters of famous classical novels.

Comer (2016) focuses on teaching vocabulary via authentic literary texts. He brings attention to the language-literature divide in Russian studies and points out the gaps in research on the subject (p. 3) He then proceeds to introduce the sequences of scaffolding techniques for reading, using the example of Pushkin's short story *The Shot*. He notes that academic discussions in Russian around these texts are considerably above students' language skills. For that reason, the historical and cultural contexts could be provided in English (Comer, 2016, p. 27), and I mostly agree with this solution. In my opinion, we should consistently apply intermediate-high and advanced-level practices in L2 that are much broader and often simpler than strictly academic discussions (see also Bernhardt, 1995). For example, we can ask interpretative how/why questions and assign narratives on plot summaries and characters' profiles. We can

also introduce key historical terms and concepts in both Russian and English, such as, "Decemberists" or "serfdom."

In another engaging pedagogy practice report, Zheltoukhova (2022) describes an experimental content course in Russian. It is based on the non-fiction book *One-Storey America* by Il'f and Petrov (written in 1935) that is accompanied by a 21st-century book and a travel TV show, both of the same title. All these works explore the Russian perceptions of the U.S. culture. While the course is tailored to heritage and advanced learners, her practices offer very productive ideas for student engagement. Zheltoukhova develops activities that frame a teacher's own cultural and linguistic identity, incorporates multimedia content, and links intercultural learning to students' personal experiences. All these components are very important for my teaching philosophy.

We can also gain valuable perspectives on Russian studies from the extensive research on reading in English, French, and Spanish as foreign languages. Case studies and statistical reports reveal the challenges that are very similar for Russian studies and probably universal to teaching any foreign language: difficulty in achieving advanced proficiency; integration of language and content; having student-centered discussions in L2 (see also Byrnes & Kord, 2002). In French and Spanish, approximately half of the majors graduate with intermediate-level language skills (Darhower, 2014, p. 398). A considerable amount of scholarship on French and Spanish is dedicated to bridging the gap between language and content and building advanced language skills. Peasani and Allen (2009) summarize the following methodologies in reading that have been developed by various scholars: standards-based instruction – 5C; the 3R model: recognize, research, relate; cultural and technical literacy; and dialogic reading technique (pp. 66-68). Donato and Brooks (2004) study evaluations and conclude that teachers' and students' goals

usually diverge: teachers emphasize linguistic and cultural competence, whereas students are frequently interested in authors' life stories and broad relatable "situations in life" (p. 195). These findings perfectly correspond with Carter and Long's (1991) approach to teaching literature in L1 than can be summarized as the textual, cultural, and personal growth model. In these terms, Donato and Brooks' findings demonstrate that foreign-language teachers focus more on textual and cultural aspects. In comparison, students express high interest in the personal-growth aspect. Therefore, the personal-growth model may be borrowed from the theories on L1 teaching and adjusted to reading in L2.

The discussed scholarship offers many valuable ideas for developing the curriculum and teaching practices. However, the surveyed scholarly works do not fully explore students' motivation to read literature, especially in the long perspective. "Motivation is seldom addressed explicitly in reading classes and teachers do not typically recognize the need to teach for motivation" (Grabe, 2009, p. 379). Several challenges are specific to teaching contemporary or classical fiction. First, students begin reading authentic works at the Intermediate Mid or High level when learners may experience a loss of motivation as the novelty of a foreign language wears off (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021, pp. 141-142). Second, language learners do not necessarily see classical and contemporary fiction's relevance either to their cultural competence, their personal experiences, or the current global issues: "…less than half of the students rated being able to read and write texts as very significant, and less than one third rated cultural understanding as very significant" (Peasani & Allen, 2012, p. 64). Third, the communication media are undergoing fast-paced changes that modify the status of the works of art created in the pre-digital era. People consume large amounts of integrated textual/audial/visual content, which

affects students' and teachers' cognitive abilities and processing habits.[3] Finally, the global image of the target language and culture needs to be taken into consideration, and the Russian culture finds itself in a prolonged challenging situation.

As I strive to teach reading with a constant focus on student engagement, the following components are essential to my teaching practices and overcoming the articulated challenges:

- maintaining teacher's motivation.
- 5C framework (Communications, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons, and Communities). More specifically, I have the following components: communicative assignments and class activities; contemporary global issues and contemporary Russian culture; comparisons between Russian and American history and society; students' personal experiences; and building community in the class.
- multimodal content: texts, in-class discussions, visual arts (painting, photography), film, and new digital media (YouTube vlogs and video essays, Reddit, the Internet humor).
- assignments aimed at developing advanced-level language skills (guided discussions, oral presentations, creative writing).
- L1 component: building superior-level skills in students' L1, developing critical thinking, and fostering long-term motivation for future independent reading.

As a researcher, I initially specialized in literature, which stemmed from my lifelong passion for reading and studying fiction. Personal enthusiasm helps me immensely in creating a positive collaborative atmosphere in the classroom. I heavily rely on my accumulated academic knowledge in the fields of literature, theory and philosophy, cultural studies, art history, and social sciences. Learners' motivation is closely linked to teachers' motivation: "…research has

[3] Libschner (2017) describes some approaches to teaching media via multiliteracy framework.

consistently identified teachers' dedicated passion and enthusiasm as a key facet of effective instruction as well as a strong determinant of students' motivation and emotional experiences" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021, p. 165). At the same time, I have been teaching teach all levels of the Russian language and several upper-level content courses in Russian and English for more than ten years. This experience has resulted in my growing interest in content-based instruction and the shift to SLA research.

Several case studies and statistical reports demonstrate that "…students learn best in classes that require a substantive and personal response to literature in both classroom interaction and in writing" (Nystrand et. al., 1997, p. 58). I strive to re-actualize 19th-century Russian fiction and demonstrate its importance for understanding our times. For example, we explore Leo Tolstoy's political and ethical views and his celebrity status during his lifetime (Emerson 2008, p. 1). Students learn about his avid followers, the "Tolstoians," who could be anachronistically described as a "fandom." Such phenomena create familiar connections with the contemporary celebrity and fan culture and learners have consistently demonstrated high levels of engagement in these conversations.

Feedback from students provides encouraging testimonies to our collaborative achievement. I am proud of one particular response that reflects the success of my overarching goals: "I didn't like reading fiction or studying history before this class" (Anonymous, 2020). I believe that the L1 component was extremely helpful for this outcome. Another student's feedback succinctly summarizes the highly desirable outcomes of my teaching experiments [original spelling and punctuation preserved]:

> My favorite of Irina's classes was Russian Literature of the 19th Century. Her knowledge on the subject is astounding and her passion for the materials encouraged us to

> read more intentionally. Analyzing and dissecting any literature into parts regarding the author's intent, cultural background, historical events, and other implications is a large undertaking. Irina was able to accomplish these things in a way that helped us to better understand what we were reading, even as the text was in a language not our own! Through this class, Irina helped me to understand Russian history in a way that allows me to better understand the political climate and cultural implications of Russia today. Irina's class was not simply a study of books written over a century ago but rather a tool I still use to better understand the current world around me (Kubas, March 2023).

This student understands the importance of historical perspective and seeing cultural continuity, which I always emphasize in my literature courses. Exploration of the cultural links with our era always receives enthusiastic responses. The cited commentary provides excellent evidence in support of teaching history and authors' biographies together with literary works.

Framing Classical Fiction: Historical Contexts and the Diachronic Perspectives on Culture

The majority of the texts we offer in the 19th-century literature course are well-known to any person who went through the education system in Russia. These works are formative for the Russian collective identity and serve as a source of references for various forms of high as well as popular culture. Belknap (2014) states the importance of teaching contexts but poses questions about their extent and the instructor's expertise:

> We should always investigate and always teach everything in its context, biographical, psychological, historical, political, economic, literary, linguistic, religious, etc., in our Russian literature, and, equally, in other subjects. … Our scholarly or pedagogical use of context is … either amateurish or dependent on the expertise of others (p. 33).

Regarding this issue, I propose a pragmatic, functional, approach: teaching contexts that summarize the key historical events and their impact on modern Russia and explain cultural references found in the specific literary texts.

I open my literature courses with a conversation about students' reading habits. When I stir the conversation toward non-fiction and various online content, almost everyone is an avid reader. I frequently encounter responses about history books, biographies, psychology and self-help books, news and special-interest websites, and contemporary genre fiction. I also make inquiries about students' previous knowledge of Russian literature and 19th-century history and culture. Occasionally, some students come to this course having read a few major works in translation. In the past few years, I have worked with students who had virtually no previous knowledge of the subject. Tolstoy's *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, and Dostoevsky's *Crime and Punishment* sometimes get recognition of their names and titles.

Introducing Russian classical fiction, I aim at providing a "road map," in the form of historical summaries in English that combine texts and visual materials. For that purpose, I compile excerpts from academic books on history, tailoring them to the authors' biographies and the historical references in their literary works. I use widely known cultural references as the anchors for students that grab their attention and help with memorization. For example, everyone knows "The Romanovs," so my students learn about the five Russian emperors of the 19th – early 20th century and the major historical events during each of their reigns. Students study the social structure of 19th-century Russia, which introduces the essential vocabulary for the readings throughout the whole semester. Below is a small excerpt from my materials:

дворяне [dvoriane], the nobility, the landowning class;

крестьяне [krestiane], peasants, subsistence farmers;

крепостное право [krepostnoe pravo], serfdom law;

чиновники [chinovniki], administrative officials, bureaucrats.

Each of the listed words or phrases is an important cultural concept that belongs to the core vocabulary in 19th-century writing. They are loaded with meaning and specific cultural connotations. My supplementary materials provide further explanations with direct links to the authors and their works. For example, Leo Tolstoy was a wealthy aristocrat who owned lands and serfs before the abolishment of 1861. Later, the same freed peasants rented his lands, and his family kept running their large estate. Major characters in *War and Peace* (who live in the 1800s-1810s) have similar backgrounds, and many of them are directly inspired by Tolstoy's ancestors and extended-family members (Zorin, 2020, p. 8).

Throughout my teaching career, I have observed consistently enthusiastic responses to social history, the accounts of the lived experiences of the past, and the social science materials, such as demographics. Russian Empire's society preserved some feudal structural features and was profoundly different from contemporary American society. "Compare and contrast" activities occur inevitably and stimulate learners' interest because they trace the connections with the history of their own country. A prominent example is the abolishment of serfdom in Russia which took place in 1861, very close in time to the abolishment of slavery in the United States. I moderate the discussions in English about the implications of these events, social classes and their shifts, the authors' backgrounds, and the male-dominant narratives of the Russian 19th century. These theoretical frameworks and introductory discussions are essential for academic learning as well as student engagement. I think that teachers need to introduce these contexts when the students have their first experiences with reading Russian fiction, for situating the works chronologically and better cultural comprehension.

Students appreciate the guidance in the vast ocean of content, such as a short bibliography of good introductory books. Books by Orlando Figes, who is a scholar writing for the broader public, are my principal sources for the history summaries. I regularly assign chapters from his books, such as his most recent *The Story of Russia* (2022). Some students become interested in these works and purchase them for independent reading, which is fulfilling one of my biggest aspirations as a teacher.

I want to emphasize the importance of multimedia content (texts, pictures, videos) for the introduction to long literary texts. This diversification reflects the integrated content of current media where we habitually consume audio-visual and textual information simultaneously. I use history, biography, clips from novel adaptations and biographical series, virtual museum exhibitions, and, occasionally, educational content from YouTube. We also explore the Internet popular culture, such as Russian jokes with references to stock characters and catchphrases that originate from Russian classical fiction.

Biographical Contexts: From Personal Connections to Social Issues.

At the beginning of each segment, one or two students do a biographical presentation on an author. I provide guidelines that list the most important and memorable facts (that often belong to the common knowledge in Russia) and tie the biographical events to major historical events. Initially, an author is merely a name that does not trigger any associations for students. The biographies flesh out an author as a human being, a person with both unusual and relatable experiences.

Students can write and narrate these presentations in Russian because they learn the core vocabulary ("born, raised, went to school, got married" etc.) at the elementary and intermediate levels. Leo Tolstoy's long and productive life is remarkably suitable for opening discussions on

Russian history and society, also serving as an excellent introduction to *War and Peace*. Before each in-class presentation, I ask a few or all the students in the audience (depending on the class size) to ask the presenter(s) one or two questions in Russian. This highly effective activity ensures active listening and often leads to discussions after the presentations.

Below are some examples from Tolstoy's biography (Zorin, 2020) that opened successful in-class conversations on very acute social issues. As a military officer, Tolstoy served in the devastating Crimea War of the 1850s. This historical episode is closely linked to ongoing geopolitical conflicts, and the discovery of such links is very insightful. Tolstoy had a very troubled marriage, and his wife Sofia Andreyevna, arguably, demanded autonomy and accountability beyond the social conventions of her time. As a result of his spiritual search, Tolstoy re-wrote the four Gospels in an attempt to create his own version of Christian faith and ethics and was eventually excommunicated from The Russian Orthodox Church. His followers, the Tolstoians, propagated pacifism, vegetarianism, and living with minimal material possessions (that can be linked to much later anti-consumerism). Tolstoians became an international phenomenon and could be found in the United States. Tolstoy's teaching of "non-violence" influenced Mahatma Gandhi and, subsequently, Martin Luther King Jr. After the discussions about Tolstoy's life and work, I usually show a few selected clips from *The Last Station* (Hoffmann, 2009) that present a fictionalized account of Tolstoy's last years and his struggles related to his family, his followers, and his ongoing internal ethical questioning.

This pedagogical direction has proved very efficient for students' active in-class participation and created positive "emotional contagion" that helped build peer enthusiasm (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021, p. 166). Of course, the conversations on those complex issues had to be conducted in English but I found this class component necessary. Students tend to remember

their own influential contributions to the discussions. By guiding learners through the highlights of Tolstoy's personal story, I demonstrate his strong relevance to acute contemporary problems and his underlying legacy in our time.

In-Class Activities: from IRE to Collaborative Discussions

In the pilot course, I taught Tolstoy's short story *The Prisoner of the Caucasus* and found the students not very engaged. Next time, I replaced that short story with the selected chapters from *War and Peace,* along with several clips from BBC's eponymous mini-series released in 2016. This course segment was very successful and enjoyable to the students. *War and Peace* is a widely known seminal novel with a palpable presence in contemporary popular culture (Emerson 2008, p. 3). Students are invariably pleased to discover that they are able to read and understand Tolstoy's writing, which helps them maintain their motivation.

The reading assignment for *War and Peace* totaled 15 single-spaced Word Document pages, which was studied over the course of four lessons. My basic criteria for selection were the introduction of the main characters and initial points in the plots and a representation of the novel's typical settings. The opening few chapters of the novel take place at a semi-formal social gathering (a "salon") and conveniently introduce many main characters. The guests engage in conversations about the ongoing war with Napoleon. These chapters have a detailed introduction to Pierre Bezukhov, one of the most important characters in the novel and a frequent mouthpiece for Tolstoy's ideas. In the further chapters I selected, the scenes at the Bolkonskys' estate present the three principal characters from this family: Andrey Bolkonsky, his sister Maria, and their dictatorial father. After that, I included a scene where Natasha Rostova has a warm conversation with her mother, in stark contrast to the hierarchical and reserved relations of the Bolkonskys.

Finally, I selected the chapters that showcase Tolstoy's observations on the chaos of war and narrate young officer Nikolay Rostov's inglorious first-battle experience.

I regularly employ the IRE (Initiation – Response – Evaluation) techniques for assignments and in-class conversations. Scholars justly point out that sometimes instructors excessively rely on intermediate-level IRE (Darhower, 2014, p. 398). However, these activities can still be very useful, if planned with building language skills in mind. Rosengrant and Lifschitz (1996) provide many excellent ideas and templates for questions and discussion topics in their collection of Russian classical pieces that is designed specifically for learners of Russian. Darhower (2014) demonstrates that this type of classroom activity can be successfully upgraded: "Studies in both L1 and L2 literature classes point to the potential learning benefits of restructuring the IRE-type classroom discourse to a more collaborative format" (p. 399). I find regular IRE activities necessary for speaking practice in the content courses. Russian grammar is very complex, with constantly changing endings, and learners greatly benefit from repetition and paraphrasing. Reifman (2014) demonstrates the approaches to including more specific grammar activities. These activities allow them to practice familiar and new grammatical forms and syntactical structures.

I develop content questions in Russian and assign them as homework, posted a week or more ahead. Some questions check basic comprehension and require paraphrasing, whereas others are open-ended "how" and "why" interpretative questions that require close reading and short-paragraph responses. Another excellent assignment is compiling character profiles, describing their looks, character traits, relationships, and opinions. *War and Peace* revolves around the stories of a few families, which is excellent material for language practice. Family relationships, friendships, and personal conflicts are infallible, eternal themes that readers are

universally enthusiastic about, even at rigorous and theoretically oriented undergraduate seminars that are taught in L1 (Belknap, 2014, p. 39).

Importantly, I confine the evaluation part of the IRE activities to the written assignments. The graded rubrics in the syllabus explicitly state that a student must answer each listed question and write one-paragraph-long replies when prompted, for a full score. Any participation in L2 is welcome in class and counts positively for each student. I aim to create "…situations in which students can demonstrate their particular strengths and make a useful contribution" (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021, p. 165). Learners' ability to participate in the in-class discussions is dependent on their completion of the reading and writing assignments.As a sample, I am providing a translated excerpt from homework that was assigned in Russian:

> 1. Read this passage: "Each visitor performed the ceremony of greeting this old aunt whom not one of them knew, not one of them wanted to know, and not one of them cared about... The aunt spoke to each of them in the same words, about their health and her own, and the health of Her Majesty, "who, thank God, was better today." And each visitor, though politeness prevented his showing impatience, left the old woman with a sense of relief at having performed a vexatious duty and did not return to her the whole evening" (Tolstoy, 2022, Book 1, Part 1, Chapter 2).
>
> How does Tolstoy describe "the ceremony of greeting [the] old aunt"? What is Tolstoy's opinion on the high society customs and rituals? Write your analysis of this passage (8-10 sentences).
>
> 2. Pierre Bezukhov. Describe his physical appearance and social background. How do the other guests perceive him? Does the salon hostess like him? Why or why not? Provide 2-3 or more quotes from the text to show the evidence for your answers.

3. Andrey Bolkonsky. Describe his physical appearance and social background. What are his plans for the near future? What is his attitude toward high society? How is he treating his wife? What does it say about the state of their marriage? Cite 2-3 or more passages from the text to support your argument.

4. Which character interests you the most and why? (Write 5 or more sentences).

Such assignments have proved manageable for any student who is at the Intermediate-Mid level or above. If a learner struggles to understand some parts of the text, they may choose to work with parallel texts in Russian and English. In accordance with the principles of differentiated instruction, students' individual proficiency level and reading/writing fluency determine the varying amount of time needed for task completion.

The class discussion begins in Russian, and I ask the exact questions from the homework (as cited above). Even though students begin by reading their replies aloud, this activity is a good pathway to more spontaneous conversations in the L2. This IRE activity checks reading comprehension and functions as vocabulary and grammar practice. Less proficient students can make contributions thanks to their conscientious preparation. For the interpretative reader-response questions, I may address the same question to a few students. They should listen to each other and comment on each other's replies, adding information, agreeing, or disagreeing. After that, we proceed to more open-ended questions that are not part of the homework assignment. Sometimes I distribute worksheets with short parallel passages in Russian and English for close reading and making observations in Russian.

More complex conversations that go beyond reading comprehension are off limits for most undergraduate learners of Russian: "The discussion of motivations is often stymied because the students lack even the most elementary vocabulary to describe the character's feelings and

grammatical constructions to express cause" (Comer, 2016, p. 24). I suggest switching to the student's native language, after the Russian segment, in order to fully integrate students' responses and thoughts into the classroom activities. Based on my experience, if students develop any interest in an assigned literary text, they accumulate quite many ideas that they are unable to express in L2. If we strictly adhere to Russian these ideas will not be expressed, which may lead to learners' frustration and falling enthusiasm. Besides, a teacher's feedback and responses to students' observations may sometimes be above the group's proficiency in listening. I overcome this limitation by the regimented usage of L1. I have always found those end-of-class discussions in English very insightful and rewarding for every participant. Based on students' responses in the evaluations, I strongly believe that these conversations in English helped in building long-term motivation in class throughout the semester as well as encouraged independent reading and research.

In the last part of the discussed lesson, I announced the transition to English, asked for any additional thoughts and comments, and posed more complex questions, for example:
As you noticed, the characters' speech mixes French and Russian. What does it say about the nobility culture in Russia in the early 1800s? Why are Pierre's opinions on Napoleon controversial and even scandalous?

Below is an example of the pedagogical procedure moving from reading comprehension to more theoretical discussion. During the described lesson, the students initially provided the following paraphrasing replies about the old aunt, in Russian: "The guests are polite. They think that the old aunt is boring. They do not notice her afterward. They greeted her because they had to." By saying these replies, the students practiced the known words (such as "polite" or boring") as well as the new vocabulary, such as "to notice" or "a duty." Later, the conversation in English

evolved into a discussion of the universal unwritten social rules and rituals. One student observed that Tolstoy often made astute and ironic comments on social etiquette. In response to that, I introduced the literary technique of "defamiliarization" [ostranenie] that is perfectly encapsulated in the passage about the old aunt and, generally, essential for understanding Tolstoy's writing style (Shklovsky, 2016, p. 16). We found two other examples of this narrative technique in the discussed chapters, and the students received an assignment to find more "defamiliarization" examples in the upcoming chapters. Thus, the group learned about the importance of attentive reading and close analysis of the text. We practiced a reader-response approach where the learners invoked their personal experiences to connect with the story. Additionally, recognizing irony in fiction and experiencing humor and laughter together is highly efficient for student engagement and building the community.

At the end of the lesson, we watched a clip from BBC's mini-series *War and Peace* (2016). Even though it is a British adaptation, I find it to be an excellent introduction to Tolstoy on film. The older Russian adaptation directed by Sergei Bondarchuk is grand and somber, whereas the British series focuses more on character development and relationships. After watching the opening scenes at the salon, the students noticed (before I did) that Pierre Bezukhov's suit did not look as well-fitted as the other character's clothes, which visually emphasized his awkwardness and outsider status. In some scenes, the direction accurately rendered angles and close-ups described in Tolstoy's text. This activity perfectly served my purpose of demonstrating the cinematic quality of Tolstoy's writing style and creating a memorable reading and learning experience.

Assessment: Tests, Recordings, and Writing Assignments.

Scholars provide many excellent ideas for vocabulary-building activities that incorporate narration and interpretation in Russian (Rosengrant, 2000; Katz, 2002; Comer, 2016). Combining the practices of fellow scholars and my own ideas, I regularly diversify in-class activities with the following exercises:

1) reconstruct the correct order of the story from the synopsis sentences on paper cards.

2) match the quotes with the characters; name their prominent character traits.

3) identify a character from the description (listening comprehension).

4) compare two families in the novel: The Bolkonskys and The Rostovs.

I have successfully tested another type of written assignment for building vocabulary. Each student creates a vocabulary list for a work we read. After that, they compose sentences using any 15 words from their lists. If a group has higher levels of proficiency, I may assign writing a coherent story or a dialog using at least 15 words from their lists. Alternatively, students may choose to compose a story or a dialog as an extra-credit task. I find this task highly efficient because students must produce texts using the new vocabulary, and many of them enjoy the creative aspect of this assignment.

Several listening and conversation exercises are also very effective. Students choose a character, summarize their storyline, and talk about their personality traits and relationships with the other characters. A variation of this assignment can be a plot summary in Russian. First, students submit their written texts. After receiving the edited and proofread texts, they prepare in-class oral narrations or post their narratives on Flip. In class, peers provide questions and comments for each other. On Flip, they can do the same by posting comments on each other's videos. In addition, I ask them to explain the choice of a character. The reasoning may stem from

entirely personal reasons as long as it is expressed in Russian. For example, one of my students compared Prince Nikolai Bolkonsky with her own strict parents.

Classical fiction provides excellent opportunities to teach writing. Besides the discussed summaries, my students write compositions. Rather than academic essays displaying structured arguments, I assign more flexible "response" papers at the intermediate level. Assessment rubrics include two separate grades for content and language. The language section includes grammar, syntax, spelling, and appropriate writing style. Creative-writing assignments are very beneficial for fostering motivation in students. Even at the intermediate level, language learners are capable of writing short stories or converting a third-person text into a first-person narrative. For example, based on the *War and Peace* chapters, students can describe the evening in the salon from one of the character's points of view and use first-person narration. Tolstoy's narrator is omnipresent, and the author habitually uses free indirect discourse. If a student chooses, for instance, Pierre Bezukhov, they can explore his family history and his admiration of Napoleon.

I include regular translation quizzes. Students receive a paragraph in Russian *in advance* and prepare the translation from Russian into English that they need to complete during the quiz without dictionaries. I select a paragraph from an actual literary work or compose a stylized text myself, using the relevant vocabulary. I use frequency dictionaries to develop the vocabulary lists. The translation task checks new vocabulary and reading comprehension. Besides, it prepares learners for possible future careers that require translation skills.

Art Projects and Content Creation.

I assign creative projects at the end of the semester after the students accumulate new knowledge of literary works, authors' biographies, and major historical concepts. Even though students strongly prefer engaging with the Internet culture rather than reciting poetry or pursuing

traditional art projects, this activity still allows them to demonstrate their growing knowledge of the materials. The ideas include but are not limited to the following:

- Learn a poem by heart and recite it in class.
- Create an art installation inspired by the class materials.
- Paint a picture based on the class materials.
- Draw a page in the graphic-novel style that reimagines a few scenes and dialogs.
- Create a playlist of Russian songs for a character or a story; present your playlist and explain your choices of music in class.
- Create 10 or more memes based on the class materials, with captions in Russian.

I have added memes and playlists to the list of options only in one most recent course, and they turned out to be the students' most popular choices. Because of that, I will continue including these options for end-of-semester projects. Memes are an extremely versatile form of the Internet culture, and the students can be very creative and very funny. We looked at the memes together in class, and some of them were created using recognizable viral "meme templates." Besides sheer entertainment, the memes showcased remarkable knowledge of the course material and functioned as inside jokes for all the classmates. Environments that are open to new forms of popular culture and encourage humor are excellent for building the learners' community.

Concluding Remarks.

Teaching classical fiction to intermediate-level learners of Russian is a task that requires extensive preparation, strategic planning, and constant adjustment. Reading long literary texts in the era of the fast-paced digital revolution is another unprecedented challenge for educators. Scholarship on reading in foreign languages poses many profound questions and provides many excellent practical ideas. However, it does not always explore the long-term motivation that is

integral to becoming a proficient reader in L2: “Fluency instruction is almost nonexistent in many L1 and L2 classes, and many teachers do not know how to include a fluency component into the instruction” (Grabe, 2009, p. 379). First, students do not always realize the importance of independent learning, beyond classroom participation and completing homework assignments, which is why teachers should explicitly articulate this message on a regular basis. Second, instruction times are insufficient for building fluency, which is why teachers should constantly focus on fostering long-term motivation for independent reading. As a scholar and a practitioner, I aim at bringing together reading pedagogy and motivation studies in content-based instruction.

As I demonstrated, classical fiction, authors’ biographies, historical contexts, and social histories offer great potential for discussing acute current topics, such as social conflicts, wars, gender relations, shifting moral values, etc. Students consistently demonstrate high degrees of involvement when materials are presented via these frameworks. I maintain that these contexts and the opportunities for college-level discussions and debates should be introduced simultaneously with the works of literature. Consequently, I advocate for bilingual instruction. Students read short stories or selections from novels in Russian and complete intermediate written and oral assignments in Russian. At the same time, students can acquire nuanced intercultural knowledge and develop their critical thinking with the help of L1. The most important area of improvement for my future teaching practice should be the development of more structured policies for using L1 and L2 and maximizing L2 learning. My teaching practice report points at possible directions for bridging the chasm between language instruction in Russian and content instruction in English, which is so characteristic of Russian studies in the United States. Hopefully, such hybrid practices result in the creation of positive emotional

imprints that are necessary for long-term motivation and autonomous learning aimed at achieving advanced and superior proficiency.

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From Translator to Post-Editor: A Different Perspective on Teaching Translation to Language Majors

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Maribel Campoy

Department of Global Languages and Cross-Cultural Studies, University of Indianapolis

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Abstract

With the ever-growing demand for professional translators and the need to prepare students for the workforce, many institutions are developing and implementing a curriculum that includes new translation courses for language students. Many students report being asked to translate different types of documents and materials for their respective jobs or during internships and practicums. Most of them do not have any experience translating and, therefore, they need some training if they want to produce an adequate rendition. As a pedagogical tool when learning a language, translation exposes students to comparing language systems between their native and target languages. This linguistic awareness can then help students to use different strategies to solve problems during the translation process and further develop their linguistic skills. This paper will explore diverse teaching approaches used in an undergraduate translation course, particularly in regard to the incorporation of a computer-assisted translation (CAT) tool in the classroom.

Keywords: language learning, translation, post-editing, CAT tool

Introduction

The Covid-19 pandemic posed many challenges for all facets of education, including higher education, as traditional in-person classes had to switch to online delivery. One of the core courses that undergraduate language majors must take to complete their degree at the University of Indianapolis is *Spanish Translation*. I will focus on the different approaches I used to teach this translation course at the undergraduate level before and after Covid-19. What tools should we -- translator educators-- use to fulfill the proposed objectives? Are they different from the ones used before the pandemic? The way language and translation educators deal with issues like student level of language proficiency, technology literacy, syllabus creation, types of activities used in the class, use of machine translation as well as interactive tools to engage students in the learning process will have an impact on student outcomes. My goal is to share my experience teaching translation using traditional methods and activities while changing the focus from translating to post-editing using web CAT tools such as Phrase TMS (formerly known as Memsource).

Background

The Department of Global Languages and Cross-Cultural Studies at the University of Indianapolis offers a Spanish translation course as a requirement for language majors and minors. With Spanish being the second language in the United States, this translation course responds to the increasing need to prepare language graduates who are able to aptly communicate in Spanish in a variety of professional settings. The emphasis is on the translation of a variety of texts from the fields of business and medicine, as well as consumer-oriented materials and literary pieces. Some of these texts are translated from English into Spanish and others from Spanish into English. While the focus of the course is mostly practical, some theoretical translation principles and

concepts are introduced as they are considered a vital component in the formal training of a professional translator.

Although some heritage speakers enroll in this class every semester, most of the students are English speakers who have had approximately 3 years of language study. Therefore, they are considered intermediate students who still lack the fluency and linguistic mastery needed to produce translations at a professional level. What I aim for with this course is to expose students to real life translation assignments so that they can experience what a professional translator would do in their practice. Translation then becomes a tool for language learning. Although research about the role that translation has in the field of second language acquisition is still limited, some studies suggest that translation in foreign language classes results in better understanding of structures of the two languages while strengthening students' translation skills. Al-Musawi (2014) explains that:

> As a strategy for language learning, translation can be used as an effective medium for developing the learners' communicative competence and for teaching properties and types of meaning underlying semantic relationships, communicative language functions, sentential information structure, and discourse values. Seen from this perspective, translation is a cognitive activity that assists students in learning new phrases and expressions in the target language, and using them to communicate meaning to others, on the one hand, and a problem-solving exercise, in which the students develop their capabilities in data analysis and processing, on the other hand (para 5).

Many scholars have also conducted studies that suggest that translation is a highly motivating activity for students and that they perceive it as a useful tool when learning the target language

(Carreres, 2006). Translation, then, is an effective, valid tool in foreign language learning and can be used in the university classroom to improve knowledge of the languages (Braçaj, 2019).

Pedagogical Approaches

My approach to teaching translation comes from Don Kiraly's social constructivist theory, where students reflect about the role and work of professionals in this field and therefore are active translators from day one. Kiraly (2000) suggests that translator education should focus on authentic translation tasks and move towards a form of dynamic and collaborative socio-construct that is shared by translator educators and translation students collectively. This approach moves away from a teacher-centered classroom and is based on the idea that the translation practice is a collaborative and social space. As Kiraly argues, "translators today cannot afford to be linguistic hermits, sitting alone behind a typewriter and surrounded only by dusty tomes. Translators are embedded in a complex network of social and professional activity" (p. 207). Therefore, I try to keep the classroom an open space for my students to discuss and collaborate in their translation assignments so that they understand the social and professional activities that translators complete on a regular basis. For that reason, most of the assignments I present in class are authentic tasks and documents from local sources.

Over the years teaching this class, I have modified the syllabus several times and have revised the student learning goals as well as the content and the activities presented in the course. Some of the topics I have included are literary, medical, marketing and business translation. Since the textbook market for translation courses has been very limited and I was never satisfied with the books I found due to their being either too advanced or not challenging enough, I have created my own materials by gathering activities and real documents for students to practice their grammar and vocabulary in Spanish. Some of the activities that I have created for the class include editing

translated documents, applying translation procedures when dealing with cultural terms, translating short stories, children's books, medical questionnaires, business documents, creating bilingual glossaries, etc. Students work in pairs or groups and discuss their translations, edits, or activities and then the student-translators solve the translation problems by applying different techniques or procedures.

Use of Machine Translation (MT) in Language Learning

During the pandemic, as the class was taught online and students had to complete their assignments at home, there was a notable increase in academic misconduct, specifically using web resources and automatic translators to complete translation assignments. After some incidents related to plagiarism, I realized that not only this use of technology was not going away, and also that incorporating it in the classroom might be beneficial to better prepare students for the realities of translation jobs. The questions that I pose are: Can students use technology in the class and still gain valuable language and translation experience? How can MT help strengthen their linguistic knowledge? The increased quality of MT in the last decades has led to growing use of technology in many contexts. In the professional context, an increasingly common workflow involves the use of a machine translated text as a raw translation to be corrected or post-edited by a translator. Post-editing (PE) "involves correcting the translation output generated by the machine translation system, a task performed by the human editor or translator in order to bring the text to a certain pre-determined standard in terms of language style and appropriate use" (Quah, 2006, p. 11). Some of the pedagogical advantages of using MT and PE activities in the classroom are preparing students to meet the growing demand for professional services, the increase of accuracy and terminological consistency, and the improvement of students' perceptions of MT and its capabilities. However, research on use of MT and PE in language and translation learning is still

insufficient and there is no model on how to teach it. To address this gap, I incorporated a CAT tool called Memsource in my translation class in the fall of 2021. In this class, students were introduced to basic concepts in MT as well as the importance of the role of post-editor in the translation field.

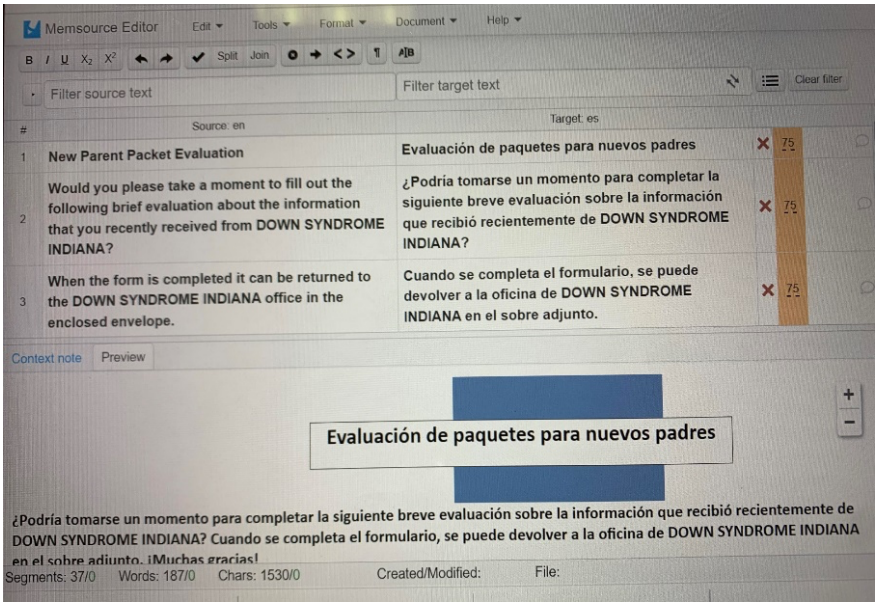
Implementation & Student Feedback

In preparation for the PE activity using Memsource, I brought a medical questionnaire to the classroom that was used with Spanish-speaking patients in a local physical therapy clinic, and students practiced how to categorize authentic errors found in the document. I asked them to recognize the type of mistake (grammatical, lexical, spelling, register, word choice, etc.) and to count the number of errors made in the questionnaire. This activity proved useful for students to put their language skills into practice, as well as their knowledge of terminology in the medical field. Another assignment that students had to complete involved editing a tax information Power Point that was translated into Spanish by a novice translator and that contained numerous errors of literal translation which made the document very difficult to understand for Spanish-speaking clients. Students were also given the opportunity to reflect on the role of the translator and the quality of translations that are sometimes published for patients or clients.

Once students were familiar with the process of editing translated documents, I introduced the concept of MT, a brief history of the development of these tools and the definition of PE. Memsource (now called Phrase TMS) is a cloud-based translation management system and CAT tool that is mostly used by freelance translators in Europe. I had some previous experience with this tool and its user-friendly interface and it works well with Word documents. I gave students instructions on creating an account and uploading some documents that we would use to practice with post-editing the translation produced by Memsource.

Figure 1

Memsource Workbench



For their final project, students worked with a document from English into Spanish called "New Parent Packet Evaluation", provided by Down Syndrome Indiana, a local non-profit agency whose mission is to support and help children and families with Down Syndrome. As they saw the MT output, they reflected on the quality of the translation, types of errors and improvements (if any) that could be implemented. Another assignment that I asked them to work with using Memsource was an excerpt of a short story from Spanish into English by Cynthia Alarcón Múgica in which the author uses several examples of colloquialisms and slang. The discussion around this assignment proved to be very insightful for students as they realized the number of mistakes present in the translated document and reflected on the applicability of MT for literary texts. They were also required to turn in a bilingual document with both the original text and the translation with their edits.

Some of the reflection questions I asked them to include in their project were:

- How did you approach the Post-editing task? That is, did you read the ST and then make sure that the MT reproduced the information, or did you just read the MT output and only referred to the ST when you had some problematic words or passages?
- What did you think of the raw MT output?
- What would/did you change/not change?
- What kind of errors did you find, if any? How would you classify them?
- How would Memsource help you in your translation tasks? Would you use it again or do you think you'd prefer to translate your documents from scratch? Why? Why not?

At the end of the semester, some students included comments about their experience with the CAT tool and I was pleased to see positive reactions and feelings towards working with automatic translators. Some of the comments include:

> Overall, however, both outputs were better than I expected them to be. It [the CAT tool] was able to recognize and translate more slang and non-formal language than I thought it would. I also had low expectations because I had never used a service like this. I think it was helpful to have a base to start the translation because it is kind of daunting to look at a piece and have nothing on the paper. I think having something to work with was useful and, for me, it gave me more motivation knowing the brunt of the work was already started. I do think I would prefer it over starting from scratch. I think with using a source like this I have to pay extra close attention because there are so many small details and things, such as register, that are really easy to look over. With Memsource I think it is a well set up program and I like the use for being able to create the bilingual documents and being able to edit stuff outside of the application. I think if I needed to use it again I would; I actually really liked it. I would be curious to know if when you select Spanish from different

countries how the translations would differ, I do think that might be something interesting to play around with. (Student Comment)

"Memsource can be very resourceful for translation tasks because you don't have to start from scratch. However, it eliminates the translator's personal dialect and can be too literal at times", another student reflected.

In sum, working with a CAT tool like Memsource in the classroom led to a positive learning experience since students had the opportunity to reflect on the advantages and disadvantages of these automatic translators as well as on how they can be of help during the translation process.

Conclusion

Some questions about the use of MT in language classes are still unanswered. With the use of MT and PE in translation classes, will the students rely on technology rather than on language learning? Is using this type of technology not conducive to language learning? Is the use of MT considered a form of plagiarism? Should PE skills be taught in programs that are not translation specific? I believe that more research needs to be done to address these issues. However, my overall experience using Memsource in the class taught me that students developed positive reactions to learning how to use these tools in the translation process. PE seems effective in the process of language learning in that students are asked to analyze texts, practice and review grammar rules and sentence structure and vocabulary, in addition to preparing themselves for the professional world as detail-oriented translators or editors. I believe that I will continue using this and other MT tools in the final modules of the translation courses so that students can familiarize themselves with the real jobs of translators and post-editors, which can then in turn

attract them to pursue a career that, without a doubt, will continue to be a profession in high demand in our globalized world.

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Promoting Equity and Inclusion Through Poetry: A Project to Empower Students to Speak Out Against Anti-Asian Discrimination

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Yating Fan

Department of World Languages and Literatures, Boston University

Abstract

This article presents a transformative project within the Intermediate Chinese Language Course at Boston University, which creatively addresses the surge in anti-Asian discrimination following the COVID-19 pandemic. By employing poetry as a tool for advocacy and empathy, students are empowered to voice their stand against injustice and support the Asian community. The article explores the purpose, implementation, and significance of the project, highlighting its impact on students' engagement and cultural awareness. Through collaboration, creative expression, and linguistic exploration, the initiative fosters an inclusive learning environment and exemplifies the potential of artistic means to advocate for marginalized communities and drive societal change.

Keywords: creative expression, diversity, inclusive learning, social justice

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought about not only physical but also social and psychological challenges worldwide. Unfortunately, it has also led to a rise in anti-Asian incidents in the U.S., including bias, threats, violence, and hate crimes towards Asian and Asian American individuals. According to a report by Stop AAPI Hate, over 10,000 incidents have been reported since the pandemic began, and the number is still rising (Stop AAPI Hate, 2021). These incidents pose a threat to the health and well-being of members of the Boston University (BU) community, which includes more than 30% Asian students (Boston University, 2021).

To address these issues and promote belonging and inclusion, the Intermediate Chinese Language Course at BU has implemented a project that encourages students to write poems in Chinese to speak up for Asian communities and stand in solidarity with them to stop anti-Asian discrimination.

This article aims to describe the project, its purpose, and significance, as well as its impact on the instructor's teaching and students' engagement and learning. Through creative expression, the project not only raises awareness about anti-Asian discrimination but also empowers students to take action against it. Additionally, it offers a platform for Asian and Asian American students to share their experiences and voices, which is essential for building a more inclusive and just society.

This article hopes to inspire other similar initiatives in support of marginalized communities and contribute to ongoing conversations on social justice and inclusion.

Project Description

The Intermediate Chinese Language Course at Boston University aimed to help students explore the Chinese language and culture and develop cultural sensitivity and understanding. As

part of the course, students participated in a project that encouraged them to use their language skills to speak out against anti-Asian discrimination and support the Asian community.

Various literary genres provide excellent supplementary materials for teaching grammar and vocabulary (Khatib, Hossein, & Rahimi, 2012). These resources are not only useful for students but also help teachers create a more comprehensive learning experience that results in better learning outcomes. Arthur (1968) highlights that using novels, short stories, fables, poems, and plays for language teaching is valuable because it provides both a literary and language experience. Poetry explores human experiences and universal themes, which provides students with a platform to express their emotions and ideas. This enables them to engage personally in writing tasks, thereby aiding in the acquisition of a foreign language (Heath, 1996). In addition, using poetry as a creative medium can be a powerful tool to promote social justice and support inclusion and diversity. Poetry has been used to express social and political issues and to create a sense of solidarity among different communities. By encouraging students to use poetry to speak out against anti-Asian discrimination, the project at BU aimed to empower students to advocate for social change and promote empathy towards different cultures and backgrounds.

The project involved a workshop titled "Chinese Poetry of Hope and Healing: Reflections on Equality and Empathy". The workshop aimed to introduce students to the beauty and significance of Chinese poetry and inspire them to use poetry as a means of promoting empathy and social change. The workshop began with an introduction to the healing properties of Chinese language, and how Chinese poetry has been used as a form of therapy and self-expression for centuries. Students were then introduced to a range of Chinese poems. Through close reading and analysis of these works, students gained a deeper understanding of the emotions and values embedded in Chinese poetry and learned how to identify different poetic devices, such as

metaphor, simile, and repetition. In the second part of the workshop, students were given the opportunity to create their own works of poetry. The speaker guided students through a series of exercises designed to help them generate ideas, find the right words to express those ideas, and structure their works effectively. At the end of the workshop, students had the chance to participate in a sharing session where they read their works aloud to their peers. This session offered a supportive environment for students to share their creations and receive constructive feedback and encouragement.

Following the workshop, students were paired with a partner to work on a creative project together. The project focused on using poetry to support the Asian community and call for an end to anti-Asian discrimination. Students had the freedom to choose from a variety of formats for their creative poetic work, including a poster, hand-made artwork, a social media post, a photo with a message, a drawing with a description, a four-panel comic, a short poem, a short story, or another format approved by the teacher. By giving students the flexibility to choose their format, the project encouraged them to be creative and expressive while also allowing them to explore their individual strengths and interests.

Throughout the project, students were encouraged to work collaboratively with their partner and to engage in frequent discussions to exchange ideas and provide feedback. The collaborative aspect of the project promoted a sense of community and supported the core values of belonging and inclusion. In addition to working closely with their partner, students also received guidance and support from the instructor, who played a vital role in helping them refine their ideas and develop their creative work. The instructor provided students with feedback and suggestions throughout the project to help them explore new creative directions and build on their strengths.

At the end of the semester, students' works were gathered, published, and shared with the BU community and the public. To ensure that the works were accessible to a wider audience, English translations of each poem were provided. The resulting manuscript provided a powerful call to action, urging readers to persist in the fight against oppression and to foster a society that embraces inclusivity for all.

Purpose and Significance of the Project

The purpose of the project was to use poetry to support and advocate for Asian community members in the face of anti-Asian discrimination and hate crimes that have risen drastically in the US since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic. The project aimed to give students a platform to express their opinions and feelings on this important issue, to call for an end to anti-Asian racism, and to support inclusive values at Boston University.

The project's significance to equity and inclusion is multifaceted. First, the project aligned with BU's vision to attract, support, and promote a wide variety of voices and backgrounds on campus. Through the project, the students demonstrated its commitment to standing with its Asian, Asian American, and Pacific Islander communities and promoting inclusivity and diversity.

Moreover, the project served as a powerful call to action for the broader community to come together to address the problem of anti-Asian discrimination with compassion and respect. The publication of the poems in a book format made the works accessible to a wider audience and furthered the message of unity and solidarity.

The project's significance also extended to the participating students. The project provided a unique opportunity for students to develop their artistic and linguistic skills while also promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion. Through their participation in the workshop and the

creative project, students gained a deeper understanding of the cultural significance of Chinese poetry and developed greater cultural awareness and sensitivity. By using poetry as a means to call for social justice and inclusivity, the project inspired students to make meaningful contributions to their communities and to society as a whole.

Reflections and Feedback

The project offered a truly unique and enriching learning experience for the students, as it provided them with a fascinating opportunity to delve into the world of Chinese language and culture through the captivating medium of poetry. At the outset, many students found themselves faced with a noteworthy challenge—the task of expressing their ideas and emotions within the constraints of Chinese poetry, a realm they weren't accustomed to exploring creatively. Nevertheless, owing to the collaborative nature of the project and the guidance and support from the instructor, they were able to conquer this hurdle and embark on an incredible journey of growth.

The project's collaborative approach was pivotal in nurturing the students' language skills and fostering cultural awareness. Through working together, they exchanged insights, cultural nuances, and linguistic expertise, gaining a deeper appreciation of the subject matter and forming a strong bond within the class. The atmosphere of unity and support not only enhanced their language acquisition but also instilled a sense of belonging and community among the students.

It was heartening to witness the positive feedback from the students regarding the project's impact on their learning and engagement. In particular, the project provided a safe space for them to candidly express their thoughts and feelings about the social issues confronting the Asian community. It encouraged them to explore and embrace their own cultural identities and values, fostering a profound sense of self-awareness and pride.

Beyond language acquisition, the project had a transformative effect on the students' perception of the power of poetry. They discovered that through the medium of verse, they could effectively advocate for empathy and social change. This realization added an inspiring dimension to their learning journey, as they began to view language not merely as a tool for communication, but as a potent instrument for influencing hearts and minds.

Conclusion

The creative project was a meaningful initiative that provided a platform for students to express their thoughts and feelings about the social issues affecting their community. By emphasizing the power of collaboration in promoting empathy, understanding, and social justice, the project not only fostered a more inclusive and compassionate learning environment, but also showcased the potential of using creative expression to support marginalized communities and drive social change.

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Expanding Intercultural Education Through the Documentary Gaze: A Powerful Tool for Technology and Learning

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Megan Grady and Gabriela Muniz

Center for Academic Technology and Dept. of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures

Butler University

Abstract

In our collaboration, we explore a dynamic pedagogical practice that combines technology and the documentary film genre. Through a Seminar Course in Spanish, we utilized technical workshops and group work to encourage students to create short documentaries, leveraging multiple languages (English, Spanish, and visual) and storytelling techniques. This hands-on approach empowers students to participate in their education actively and offers a captivating lens through which they can explore the real world.

Keywords: Documentary film, Workshop, Technology, Reality and Fiction, Languages Learning

Introduction: The Importance of Technological and Visual Literacy

Teaching today is characterized by a dynamic and demanding environment. The rapid expansion of digital media, technological advancements, and competitive educational programs aimed at improving higher education bring about promising prospects. However, they also impose significant responsibilities and pressures on both students and faculty. As educators adapt their roles to that of content facilitators, they continually integrate emerging digital tools into their teaching practices, occasionally requiring assistance in implementing new software and instructional methods. This necessitates critically evaluating the pedagogical limits and affordances of technology. Concurrently, there is a need to cultivate a pedagogical approach that fosters novel opportunities for engaging communities and conveying knowledge narratives that inspire and empower students and educators while contributing to cultural knowledge.

This article introduces the documentary film genre as a rich educational resource that not only enables teachers to explore technology in collaboration with their students but also empowers the students themselves to share stories that enrich cultural knowledge. In exploring this genre, students develop inclusive communication practices, hone their critical thinking skills, gain facility in a variety of digital technologies, and discover the importance of stories and storytelling. Audiovisual language serves as the lingua franca for our current generation of young learners, with documentary language serving as a tool of empowerment and a means to share their stories. By teaching a Spanish course centered around documentary film, we were able to embrace multicultural narratives, practice the target language, gain a deeper comprehension of contemporary visual language, and engage students as digital creators.

The documentary genre has become increasingly widespread thanks to digital technologies. With this in mind, we embarked on an innovative endeavor to integrate this genre

into a Spanish seminar course, aiming to introduce students not only to the expressive possibilities and cultural insights offered by documentary media but also to the intricacies of digital tools employed in its production and dissemination. Initially, our course was based on a textbook titled *Documentary Cinema* (Hertel & Harrington, 2017), which offers a well-curated selection of documentaries that explore Latin American culture and provide valuable opportunities for practical reflection. In addition to this resource, we expanded our repertoire to include a diverse range of more recent materials sourced from websites showcasing the work of activist filmmakers. This expansion prompted us to empower students much in the same way that these filmmakers are empowered—through meaningful connections to their communities that are given expression through the creative power of digital tools.

Various factors contributed to our ability to rethink the course in this way, chief among them being the massification and affordability of technology. Even without the benefit of extensive media training, our students are already generating visual content rooted in their experiences—from Instagram posts to Tik Tok videos to digital stories edited using smartphone apps. As such, many of them intuitively understand how the boundaries between fiction and reality blur in the realm of social media (Campo, 2020). In our course, we ask that students exhibit fidelity to reality, trading in fancy filters and other mainstays of social media storytelling for a commitment to honesty and integrity in their interactions with their audience. We provide comprehensive instruction on effective strategies for sourcing, analyzing, verifying, and transforming materials into compelling documentaries, all the while asking students to consider how their own creative decisions—camera angles, background music, interviewing techniques, etc.—influence audience perception of their subject matter.

In implementing this approach, we achieved five key outcomes:

1. **Enhancement of communication and linguistic skills**: Students primarily spoke Spanish during class activities, but they also conducted interviews in English, which they subsequently translated and prepped for bilingual presentation, subtitling their documentaries in Spanish as appropriate.
2. **Integration of technology into content creation**: Students delved into the realm of technological tools, exploring the diverse expressive possibilities they offer.
3. **Flexibility in course implementation**: This documentary course was designed to accommodate various modes of delivery, including hybrid formats, traditional classroom settings, and even online courses.
4. **Critical examination of the documentary genre**: Students engaged in a thoughtful exploration of the genre, emphasizing the importance of reliable information and of fostering a discerning approach.
5. **Participation in an inclusive community project**: Students had the invaluable opportunity to interact with individuals from different countries and engage with native Spanish speakers, contributing to an inclusive and collaborative learning endeavor.

Developing the Course:

As mentioned above, we made a deliberate decision to deviate from our initial version of the course, which was erected and timed around a succession of textbook chapters. While our chosen textbook, *Documentary Cinema*, offered valuable educational audiovisual resources and facilitated access to the target culture, we aimed to empower students to actively manipulate language and film materials. We believed that their learning experience would be more effective if they were not confined to the passive consumption of videos provided by their instructors.

The documentary genre, with its ability to convey complex and contemporary events, employ essayistic narration, and emphasize the importance of verifying data and incorporating diverse perspectives, presented a unique opportunity for students to delve deeper into modes of representation. It allowed them to transcend the role of mere spectators and become creators of visual artifacts that tell life stories or shed light on societal issues. Our exploration of this genre prompted us to recognize the need for teaching practices to incorporate more media and visual communication. We realized the importance of embracing audiovisual language in the classroom, adapting our approach to align with the "pictorial turn" that W.J.T. Mitchell (1995) has identified—the shift from the dominance of the written word to a cultural shift that values the image and its power to convey messages. In today's visually saturated world, it is crucial for students to develop literacy in producing audiovisual materials.

Initially, our perception of the documentary genre was that it would serve as a valuable stimulus for discussions in advanced Spanish and as a tool for critical cultural analysis of reality. However, we were fortunate to have a second instructor who specialized in media technology join our class, complementing the course with workshops. The COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a massive shift to online classes, created a heightened demand for multimedia materials. Teachers turned to technology and creatively utilized it to engage students who were grappling with the shock of the situation. In our case, in 2020, due to the COVID-19 circumstances, we had to teach the final portion of our course on Latin American documentaries online. This presented an opportunity for practical activities that explored various forms of communication, genre creation, and the fundamental principles of visual language. As a result, students engaged with three languages throughout the course: Spanish, visual, and technical. This holistic approach integrated their ideas through different forms of expression.

Our focus on the components of film enabled students to analyze the thematic content of the documentaries they watched while also examining the techniques employed and recognizing the technical aspects and aesthetic features of the films. This approach allowed them to gain a deeper understanding of how images convey ideas.

Furthermore, the most effective way to comprehend this genre, with its emphasis on evidence and reality, was to provide students with the opportunity to create their own documentaries. This involved working in creative groups and assuming distinct roles in the production process. As a result, the course encompassed two main modalities:

1. Reflection and analysis of themes and techniques used in various types of documentaries.
2. Practical workshops that provided an explanation and hands-on experience with the different technologies that enable audiovisual storytelling.

In the following sections, we will present the outcomes of the Spanish course "El documental latinoamericano" ("The Latin American Documentary"), which has proven to be successful in both online/hybrid and traditional approaches. In the first part, "Reality and fiction," we explore the significant role of documentaries as educational and cultural materials, addressing real-world issues and seeking evidence related to current and historical matters. Topics covered include how reality has shaped our perception, the increase in students adopting a critical lens, and the importance of narratives and inclusivity within our communities. In the second part, "Practical Workshops," we will delve into the workshop approach, where students engage with technical and audiovisual language to shape their ideas and projects. Finally, in the last section, "Takeaways," we will provide insights into the student experience and course deliverables.

Reality and Fiction

In an era characterized by an overwhelming amount of information and misinformation, the dissemination of both valuable and deceptive narratives has become alarmingly easy, exerting influence on public opinion. Social networks have only amplified pre-existing methodologies used for this purpose. In response to these challenges, the educational system must actively foster the analysis of facts in contrast to emotionally charged and fictitious narratives. It is crucial to cultivate intellectual freedom and equip higher education students with critical tools to navigate the vast sea of information. Simultaneously, educators themselves seek robust defenses against those who seek to impose their agendas through coercion and deceit. Education represents a resolute quest for truth, as it is this truth that liberates us from falsehoods. Within the realm of documentaries, facts and truth form the core content, even when creative elements are employed to convey reality. Consequently, the ability to discern what is real becomes a skill that can be honed and applied through the practice of documentary filmmaking.

The audiovisual language of documentaries provides a valuable platform for students to engage in authentic conversations and explore various linguistic elements. Through the process of creating their own documentaries, students not only gain practical experience but also develop a heightened sense of critical reflection. This transformation became evident when we analyzed the documentary *Which way home* (Cammisa, 2010), which depicts the journey of immigrant children seeking to reach the United States. At this point, our students had already begun their own filming endeavors, and their active participation led to insightful discussions. They raised thought-provoking questions based on their own experiences, such as: Why did the director prioritize filming over assisting the children? How do humor and tragedy intersect in this documentary? What purpose does the foreground serve? What techniques were employed to

encourage the children to share their stories off-camera? How did the director establish trust with the children? These interventions showcased the tangible benefits of the practical exercises. Students demonstrated their ability to discern the boundaries between fiction and reality, while critically analyzing the form and content of the film from both the perspective of spectators and creators.

Practical Workshops: Learning Through Action

Creating audiovisual work is a collaborative endeavor that encompasses multiple stages. In this Spanish course for English speakers, students must navigate various languages. Alongside the target language, Spanish, they must grasp the technical aspects of documentary filmmaking, understanding its visual vocabulary and the diverse functions and production stages involved. Documentaries are remarkably rich in testimonies, images, and archival material. To actively engage students and merge these languages effectively, we incorporated a series of workshops where they could explore visual techniques and reflect on the communicative impact they generate.

Our approach involved forming student groups that functioned as a community of learners. José Bowen's book *Teaching Naked* (2012) highlights the benefits of cooperative activities in higher education. He argues that direct instruction often hampers spontaneous exploration, as the teacher is readily available to provide answers and solve problems. Following Prince's perspective, he notes that incorporating active, cooperative, or problem-based learning during class time enhances retention, application skills, and deeper understanding across various disciplines.

Workshop 1: Documentary Photography (La fotografía documental)

Preparation for Picture Analysis:

To introduce the topic of documentary photography, we presented several photographs encompassing artistic, decorative, and documentary styles. We tasked students with categorizing these images, enabling them to identify the documentary genre among the diverse visuals. They swiftly selected documentary photos and explained their contents. Two notable photographers that emerged in their discussions were Delilah Montoya, a Hispanic photographer, and Sebastião Salgado, a Brazilian social documentary photographer and photojournalist. Ferrer (2021) explains that Montoya's photographs often depict families from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, Latinx families, and others with ancestral ties to the New World. These families served as excellent examples to demonstrate to students that capturing documentary photography does not necessitate technical perfection or traveling to distant lands but rather the ability to tell a compelling story.

On the other hand, Sebastião Salgado, through his art, elicits immediate emotional responses. As Nair suggests,

> Sebastião Salgado's photography invariably evokes a response. Some leave their exhibitions with tears in their eyes and feel ennobled, but at the same time, humiliated by the images they have seen, as if the pathos and splendor of these visions of human struggle and, above all, humanity's survival, had touched their foreheads with an extraordinary touch of light. (2012, p. 1)

Photography Workshop:

During the photography workshop, participants delve into various topics and activities, including reviewing photographs to emphasize the importance of understanding how photography and videography extend beyond the frame. Together, we:

- Discuss the elements that convey meaning in photography and videography, such as angles, framing, light, focus, and composition. Students are given this guide as a reference point for the discussion: https://create.piktochart.com/output/15782239-how-photographs-convey-meaning
- Explain how these elements can reflect our biases and influence the conveyed meaning.
- Provide examples of how framing can skew a situation or alter perception.
- Discuss the significance of revealing what lies beyond the frame, particularly in documentaries.
- Explore the diverse effects of lighting and its applications in different settings.
- Explain the various principles of image composition in photography and videography, including the rule of thirds.

Ultimately, this workshop aims to equip students with a heightened understanding and appreciation for the elements that constitute visual language. It becomes apparent to them that, much like the diverse impact of various parts of speech, the choices we make regarding image framing and composition hold significant influence. By recognizing the power behind these decisions, participants embark on a journey of discovery, where they unravel the intricacies of visual storytelling and the art of conveying meaning through imagery.

After the workshop:

Each element used in the workshops was examined and identified in the films shown in class. For example, when the photography workshop was given, we saw the types of shots, colors, textures, and distances in the frames of the film *Home* (Arthus-Bertrand, 2009) Regarding content, documentary photography is a genre of photography that aims to tell a story or convey a

message about a particular subject or issue. We notice in the final shot examples how the students put their knowledge to work with the visual language, they use composition, light, and color to convey emotions, atmosphere, and mood. They effectively use the visual language of photography to tell the story.

We asked them to create examples for the next class with the material learned in the workshop, following the instructions below:

1. Find a place where you think an event or news is happening.
2. Use the technical aspect you are learning to compose the image: deciding what elements to include in the photo and how to frame them. Make sure to focus on the critical elements of the story and frame them in a way that conveys the information clearly.
3. Attention to lighting: Light is essential for good photography. Consider the available light and how it may affect the image.
4. Be respectful: If you are covering an event or news involving people, ensure that you are respectful and get the necessary permission to photograph people in the image.
5. Edit the image: Make sure to edit the image appropriately to highlight the key elements of the story. The editing should be ethical and not misleadingly alter the image's information.

Most students follow these steps, go to their own neighborhoods or downtown, and effectively capture a photograph to explain to the group how it portrays an actual event or news. They demonstrated that understanding the elements of photography and videography conveys meaning effectively.

Workshop 2: Interview Strategies

Engaging in interviews with native speakers is a highly effective approach to practicing a foreign language. However, students frequently encounter difficulties when it comes to formulating questions in the language they are learning. To enhance students' language skills and foster their confidence as interviewers, we have compiled a set of valuable practices aimed at creating a comfortable and supportive environment for students to practice interviewing skills.

Firstly, we focused on educating students about communicative practices, emphasizing empathy and attentive listening to their interviewees. To generate interview questions and answers, we discussed topics from the course material and documentaries viewed in class, such as typical foods or fast foods, climate change, and immigration. By actively engaging in question-asking activities with their peers and immersing themselves in role-playing scenarios, students were able to cultivate their communicative skills and foster a deeper understanding of the interview process.

Next, we explored various examples of interviews in different documentaries viewed during class sessions. This exercise enabled students to recognize the diverse approaches employed in interviews. Some interviews were presented as casual conversations, while others featured off-camera questions, survey formats, discussions on specific topics, and a few aimed to capture the essence of the speakers, as one student eloquently expressed.

In addition to identifying suitable topics for engaging native speakers who possess opinions or compelling stories, students were encouraged to develop strategies for accessing potential interviewees. For instance, they learned to explain their language learning journey or display genuine interest in the interviewee's expertise. In online classes, students also utilized language exchange websites or apps to connect with native speakers.

Another important aspect was preparing questions, which involved collaborative group work. Each student proposed the types of questions they wished to ask their interviewee. Subsequently, they compiled a relevant list of questions aligned with the chosen topic of conversation.

By following these guidelines, students can maximize the benefits of interviews in documentaries, ultimately improving their language proficiency in an engaging and practical manner.

Interview Techniques' Workshop:

During the interview techniques workshop, we focus on imparting essential skills to students, enabling them to approach interviews with calmness and courtesy that instill a sense of ease in the interviewee. Through engaging role-play activities, students practice asking questions to both their peers and instructors.

A primary objective of this workshop is to teach students the art of asking open-ended questions that elicit detailed and meaningful responses from interviewees. We emphasize the significance of employing descriptive language to create vivid portraits of the individuals being interviewed, fostering an environment where they feel valued and included.

In addition, the workshop encompasses essential techniques for conducting interviews, including vox populi. This approach entails engaging in street interviews with random individuals to collect a wide range of perspectives and information, offering a glimpse into public opinion. It is important to note that vox populi is not advocated as a replacement for more rigorous, statistically significant research methods. Instead, it is presented as an introductory tool to facilitate discussions where diverse viewpoints can steer interviewers towards alternative

investigative avenues, enabling a holistic understanding of complex issues from various perspectives.

Following the workshop, students shared their experiences of managing nerves and feeling empowered during the interview process, particularly as they had the opportunity to utilize as much Spanish as possible. We encouraged them not to worry excessively about making mistakes during conversations with interviewees, but rather to focus on the act of communication itself. The objective was to establish a connection, understand the interviewee, and encourage them to express their thoughts. Personally, the students viewed the experience as a fantastic opportunity to practice and improve their language skills, further enhancing their overall interview capabilities.

Workshop 3: Narratives

Narrative preparation:

Using a foreign language to craft a narrative or plot is an excellent way of practicing the target language. It is an engaging way to write in Spanish and helps to improve vocabulary, grammar, and syntax. The workshop on narrative gave the students a sense of how to effectively structure their stories, enhancing their storytelling abilities and fostering a deeper connection with the target language.

The first step to prepare the students for the narrative workshop was a group exercise to recreate and reconstruct the plot of the last documentary viewed in class: *La mina del diablo* (*The Devil's Miner*) (Davidson & Ladkani, 2005). They needed to make a plot from a new perspective, so we picked the protagonist's little sister, Vanesa. We provided many photographs from the movie so students could organize a narrative to tell the girl's view of life in the

mine. The students used the visual material well, and every group came out with a different impression of Vanessa's life and interpretations of her thoughts.

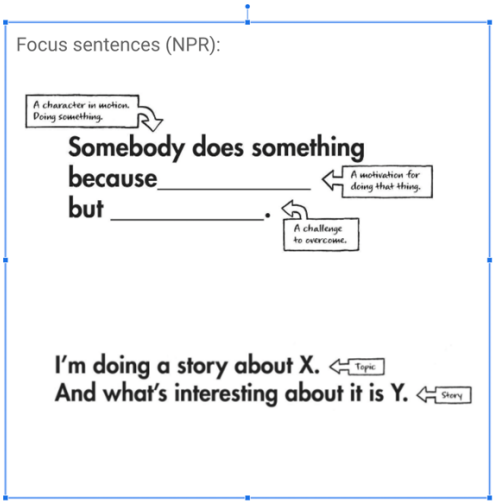
Narrative Workshop:

We begin this workshop with an analysis of existing narratives, encouraging students to explore films, documentaries, and written works to identify diverse narrative structures. This exercise deepens students' understanding of how different narrative structures effectively convey various types of stories. For efficiency's sake, we narrow our focus to discussing and applying the three storytelling structures outlined below. We do this not to constrain students' creativity or limit their options, but to get them thinking and talking about different approaches to telling stories in compelling ways.

The Three-Act Structure: This traditional framework divides a story into three distinct acts—Setup or Exposition, Confrontation or Rising Action, and Resolution or Denouement. Each act serves a specific purpose, contributing to the overall narrative arc.

The "e" Structure: A favorite among podcasters, the "e" structure starts in the present, delves into the past for explanations, returns to the starting point, and then moves forward to explore imagined futures or the questions that arise from them.

Focus Sentences: While not necessarily narrative structures, focus sentences serve as thought-provoking tools. They capture an entire story within a single sentence. Students can use sentence stems as prompts and expand upon them to structure their stories. Take, for example, these focus sentence examples featured in *Out on the Wire* (Abel, 2015):



Abel, Jessica, and Broadway Books. *Out on the Wire : The Storytelling Secrets of the New Masters of Radio*. First ed., B/D/W/Y/Broadway Books, 2015.

After gaining a solid grasp of these basic, time-tested storytelling structures, students can practice organizing and presenting their ideas in captivating ways. An essential component of the workshop offers students a valuable opportunity to put these structures into practice through collaborative storytelling activities. Working in groups, students collectively create narratives that incorporate diverse storytelling strategies. This activity not only sharpens their collaboration and brainstorming skills but also allows them to experiment with different narrative structures within a collaborative setting.

In addition, the workshop includes sound design exercises. Students focus on the intricacies of sound design, utilizing appropriately licensed sound effects and music to complement their narratives. Through this exercise, they gain an understanding of how sound can be harnessed to enhance storytelling and seamlessly integrate it into diverse narrative structures.

After workshop:

When crafting a narrative or plot together, students challenge themselves to use more complex structures and vocabulary than they might typically use in everyday conversation.

Group narratives can help students communicate among themselves and improve their writing skills and the ability to express themselves in the target language.

Activities in the regular class:

Drafting a story or narrative can be a fun and engaging way to practice the language, allowing the group to be creative and use their imagination. Creating the plot can help make the learning process more enjoyable and memorable. Overall, using a foreign language to craft a narrative or plot can be an effective way to practice the language, as it allows the use of the language in a meaningful and engaging way.

Workshop 4: Editing

Teaching video editing is challenging due to the vast array of different software options, variations in interfaces, and the constraint of limited class time. To navigate these challenges effectively, it is crucial to approach the subject with thoughtful consideration. Here are some key questions helpful in achieving that thoughtfulness:

1. How much time is allocated for your workshop?
2. Which three video editing skills are the most relevant or essential to the assignment at hand?
3. How can you incorporate an activity that allows students to gain hands-on experience with the software they will be using?
4. Is the software you plan to use widely available to all students, either through lab setups or library checkout services?

In applying these questions to our course, we concluded that dedicating 75 minutes of class time to introducing iMovie would be suitable. iMovie is a widely used video editing software included with Apple iOS and macOS devices. Despite this software being Mac-specific,

we were confident that students would have access to it through campus Mac labs or library checkout services. Moreover, iMovie strikes a balance by offering powerful features that meet the expectations of experienced editors, while also maintaining a user-friendly interface suitable for beginners learning in a single class session.

Our class session focuses on three fundamental editing skills: clip selection and organization, applying transitions and effects, and incorporating sound when appropriate. These skills lay a solid foundation for students to create compelling videos with iMovie.

First, in the clip selection and organization section, we provide students with a collection of video clips that can be seamlessly edited together to craft a concise one-minute story. To guide them through this process, we first assist students in labeling the clips and then demonstrate how to edit them cohesively using iMovie. Throughout this hands-on activity, we actively highlight common video editing pitfalls to avoid, including jump cuts, inconsistent audio quality, continuity problems, insufficient color correction, and pacing issues that can hinder the flow and cohesiveness of the video.

Next, in the section devoted to transitions and effects, we show students how to add transitions between video clips, cautioning them against some of the transitions that are so involved as to be bewildering. We also work on text effects like overlays for interviewee identification.

Finally, in the section on sound, we show students how to edit audio levels for consistency, have them incorporate appropriately licensed sound effects and music into their workshop projects, and introduce them to websites featuring Creative Commons licensed music and sound effects.

By engaging with these essential skills and completing practical exercises, students gain a solid understanding of video editing principles and how to avoid common mistakes. As such, they are sufficiently equipped to create the final deliverable for our class: a short documentary that presents well.

Takeaways

Online classes can broaden the field of study while including community.

Moving the course online was fine. We accommodated content easily: Online, we discussed and analyzed films, students worked in groups using Zoom and shared ideas, and we even had the latest workshop on "Editing" online. The final videos were genuine and told the story of the pandemic. The result was mixed, but we found two beautiful examples: one was the documentary *Los voluntarios de la Pandemia* (*Volunteers During the Pandemic*), which tells the story of a Harvest Bible Chapel, a Community Pantry in Illinois that had to increase its work, given the great demand for people who were unable to work due to the pandemic. The other successful example of transmitting reality in a documentary was *Los esenciales* (*The Essential Ones*). It describes the lives of essential workers during the pandemic and their sacrifice, exposing themselves to contagion, working overtime, and separating from their families for fear of contagion. The student who supervised that film works in a pharmacy. The film was very moving because that story of bravery was his story. That ability cannot be covered with lectures; it is necessary to allow students to experience diverse ways of relating to reality. The documentary is an excellent audiovisual genre to explore the social fabric and understand different perspectives. How do we combat the condition of indiscernibility between the territories of fiction and reality through the contemporary moment? The student can draw the line between fact and fiction through critical analysis generating the audiovisual creation of it; the

strategies to discern forms of manipulation of the real cannot be acquired through lectures. Our goal was to help students understand that documentaries are storytelling that explores real stories and issues using film or video. We oriented them to know the difference between fact, fiction, and opinion while simultaneously creating documentaries.

Reflections and ideas from students

A useful way to experiment with real conversations is through the audiovisual language of documentaries. By creating a documentary, students gain experience and learn about the languages involved in the process. Also, we noticed that they reflected more critically; after their first incursions with the camera, it was a change. For example, when we were discussing the documentary *Which way home*, a film that portrays the journey of immigrant children seeking to reach the United States, the students, who had already started shooting, pointed out the difficulties faced by the director of that film and raised discussions based on their experiences, such as: Why was the director able to continue filming without helping the children? Why are there humorous scenes on such a tragic topic? What is the reason for using that foreground? What questions do they ask off-camera to make children talk? How do they earn the children's trust? What would you do in his place? In their interventions, we could see the benefits of the practices. They discerned the limits between fiction and reality, and reflected on the form and content of the film as spectators and from the creator's perspective.

Inclusivity

In Spring 2022, we had the opportunity to teach *El documental latinoamericano* again. The mode was utterly face-to-face. Most of the participants live on campus. We suggested the topic of inclusion and social justice in Indiana. The idea was to learn more about the Hispanic community organizations in this state. Although we gave them a list of available organizations

they could visit, most students preferred to do their work at the university, many arguing that it was a hot topic and necessary to discuss the institution's efforts to increase diversity. Also, many lived on campus, and the second part of the semester was too busy to travel around the city.

We provide the following instructions to direct the work:

1. Find compelling stories and people. You should look for individuals or groups with persuasive stories and experiences about inclusivity and social justice. Student addressed three topics: Immigrant Workers, International Students, and Lack of Diversity. These personal stories will bring the message to life and create an emotional connection with the audience.
2. Use diverse voices and perspectives. It is important to include diverse voices and perspectives in your documentary to provide a well-rounded view of the subject. Ideal for these topics, they need to have individuals from divergent backgrounds, cultures, races, genders, and socioeconomic statuses.
3. Use effective storytelling techniques learned in the workshops.

The result was four interesting documentaries: *Diversidad en Butler; A través de las ventanas de Jordan Hall; El sueño de Butler;* and *Vida extranjera en Butler* (*Diversity at Butler*; *Through the Windows of Jordan Hall*; *Butler's Dream*; and *Foreign Life in Butler*). The first documentary shows the perspective of students who notice the lack of diversity at the university and interview professors who talk about the efforts that the administration and faculty make to increase diversity on campus. The students address the varsity team, showing that the lack of diversity is problematic; everyone works to create a more inclusive and welcoming environment. The story shows a lack of diversity that produces shame. *El sueño de Butler* tells stories of immigrant workers at Butler. The directors convey empathy and emotion using the student's perspective, the

history of the workers when they arrived in the United States, and what factors prompted them to migrate. The atmosphere the film creates is friendly and intimate. Finally, *Vida extranjera en Butler* comments on the reception of foreign students at the university and what they think of the country that welcomes them.

All students indicated how their documentary work had mobilized them to act on the issue of diversity at the university.

Conclusions: Class material & advice

Today the production of documentaries is growing vibrantly and dynamically. Documentaries have risen since the Lumière brothers' first film, *Workers Leaving the Lumière Factory in Lyon* (1895). That historical event began in the cinema, indicating the need to deal with reality. On the current rise of the genre, Paul Ward (2005) announces: "One thing is certain: because documentaries tell stories about the real world, they will always be part of that world and must continue to evolve with it." (p. 101). Understanding, analyzing, and exercising this genre is a stimulus for the critical and communicative skills that higher education can provide to students.

Advice going forward:

- It is necessary to incorporate in our class material examples of documentaries made by students. Young documentary makers' ideas and themes increase students' participation in the discussions. Some good examples are the work at https://www.youthdocumentary.org, and, in Spanish, we also find https://webdoc.projectehebe.com/es/. These sites show films that address critical issues for young people and show the importance of visual language as a tool for critical knowledge. Some universities in Spain have developed a Webdoc in

which young people tell their life stories. The Webdoc is proposed as an audiovisual method of youth empowerment and a research tool for new dynamic proposals for participation and training pathways for young people.

- In class, do not forget to use examples from your students.
- Go outside the campus with the students. Take pictures with them. Take them to look for nearby topics in their community, the problems in their neighborhood or city, university life, etc.
- Promote inclusivity through interviews. This can be achieved by using inclusive language, avoiding unconscious bias, asking diverse interview questions, creating an inclusive interview environment, and including diverse interviewers. Ensure that the interview process is fair and equitable for all candidates and students.
- Use a screening function as the final project and invite community members, family, interviewers, and helpers.
- Practice interculturality and a second language: Use Zoom or other online tools to find people worldwide who want to talk. Students could benefit from using online tools like this to create a global approach and establish connections between unlikely interlocutors. It's all about expanding your horizons and learning from different perspectives! And they can practice languages. As Bowen emphasizes, "Learning now happens in more mobile, customized, and varied ways. We must consider how we can advance student learning by thinking equally about learning environments inside and outside the classroom." (p. xiii)

In addition to the points mentioned above, we would like to underline the importance of dedicating more time to filming and editing our students' ideas in the context of creating

documentary films. By actively allowing young people to participate in filmmaking, we can harness the power of their unique perspectives and insights. Engaging students in filming not only serves as a pedagogical methodology for practicing languages and communication but it also highlights the significance of learning from emotional experiences in life.

Through the medium of documentary filmmaking, students have the opportunity to reflect on their own experiences and those of others. This process enables them to develop critical thinking skills necessary for discerning what is real and what is not. By actively engaging with the subject matter and shaping their narratives, students can gain a deeper understanding of the world around them. This type of learning, rooted in authentic emotional experiences, has the potential to create a more accurate and genuine representation of reality.

Therefore, by spending more time filming and editing our students' ideas, we enhance their creative abilities and foster a deeper connection with the subject matter. This hands-on approach empowers them to become active participants in their education and encourages them to explore the world through the lens of storytelling.

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Empowering Higher Education Foreign Language Teachers with Effective Peer Observation and Feedback Practice

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Kara McDonald and Sun Young Park

Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center

Abstract

Peer observation is considered as one of the professional development tools enhancing the quality of teaching and learning process in higher education (Sullivan, et al., 2012). However, it is not a widely practiced or popular professional development activity except on occasions involving pre-service teacher training courses to assimilate newly hired instructors. Using an online survey, the authors sought to examine the perceptions of peer observation and identify the most and least important characteristics of effective peer feedback among in-service teachers. 16 foreign language (FL) teachers voluntarily participated in the survey (10 Chinese and 6 Russian). Findings suggest that a majority of teachers acknowledged that peer-observation is a legitimate, gradual learning process requiring appropriate knowledge, skills, and attitudes. However, they emphasized the importance of respect and positive attitudes as significant characteristics of feedback, which differs from descriptions in the literature. Interestingly, most of the participants viewed peer observation in relation to a part of the mentoring process between a novice and veteran instructor, rather than a coaching relationship between two colleagues with an equal status, which affects their expectations in terms of the reception of peer feedback.

Keywords: Peer Observation, Peer Feedback, Mentoring, Coaching, Feedback Culture

Introduction

Research studies advocate that effective professional development infuses pedagogical knowledge and skills in teachers; provides them with instructional resources and tools to increase teaching performance; and subsequently enhances student performance and school improvement (Witte & Jansen, 2016). Institutions of higher education offer teachers ample opportunities to systematically plan their professional development so that they can address the gaps in pedagogical knowledge, skills, and capabilities and stay current with effective teaching practices in the 21st century.

Many higher education institutions offer a wide array of opportunities for professional learning to assist novice and seasoned teachers in realizing the institutional vision and goals. It allows a host of diverse teachers in terms of experience, education, culture, language, motivation, expectations, values, and goals to pursue their professional growth through a variety of formal and informal venues. By doing so, diverse teachers with different needs and expectations can keep abreast of the innovative educational practice and adapt to institutional teaching philosophy and practices. The informal professional learning, peer coaching, includes peer observation and feedback. Despite the recent increasing attention and uptake in higher education, peer observation is not widely embedded as formative assessment (Dillon et al., 2020) because many teachers still consider peer observation a threatening, contentious, and fearful process rather than a constructive and developmental process for self-development (Sullivan, et al., 2012).

Therefore, it is important to explore teachers' perceptions and practice pertaining to peer observation and feedback to gain insightful information to support higher education foreign language (FL) teachers and academic leaders and, in turn, to assist language learners in meeting proficiency and world readiness standards (NCSSFL-ACTFL, 2017).

Literature Review

Peer Observation

Peer observation practice—grounded in Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning and development (1997)—is one of the most powerful professional development tools accepted in teacher training programs in higher education (Lu, 2010). It allows teachers to work together to reflect on current teaching practices, expand, refine, and build new knowledge, skills, and strategies enhancing the quality of teaching and learning processes (Halloran, 2009). The benefits of the practice include self-development opportunities for involved teachers, promotion of effective self-reflective teaching practices, an increase in collaboration and trust among peer teachers, and transformation in school culture and practice in the 21st century.

Effective peer observation practice requires a structured process, such as the pre-observation meeting, the observation, the post-observation feedback, and reflection (Bell, 2002; Sullivan, et al., 2012). A pre-observation meeting enables involved teachers, the observer and observed, to clarify the process, the context of the teaching event, learning objectives and content, teaching methods and approaches, potential challenges and problems, and specific areas that the observed wants to focus on, and so on. During the observation, the observation notes can be taken with respect to the content, process, and assessment of learning to validate any observation made by the observer. During the post observation feedback, the observer should provide insights with reference to clear criteria rather than judgment or evaluation. The reflection stage is a vital step of peer observation because it allows the observed to reflect on their teaching in the light of feedback from observation. Despite numerous benefits, peer observation can be seen as an invasion of teacher autonomy (Blackwell & McLean, 1996).

Peer Feedback

Feedback is not summative but formative assessment that aims to provide timely, descriptive, and non-judgmental information pertaining to direct observations of the individual in the learning environment. Direct observation, a pre-requisite for feedback, should give the observers an opportunity to collect specific data for feedback analysis. However, it is of paramount importance that individuals involved in feedback practice should establish a committed and caring interpersonal relationship for effective feedback. Effective feedback necessitates not only welcome reception of feedback, but also an active participant in the discussion. In a teacher training setting, effective feedback ultimately results not only in enhancing teacher performance, but also in student learning and school improvement. Therefore, the ability to give and receive effective feedback is one of the critical components of professional competency.

Effective feedback—written or verbal—aims to promote self-assessment, collaboration, and professional growth (Vidmar, 2005). It is reported that if the adequacy and quality of peer feedback is not agreed upon between the involved teachers, it could lead the observed to think that feedback is vague and non-actionable, whereas the observer regards it as meaningful and specific (Ramani et al., 2017). Chun and Plass (2000) discovered that peer teachers were hesitant to reflect on their peer's performance in a negative light and felt uncomfortable to provide critical feedback. Another issue addressed was an ambiguous and superficial nature of peer feedback. Other studies indicate that some peer feedback can be hostile, critical, sarcastic, and humiliating (Liu & Sadler, 2003). As carefully crafted comments are integral to effective peer feedback, teachers involved in feedback practice should avoid language pertaining to personality traits, and the perils of vague praise.

Politeness Theory

Research studies have shared characteristics of effective feedback as specific, actionable, timely, manageable, descriptive, focusing on behavior, constructive, and non-judgmental (Hattie & Timperley, 2007). However, as many feedback conversations in peer coaching can be potentially face-threatening to the coached peer (Brown & Levinson, 1987), the coach might be concerned with negative effects of feedback using a politeness strategy. A cross-cultural theory of politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987)—a concept that has been studied in the field of sociolinguistics and pragmatics (Eelen, 2001)—refers to a civility that facilitates interaction by minimizing the potential conflicts in human exchanges. Politeness theory suggests that an individual has a positive and negative face. Face can be viewed as positive (the need to project a positive image) and negative (freedom to act without imposition). For example, constructive feedback from the coach is critical for professional growth in the coached but can be viewed as a negative imposition of the coach's view upon the coached. The coach might feel that his/her beliefs, values, and approaches are not approved of, threatening his/her positive face. Thus, teaching professionals in a community of practice tend to overuse positive language in feedback dialogues, which in fact can impede constructive feedback (Ginsburg et al., 2015).

Various research studies have addressed the effects of politeness on learning processes. Wang et al. (2005) conducted a research study with 51 university students in California on politeness effects on learner outcomes. Subjects in two groups received a different type of feedback from computer-mediated tutoring. One group received polite tutorial feedback and suggestions, and the other group with direct suggestions in response to learner queries. The research findings suggest that the polite version of feedback produced amplified learning outcomes in students who expressed their preferences for indirect feedback. Also, students with

characteristics of being extroverted and open to communication displayed a better understanding of difficult concepts supported by a polite agent. In general, a polite agent had a positive impact on students' learning outcomes. This politeness effect can be applied not only to classroom teaching and learning, but also professional development activities. However, some concerns were addressed relating to politeness theory, because a polite face-saving learning culture may have a negative impact on open feedback dialogues (Ramani et al., 2017).

Research investigating the effectiveness of peer feedback practice was conducted in an elementary education program at a major research university in the Midwest (Shin et al., 2007). 64 education majors who participated in the study were paired up with another student in the same school for performance observation. The findings of the research study suggest that the least helpful feedback consisted of positive comments from their peer due to its lack of constructive criticism. Despite their appreciation of positive comments that help build self-esteem about their teaching, a critical element of reflective practice was considered insufficient. In addition, the research indicated that participating teachers appreciated honest and open feedback from peers in the form of constructive criticism in comparison to feedback from authority figures.

Sociocultural Lens

Effective learning and training take place via interaction and collaboration among members in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Members of the community take into account learner factors, teacher factors and institutional factors to craft their teaching practice. Such sociocultural factors have a great impact on perceptions of effective feedback. Feedback should be examined through different perspectives, such as the recipient, the provider, and the context (Ramani et al., 2019). Feedback culture plays a significant role in promoting

continuous formal and informal feedback for performance improvement. Educational entities should strive to foster a culture that promotes trusting relationships between teachers, providing time and space for peer feedback to take place, and establishing a shared understanding of the process and content of effective feedback among members of a community of practice (Kraut et al., 2015). Effective feedback providers contribute to promoting a positive learning environment, cultivating rapport with receivers, and focusing on actionable, goal-oriented performance. In addition, encouraging self-reflection and self-assessment should be underlined to improve performance.

Methods

This descriptive action research aimed to examine the perceptions on peer observation and peer feedback among language instructors at a higher education FL institute. The study draws on the experiences of 16 instructors, 10 Chinese and 6 Russian, whose years of service at the institute ranged from 3 years to 27 years. They responded to an online survey voluntarily. The online survey *Peer-to-Peer Feedback Assessment* was adapted based on John Murphy's the *Etiquette of Nonsupervisory Observation* (1992, 223-224) was disseminated through email accounts. The survey entailed five questions about: a) the target language, b) the year of service at the current employer, c) the characteristics of non-supervisory observation, d) characteristics of effective peer feedback, and e) additional characteristics of effective peer feedback. Question c) requires participants to select an answer ranging from Strongly Disagree, Disagree, Agree, to Strongly Agree. Question d) requires participants to prioritize their answers from the most important (1) to the least important (7); and question e) is open-ended.

Findings

Teachers' Perceptions on Peer Observation

A majority of participants (81.3% [13 out of 16]) stated that classroom observation should be taken seriously, whereas 18.8 % (3 of 16) disagree with the statement. Participants showed diverse responses with regard to the difficulty involving classroom observation. 43.8% of (7 out of 16) participants disagreed that classroom observation is not easy for the observed instructor, whereas 56.3 % of participants (5 out of 16) agreed that classroom observation can be challenging for the observed instructor.

75% of participants (12 out of 16) said that the ability to observe in an acceptable manner, including careful reflection, personal tact, and creativity, should develop, change, and improve over time. A majority of participants (93.8% [15 out of 16]) indicated that an observer should not take away any classroom responsibility, control, or authority from the observed teacher and students.

64.3% of survey participants (10 out of 16) stated that the observing teacher does not necessarily offer constructive advice, but nonetheless avoids judging, evaluating, and criticizing the observed teachers, whereas 35.7 % of participants (6 out of 16) disagreed with non-provision of constructive feedback. 80% of participants (14 out of 16) viewed the observer entering into a long-term process of learning with the observed, whereas 3 out of 16 participants disagree with the statement.

A majority of participants (87.5% [14 out of 16]) regarded classroom observation as invaluable opportunities because of increased awareness of their own classroom practices.

In a similar vein, a majority of participants (87.6% [14 out of 16]) stated that reflection on the observed teacher raised awareness of their own classroom behaviors, while two participants disagreed with the statement.

Table 1

Teachers' Perception of Peer Observation

	Strongly Disagree	**Disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
The observation of classroom teachers is serious business.	6.3%	12.5%	37.5%	43.8%
Classroom observations are not easy for the classroom teachers involved.	25%	31.3%	18.8%	25%
Learning how to observe is a slowly developing ability.	12.5%	12.5%	37.5%	37.5%
An observer should not take away classroom responsibility, control, or authority.	6.3%	0%	31.3%	62.5%
Classroom observations are not necessarily carried out as a quest to offer constructive advice.	14.3%	21.4%	35.7%	28.6%
One option is for the guest to envision his/her role as entering into a long-term process of learning to observe.	13.3%	6.7%	53.3%	26.7%
Observing others increases awareness of their own classroom practices.	6.3%	6.3%	37.5%	50%
Reflecting upon their teachers helps us become aware of our own classroom behaviors.	6.3%	6.3%	18.8%	68.8%

Characteristics of Effective Feedback

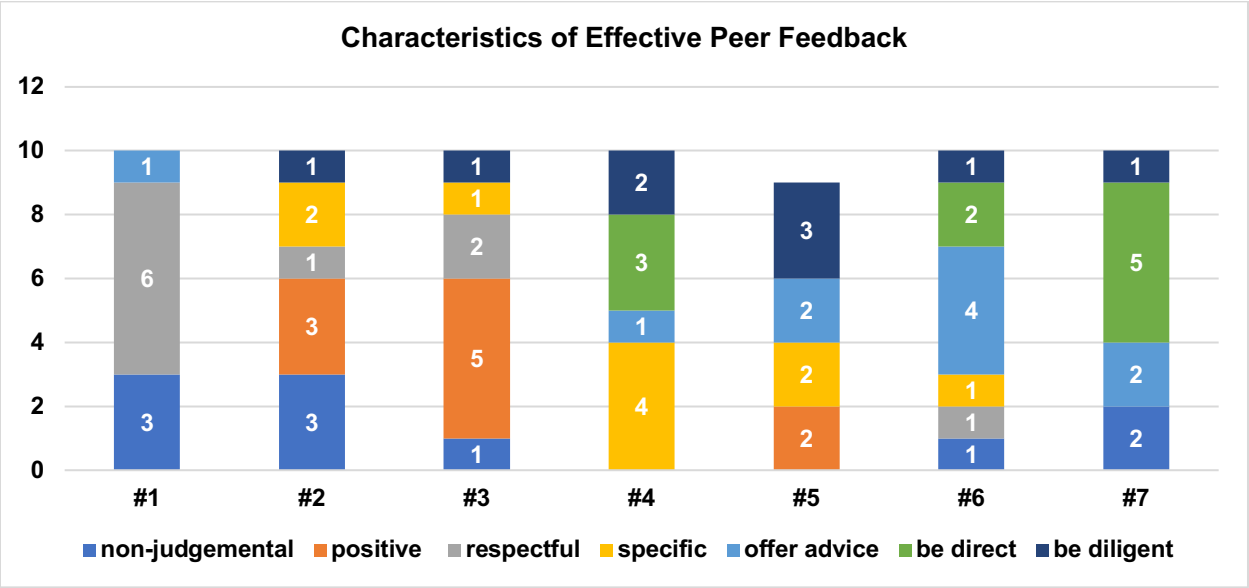
The questions regarding the characteristics of effective feedback required participants to prioritize their preferences from #1 (the most important) to #7 (the least important). However, 6 instructors seemingly did not follow the instructions and did not prioritize characteristics by their preferences from 1-7. They instead gave their highest preferences (# 1) to multiple characteristic traits. Therefore, the researchers excluded those incorrect responses from the data analysis. The graph below illuminates the responses from only 10 participants. 60% of paraticipants (6 out of 10) rated "Respectful" as the most important characteristic of effective peer feedback (6 out of 10 [60%]), and 30% of participants (3 out ot 10) rated "Non-judgmental" as the most significant characteristic. Both "Respectful" and "Positive" received 30% (3 out of 10) responses. "Positive" was rated as the third important characteristic of effective peer feedback by 50% of participants (5 out of 10). "Specific" received the most responses as the fourth important characteristic by 40% of participants (4 out of 10), along with 30% of the responses for the characteristic, "Direct". The fifth important characteristic received the most diverse responses, such as "Diligent", "Positive", "Specific", and "Offer advice". "Offer advice" came as the sixth important characteristic by 40% of participants (4 out of 10), and "Direct" received the most responses as the least important characteristic (50% [5 out of 10]).

Research question #5 solicited additional responses from participants with regard to characteristics of effective peer feedback. Five participants provided their own personalized responses. The responses included "Be appreciative and show what you've learned from your peer"; "It has been initiated/approved entirely by the observed party"; "Provide constructive and workable feedback"; "Will prefer the peer feedback in the written form"; "I enjoy when people come to observe, it is a way for me to show off my skills and grow as an instructor. I know it can

be stressful for some people, but I feel like this is a part of professional development that should not be omitted".

Table 2

Characteristics of Effective Peer Feedback



Discussion

When it comes to non-supervisory observation, most of participants were cognizant of characteristics of peer observation as an important long-term learning process involving careful reflection, sufficient time, personal tact, and creativity. A majority of the participants (87.6%) believed that observation and subsequent reflection would play a significant role in enhancing awareness in classroom practice and behaviors. However, 64.3% of them indicated that it would not be necessary for the observers to offer constructive advice to the observed in spite of acknowledging the benefits of the peer observation by participants. The researchers explored the possible interpretations and implications given the current institutional climate, (the general state of the current situation and practice-based suggestions for other higher education FL institutes.)

Mentoring vs Coaching

The responses appear to have originated in participants' experiences related to typical peer observation at the institute. It has been common practice for newly hired instructors to observe seasoned teachers in order to gain a good grasp of the student population and expected institutional teaching practice. However, peer observation between two seasoned teachers is not being actively practiced in the institute's community of practice. There is a possibility that participants in the study viewed peer observation as a mentoring session to assist new teachers with assimilation, rather than a coaching process for teaching professionals with equal status within a FL school at the institute.

Mentoring and coaching are two approaches to peer learning in professional development. Both of the approaches are designed to offer non-evaluative, non-threatening support to teaching professionals. Mentoring refers to an interpersonal, supportive, situated, and ongoing relationship between two individuals, a mentor and a mentee. A mentor who has more experience in his/her craft is typically working with a novice or a new teacher. In spite of an unequal power relationship between a mentor and a mentee, mentoring is not supervisory in nature. Coaching is an ongoing process in which teams of peers "study the rationale of the new skills, see them demonstrated, practice them, and learn to provide feedback to one another as they experiment with the skills (Benedetti, 1997, p.41). It refers to a developmental, collaborative relationship involving teachers whose status is equal. The main purpose of coaching entails promoting continuous engagement in the development of their craft and skills; developing the shared understandings of knowledges, skills, and language in a community of practice; facilitating the acquisition of new teaching skills and strategies via the follow-up training sessions (Bailey et al., 2001). Coaching allows teaching professionals to work together

on candid terms for the purpose of the development and enhancement of their teaching skills without feeling threatened by disclosing their limitations and weaknesses. One of the critical elements in coaching is accurate, specific, and non-evaluative feedback (Benedetti, 1997). Two teaching professionals in a coaching partnership should be able to discover how they can carry out their teaching in effective, meaningful, and motivating ways by accommodating students' needs and expectation by a means of objective reciprocal discussion (Benedetti, 1997).

Based on the responses from the participants in the current action research, they seemingly perceived peer observation in a mentor-mentee relationship, rather than between the coach and coached who have an equal status. Those perceptions rendered that they put less weight on the reception of the post-observation feedback from the observer. As those perceptions and experiences are more likely to be affected by the typical professional development activity practiced across the institute (e.g., the novice teachers' observation on the seasoned), it would be necessary to widen the horizon of institute teachers in terms of concepts and practice of peer observation.

Socio-Cultural Influence on Effective Feedback

"Respectful" and "Positive" feedback were selected as the most significant characteristics of effective feedback according to the survey results, whereas "Direct" and "Offer advice" were considered the least significant ones. This finding suggests that "face" or "public self-image" plays a significant role in social interactions among institute teachers. The responses from participants exhibited that they possessed the need to be openly appreciated by other faculty and for freedom of action (i.e., autonomy). In such a climate, constructive feedback might be perceived as "negative", which violates the norms of expected politeness despite that honest constructive feedback is essential and critical for professional development. As a result, a polite

or face-saving learning culture are more likely to have a negative effect on feedback exchanges in a community of practice (Ramani et al., 2017). The findings suggest that it is important for all stakeholders to understand that a host of diverse instructors have a set of social values and cultural-based behavior which instruct them in interactions to consider each other by satisfying shared expectations. Therefore, it is significantly important for all stakeholders to take account of cross-cultural aspects affecting the perceptions of effective feedback and establish an institutional feedback culture by developing a growth mind-set and training a wide array of strategies from multiple perspectives.

Recommendations for Practice

Promote Reflective Peer Coaching

Reflective peer coaching refers to a formative process that fosters self-assessment and self-management before, during, and after instruction built upon a trusting relationship and inquiry in a safe, supportive environment (York-Barr et al., 2001). Teachers work collaboratively and systematically to engage in non-threatening collegial dialogues with regard to their teaching, intended outcomes prior to teaching, and subsequent reflection on actual instructional experience. Reflective dialogues allow teachers to develop and heighten a self-awareness of their actions in the classroom and consequential impact on student learning and behaviors. Higher education foreign language departments, divisions and/or institutes can benefit from fostering a trustful and risk-taking environment where reflective peer coaching is a standard practice. In doing so, teachers engage in professional development within their teaching context for the development of their instructional practice.

However, reflective conversations involving self-disclosure can be viewed as a risk-taking event that cause discomfort, embracement, and uncertainty. Therefore, Brookfield (1995)

and Farrell (2004) suggest a list of questions that instructors can pose to themselves as some reflective inventory exercises as follows: i) What am I most proud of as an instructor? ii) What would I like my students to say about me after class? iii) What do I most need to learn about or improve in my teaching? iv) What do I worry about most in my work as an instructor? v) Are there things I would like to change about my teaching? vi) Do I spend much time thinking about new ideas or methods for teaching my classes? vii) How do I know when I have taught well? viii) What mistakes have I learned the most from as an instructor? ix) What have I learned about myself so far?

These questions can initially be posed for teachers to become accustomed to exploring self-reflection around their teaching practice. Once teachers are comfortable, the same questions can be posed during ongoing peer coaching sessions. To mitigate teachers feeling uneasy to expose themselves, teachers can select a critical friend/colleague (Stenhouse, 1975; Costa, 2008), someone that is a self-selected trusted individual, to work with in the peer coaching process.

Cultivate Feedback Culture

As institutional climate has a significant influence on the quality and impact of feedback, feedback-seeking, acceptance, and performance improvement, an effective feedback culture can be cultivated by creating a shared understanding of the importance of peer feedback and facilitating trusting relationships among teaching professionals in a community of practice (Sargeant, et al., 2015; 2008). Stakeholders should take politeness theory into consideration to foster meaningful feedback exchanges, resulting in effecting teaching behaviors and professional growth (Ramani et al., 2019). It is important for leadership to send out clear, explicit messages and expectations to faculty and staff. The institution can engage teachers with strengths and areas for improvement in continuous, reflective, and life-long learning by means of collaborative

bidirectional feedback through effective teacher training to (Ramani et al., 2019): i) establish an environment of gradual, increasing, and appropriate autonomy, ii) fostering a safe team culture for trusting teacher to teacher relationships, iii) provide training on how to provide constructive feedback based on observed behaviors; how to co-create action plans for improvement; how to engage in critical reflection on performance, iv) encourage direct observation of performance among faculty members, v) provide some examples of excellence on feedback conversations.

Higher education FL departments, divisions and/or institutes consist of tenured, permanent, and adjunct instructors. It can be easier to foster an environment among full-time permanent teachers who work together on a regular basis and may also share an extended period of time working together. In such cases, the quality of an effective feedback culture can be easier to establish or may already be in place. However, it can be more challenging to cultivate such a culture among adjunct faculty and/or tenured/permanent faculty, as schedules may not afford them frequent contact with each other. They may operate more autonomously. However, engaging teachers across employment status and levels of experience can strengthen the community of practice and promote learning through collaborative feedback.

Promote Effective Processes of Receiving Feedback

Despite the importance of constructive feedback instrumental in changing practice, the notion of "positive and negative face" can lead teachers either to seek or to shun feedback from others. Still, after balancing ego costs (negative feeling) and ego benefits as constructive feedback, it is evident that constructive feedback is vital in teachers' professional growth, student achievement, and school improvement. However, various research studies seemingly describe effective feedback from the viewpoint of givers not receivers. When feedback exchange is predominantly understood from the giver's perspective by the needs of the recipient and the

influence of the feedback situation and/or environment are not given the appropriate level of attention. Since effective feedback that attributes to fostering professional development requires continuous growth mind-set, the acquisition of effective feedback on the receiving end plays a significant role in an optimal peer feedback culture. Therefore, receiving of constructive feedback requires a list of steps to maximize the learning experience as follows:

- **Listen:** the receiver should allow the giver to offer feedback without any interruption of the feedback message in a defensive manner. Defensive responses are more likely to decrease the amount and quality of the information delivered by the giver.
- **Express gratitude:** the provision of effective feedback requires the giver to overcome various barriers, such as lack of time, insufficient training, absence of clear goals, and apprehension of the receiver's response. It is important to acknowledge the giver's effort, time investment, and care to deliver feedback for his/her professional growth.
- **Clarify feedback through self-reflection and communication with the giver:** teachers need to develop ability to confirm the comprehension of the feedback and engage in self-reflection on feedback received. Subsequently, the feedback should be integrated into the receiver's action plan to benefit from feedback (Jug et al.,2019).

Regardless of the peer feedback relationship with a self-selected peer as a critical friend/colleague (Stenhouse, 1975; Costa, 2008), or faculty as longtime professional peer, the steps in receiving feedback are essential to establish as a norm up front. This process of establishing a protocol for receiving feedback is even more important when teachers have little contact with the peer coach.

Raise Cultural Awareness

Higher education foreign language departments, divisions and/or institution stakeholders should be mindful of the importance of socio-cultural impacts on perceptions and expectations of peer coaching and peer feedback in a community of practice. Especially, given that effective feedback dialogue is co-constructed between the involved teachers, it is important for leadership, including chairpersons and academic support positions, should take different cultural, social, emotional, and interpersonal factors into account and subsequently instill a wide array of activities, strategies, and techniques in order to cultivate effective peer coaching as one of the options for professional development. Moreover, they should endeavor to create and maintain a non-threatening environment for diverse teachers by modeling effective peer observation and peer feedback process. In sum, it would be vital for various stakeholders to be cognizant of different perspectives, viewpoints, and preferences among a host of diverse faculty and staff and establish a common understanding with regards to peer coaching and peer feedback in a community of practice.

Recommendations for Further Practice

Teachers, in general, are more likely to have their preferred characteristics of effective feedback—respectful, positive, non-judgmental, etc. However, it would be important to investigate whether these characteristics of feedback are carried over to their teaching practices with students. Subsequently, the perceptions of the students with respect to effective feedback should be further identified and explored to discover any gaps between teachers' preferred feedback practices and their actual feedback practices used with students, resulting in effecting teaching and learning process.

Conclusions

Peer learning promotes reciprocal teaching in which teachers in pairs/groups work together when they acquire and implement new pedagogical knowledge, skills, strategies in their teaching repertoire (Wilkins et al., 2009). Peer observation and feedback is one of the effective, pivotal peer learning activities that teachers should include in their professional development plan. However, a host of culturally, linguistically, and ethnically diverse factors influence how teachers engage in professional communication and impact the peer observation and feedback in terms of both mentoring and coaching processes as effective feedback in a community of practice.

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Creating Diverse Encounters Within an Established Short-Term Study Abroad Program

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Nichole Neuman

Dept. of World Languages and Cultures - Max Kade German-American Center

Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis

Abstract

Utilizing a short-term German study abroad program as a case study, this article examines how—and the impacts of—making small programmatic changes to increase student exposure to diverse German speakers. It further builds upon scholarship regarding language usage in study abroad programs and makes the case for an experiential program focus over a strict L2 linguistic focus.

Keywords: study abroad, German language learners, multilingualism, short-term study abroad program

Introduction

Study abroad programs play a prominent role in many post-secondary language programs. While study abroad can allow teachers and students to create stronger connections and community outside the classroom, it also plays an increasing role in financially driven student recruitment and retention strategies in language programs (McGregor, 2020). The programs' form and function necessarily differ, as do the value perceptions for administrators, instructors, and students. Study abroad allows students in places where (presumably) the classroom-based second language (L2) is taught to experience the language and associated culture first-hand. In the expansive scholarship on study abroad, numerous scholars have written to characterize program types, in some cases trying to standardize the language surrounding study abroad discourse. On the more straight forward end, program types are described as either island (where students study abroad in a program run, often, by their home institutions), third party (where students take some local university-based coursework in tandem with work facilitated by a group aware of the demands of a student studying abroad), or direct-enrollment (where students enroll directly into a university abroad and take on the same roles as local students) (Scally, 2015). Other classifications look at the differing ideologies behind the reasons for study abroad, e.g., educational tourism, personal growth, professional training, etc. (Trentman, 2022).

In an attempt to create a guide for both students surveying potential programs and study abroad professionals, Lilli and John Engle created "a hierarchical classification of program types" as a way to assign value to different program structures (Engle and Engle, 2003, p. 2 and p. 15). Citing Milton Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (2017), which describes how individuals respond to cultural difference along a continuum of development from denial to integration, their model's stated goal suggests that study abroad programs should aim

for student integration (Engle and Engle). Bennett's integration stage is one in which the self can move between different cultural views, and which promotes cultural mediation and, thus, the Engle and Engle study prizes interaction with the host culture. Their taxonomy takes into account six factors in study abroad programs, such as student housing, program duration, and linguistic entry level of participants, organized into five categories, with a study tour as demonstrating the least value and a cross-cultural immersion program the greatest value. It arrives at the conclusion that such a system ultimately will assist students in understanding the value of global education. However, categorizing study abroad programs according to the Engle taxonomic system is problematic. In their valuation of the full student integration, they assume a homogenic approach to language and culture in host countries, which potentially ignores—or, at worst, denies—the many different lived experiences within a country in which a program occurs. Such a taxonomy privileges a monoculture that assumes encounters with only one dominant language and cultural (ethnic) experience. Valuing programs in this manner ignores the support that some students may need when studying abroad; from homesickness to culture shock to being away from support systems, study abroad can be a difficult endeavor for some students. It also says nothing of the economic pressures of students who want to and/or do study abroad. Personal financial situations may dictate whether one has the opportunity to study abroad at all and, if possible, whether students with little to no financial means may opt for short-term programs, which might demand, for example, less time off of work, or offer a lower cost than a semester- or year-long program (Kinginger, 2004; Trentman, 2022).

In attempting to categorize program types, which may indeed result in a useful tool for some study abroad administrators and researchers, the value of the program often seems to belie a loyalty to linguistic or cultural standards that see strict language usage and authentic

experiences as the programmatic apogee. In coming to my position in August 2019 at a large public Midwestern research university in one of the United States' most populous cities, I inherited the German study abroad program from a retiring colleague. Housed within a World Languages and Cultures department, the German program began its "island" study abroad short-term program to Heilbronn, Germany about a decade prior, developed and led by one faculty member with roots in that region of Baden-Württemberg. To honor the existing relationships our program had with the Hochschule Heilbronn and to learn more about the study abroad systems at my university before changing the current program or proposing a new one, I chose to adopt the pre-existing syllabus and most of the programming created by a former colleague who conceived of and ran the program through 2019. In this iteration, however, the language learning objectives of the program syllabus remained vague, emphasizing immersion and engagement with language and contemporary culture.

After meeting most of the students that participated in the May 2019 program, the same kind of terms arose in our informal discussions to describe the experience and, particularly, with reference to the city of Heilbronn: "nice," "cute," "quaint," and "safe" to name a few. They spoke of eating traditional southern German foods, *Maultaschen* and *Spätzle* (foods, of course, with their own histories of region and class), and of visiting the *Weingärten* in the area. While these terms are seemingly innocuous and conversations demonstrated a clearly positive experience for the students, such descriptions did not indicate a wide-ranging experience of German culture. The language students utilized after this study abroad program failed to address the many diverse types of German-speaking communities and representations of Germanness found throughout the country.

When we look to language to describe cultural or ethnic differences in the United States, we often see or hear words in the media or from politicians that act as a type of short-hand to "describe communities impacted by racism, disinvestment, physical destruction, and economic exclusion," such as "high-crime areas" or "distressed places" (Vey and Love, 2020, para. 3). Media critic Eric Deggans (2012) highlights this issue in the U.S. differently in recalling a broadcast by conservative commentator Bill O'Reilly. O'Reilly had dined at Sylvia's Restaurant in Harlem (a Black-owned soul food restaurant in New York City) with Al Sharpton, a civil rights activist, and, as Deggans explains, O'Reilly expressed surprise that the patrons of that restaurant acted in a manner that he would have found in any restaurant in a predominantly white suburb. His point was that Sylvia's diners lacked what he perceived as "Black" culture, which meant it adhered to a restaurant culture with which he was familiar. And he continued to argue that there was no difference between restaurants (and cultures) in the United States, that everyone acted the same in dining spaces. However, underneath O'Reilly's comments there is an implicit understanding that correct (dining) culture is associated with a white population. The absence of what O'Reilly termed "craziness," which he associated with Black mannerisms, makes explicit the link between coded language (negative descriptors) and race[4]. O'Reilly did not—and did not need to—describe white culture in his comments with further adjectives, as it was understood as the de facto culture. If, in German Studies, whiteness and national identity are seen as a de facto pairing (Gallagher and Zenker, 2020), such adjectives as used by white students could suggest an experience presumably unmarked by difference, be it racial, religious, economic, or otherwise. This is not to suggest that the students were unaware of diverse populations in Germany or that they had not had experiences with minoritized or racialized

[4] See also: López's *Dog Whistle Politics* for discussions of coded language shaping racial and ideological discourse.

individuals. Rather, whiteness is manifested precisely in its unremarkable ubiquity (McGregor, 2020).

These encounters inspired me to integrate small, feasible changes to the existing program to see if one could attend to incorporating more diverse situations within a short-term study abroad program. The point of these small programmatic interventions was to begin to step away from a program that, even if unintentionally, mostly engages a monoculturalist notion of German culture (with one important exception, mentioned below). The remainder of this article will explore the changes made to the program, student reactions, as well as criticism and steps toward further changes to maximize the types of German culture and identity to which students can be exposed during a short program.

Program Overview

Study abroad participation at my institution has grown significantly in the twenty-first century, expanding by 182% from the 2000/2001 academic year, with 209 students to 591 in 2016/2017 (the last year for which data was available; IUPUI Study Abroad). Although in the 2019/2020 academic year, approximately 31% of all students participated in short-term programs (eight weeks or less, including summer programs), that number jumped to 64% the following year. Study abroad, broadly classified, to Germany accounted for 3% of all American student sojourns in 2020/2021 (Institute of International Education, 2022), compared to 4% of all students abroad in the final academic year before pandemic disruption (Institute of International Education, 2018/2019). Our German summer study abroad program typically accounts for only a very small portion of students engaged in international education: This year's program (May 2023) had four students. The last iteration offered in 2019 enrolled seven students and thirteen

students in 2018. As support for upper-level classes and the overall German program diminishes, so too does interest in our summer program.

The original course consisted of ten total days in Heilbronn, including arrival and departure days, meaning eight days of instruction and excursions and one half-day of evaluation and presentations on the final program date. It also had two one-hour pre-departure orientation sessions focusing on practical travel and German cultural tips. Students are required by the study abroad office to complete a post-program evaluation, as is the instructor, which are reviewed by upper-level administration.

As mentioned, the university has a strong relationship with the Hochschule Heilbronn (HH) that extends beyond this program to student and faculty exchanges, particularly in the areas of engineering and tourism. Each year, the program receives assistance in coordinating the onsite logistics of studying on the HH campus, a *Mensakarte* to allow students to eat at HH's cafeterias for the significantly discounted student price, and a classroom and access to technology for the instruction portion of the program. After a welcome meal with colleagues in the international office and engineering department on arrival day at a German restaurant, the program generally was split into mornings of grammatical and cultural history instruction by the home institution instructor, and afternoons of regional excursions to sight-see and/or learn regional history in museums and on tours. One feature of this program was a getting acquainted session with the *Aufbaugilde*, a social service organization that works to support disadvantaged individuals in the greater Heilbronn region. I will discuss this affiliation in more detail later, but note here that the partnership between this study abroad program and the *Aufbaugilde* also grew out of my former colleague's personal relationships to individuals in the region. Students usually would tour the organization's second-hand shop one afternoon to understand some of their functions in the

region, as well as attend an afternoon of German language instruction with students in their language courses for immigrant and refugee populations.

Within the aforementioned Engle and Engle taxonomy, the program did not fit neatly into their categorizations, demonstrating both fewer desirable and strongly preferred elements. For example, according to their taxonomy, the program it would count as a study tour, being only, initially, ten days long, requiring only one year of basic German language study, placing them on the Novice High or Intermediate Low of the ACTFL scale or A1+ to A2 levels of the CEFR scale. Students bunk together in double hotel rooms or two-to-three-person hostel rooms (i.e., collective housing). The work within the *Aufbaugilde* counted toward occasional integration activities, and in addition to the pre-departure sessions, students reflected on their time through a cross-cultural reflective presentation. Course work was conducted in German, working out of two texts (*Übungsgrammatik* and *Zur Orientierung: Basiswissen Deutschland*, both from German publisher Hueber), and students were intended to use German in non-classroom interactions.

Before departure, students were to complete an assignment that spoke to their interests in German culture and the study abroad program, along with a brief biography in German. Throughout the ten-day period, students completed two other assignments on site: a portrait of the city of Heilbronn and a daily diary, both of which had to go through a first and second draft. Finally, after return, students were required to write two essays about education in Germany and an intercultural reflection. Each written assignment was a minimum of 250 words, in German, and graded on content and grammar. Students also completed short term assignments on site, had a written midterm and final exam on grammar and culture, and needed to create a final presentation on a cultural experience.

A secondary program goal was for the students to get to know and connect with the southern, host city of Heilbronn, its history and culture, and region and state (Baden-Württemberg). With 130,870 residents at the end of 2022, Heilbronn qualifies as a *Großstadt* (metropolis). Dating back to the Middle Ages, Heilbronn was first mentioned in documents in 741 as a spring source. Positioned on both sides of the Neckar River, the city was an important site for merchants and would continue its prosperity through the nineteenth century, when it was known for its industry. Although heavily bombed during World War II, the city recovered and is today known for its higher education institutions (five in total, such as HH) and the educational opportunities afforded to citizens through the largesse of its patron Dieter Schwarz (founder of Lidl and Kaufland grocery stores). In May 2023 (the month of the program), the city had a 3.3% unemployment rate (*Heilbronn*). When it comes to the make-up of the citizenry, an oft-touted fact in our university tours was that approximately 40% of the people living in Heilbronn had migration backgrounds or were immigrants or refugees. However, statistics from 2016 reveal that number to be much lower; approximately 11% of residents in the Heilbronn region were foreign nationals and 16% of residents Germans with migration backgrounds (*Statistisches Monatsheft*). It is important to note that the *Statistisches Bundesamt* defines someone as having a migration background when they themselves immigrated to Germany or when at least one parent was born without German citizenship, which means that children born and raised in Germany of one immigrant parent could be considered as having a migration background. In May 2019, Heilbronn hosted 976 refugees (*Statistisches Monatsheft*). That number is likely to have fluctuated in the intervening years, particularly owing to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

As mentioned, the *Aufbaugilde* (ABG) is the city's premier organization supporting disadvantaged individuals in the greater Heilbronn area. The organization's roots are in the

postwar period, when a collaborative organization focused on youth was formed by the evangelical *Aufbaugilden* to help care for war veterans. Soon after, it began caring for young refugees from the newly formed German Democratic Republic, i.e., East Germany. In addition to care, initial services focused on training and job placement, first in agriculture and later in industry. As the ABG continued, its purview widened, eventually expanding to care for children and youth and Hungarian refugees. In the 1970s, they again expanded their mission to focus on people experiencing homelessness. Today, the reach of the ABG's social services is vast, including education, childcare, refugee and immigrant support, employment assistance and training, debt counseling, addiction counseling and support, housing support, onsite vocational training, and language classes. They have strong partnerships with both city administration and local businesses and connect with other citizens through their second-hand retail location (similar to Goodwill Industries in the U.S.).

Students in our program have been able to tour the retail location and learn alongside adult language learners in ABG's language classes. These classes typically train students to pass exams with questions about German history and culture so individuals may obtain visas, and to provide them A2 language capabilities so the individuals in the class can integrate into (work in) society. Classes are generally teacher-centered and focus on teaching grammar rules.

Reshaping the Study Abroad Program

Upon taking over this course as the only remaining faculty member in 2023 (with planning beginning already in 2020), I knew that I wanted to reshape some of the experiences to offer students more diverse encounters to highlight different aspects of German culture. With the existing program, students' experiences focused on traditional narratives of (white and often Christian) German culture and history, excepting random museum didactics if they happened to

encounter them. Indeed, the city and museum tours we booked following the previous program did not speak of minoritized individuals in the region, unless to mention them briefly in relation to persecution during the Second World War. But, as the work of, for example, Black Central Europe shows us, German history has not been comprised of a monolithic German identity. How, then, to counter the lack of narrative difference students regularly encountered during their excursions into Heilbronn, the region, and other major cities?

One significant aspect of course revision was to add a four-day stopover in Berlin. Germany's capital and largest city with circa 3.8 million residents, Berlin's incredible history and cultural and social composite offer a counterpoint to Heilbronn. In addition to being a significantly more populous (though dense) city, Berlin is the site of myriad historic events, from the Berlin Conference outlining European imperialism through the partitioning of Africa to the emblem of a divided Germany during the Cold War. As a much larger city, too, Berlin offers forty-two universities and colleges, significant cultural offerings (175 museums; dozens of symphonies, operas, theater venues, and movie theaters; art galleries; and historical monuments in every neighborhood), as well as a different social and cultural fabric. For example, Berlin's unemployment rate in May 2023 was 8.9% - over 5% higher than during the same period in Heilbronn. In February 2022, approximately 811,000 individuals or 21% of the Berlin population were foreign nationals (compared to Heilbronn's 11% or 14,395 people; Hauptstadt, 2021), and about 570,000 (15%) Germans had migration backgrounds. And, during this past year, Berlin hosted 90,000 refugees and asylum-seekers (again, largely owing to the Russian invasion of Ukraine).

Beyond the facts that Berlin's population eclipses and differs greatly from Heilbronn's and would, for those reasons, provide a different experience of German culture, starting the tour

in Berlin offers other advantages: dozens of affordable food options; a well-developed transportation network; a night life culture, which students tend to enjoy; buskers and free entertainment at the parks, as well as myriad gratis exhibitions and events; free tours of Reichstag; free (or greatly reduced) entry for student groups to the *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin* (state museums of Berlin). There is yet another reason I chose to begin the program in Berlin, which has to do with language, both for student production and reception. If students were only required to complete a second semester course (Novice High to Intermediate Low), focusing on German-only tours in museums and other city sites (as occurred in some of the site visits in the Heilbronn section) may impede comprehension for the sake of language exposure. At almost every site (excepting the *Gründerzeitmuseum*), students could either choose to read didactics or have audio guides in German or English. This choice empowers them in their own linguistic engagement with German, which also gave them flexibility if, for example, overly tired or frustrated without excluding anyone from accessing the knowledge presented. Similarly, after engaging in tours of the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe) or in the reconstructed *Nikolaiviertel*, students could converse with the class and reflect in a manner that felt right for them in that moment—be it in German, English, or a mix of the two.

Because the focus of the program my colleague conceived in Heilbronn was L2 practice and engagement (particularly with daily instruction and tours), I also wanted students to have an experience of German that reflected their engagement with it during their regular semester classes. Study abroad programs often tout authentic encounters and the possibility of "native-like" language acquisition (McGregor, 2020, p. 158). But the question that follows is "Whose German?" Janice McGregor (2014) deftly points out that the native-speaker proficiency idyll in

language courses asks learners "to emulate an idealized monolingual other" (p. 111), here a native-speaker German monolingual. However, suggesting that students attempt to act in a strictly monolingual L2 context whilst abroad fails because of the essential multilingualism in which students exist, i.e., using multiple language systems is the norm for L2 users (McGregor, 2020). In the classroom, students regularly switch between the L2 and their L1 (or, in some cases, between their L2, e.g., English, and an L3, e.g., German). In everyday situations or within media, too, students encounter other linguistic and cultural structures. And Germany is neither a monolingual nor a monocultural society[5]. The applied linguist Claire Kramsch (2009a) proposes a "third culture" pedagogy that embraces the liminal status of language learners and eschews the native speaker/non-native speaker dichotomy. The third culture space allows the student to make "meaning on the margins" and "in the interstices of official meaning" (p. 138). Embracing students' status between the languages allows for a linguistic playfulness that destabilizes "native speaker claims of authenticity" (Kramsch, p. 138). The native speaker/non-native speaker construct creates an almost permanent imbalance of power, repositioning such interactions allows both speakers (or cultures) to bring unique knowledge to the interaction. Instead of valorizing the monolingual culture and its native speakers, language learners should be lauded for their ability to navigate others' social and cultural surroundings (McGregor, 2014, p. 111). Put differently, language learners are in the process of becoming, which is its own state with its own, unique properties (Gramling, p. 4).

[5] See multiple examples within Gramling's *The Invention of Monolingualism*, in which he makes the case for "Germany's civic habituation to monolingualism" (p. 4).

In Berlin, with its many diverse German speakers and languages in daily use, students could both encounter Germans and German speakers of different abilities, race and ethnicities, ages, religious and socio-economic backgrounds, and even nationalities and begin to navigate their own multilingual identities while engaging with different types of German culture. The program in Berlin consisted of a mix of tours, independent (but structured) exploration, museum visits, walking tours led by me (the instructor), and some built-in free time to allow students to follow their own interests. Taking inspiration from a study abroad program activity developed by colleagues at Kansas State University's German Program, the students' program began with a challenge to find their way through the city to visit various sites we would revisit in the coming days of the program. The goals of this activity were three-fold: 1) to give them experience with the Berlin transit system of busses, trams, subways and city trains; 2) to give them a preview of important historic sites and allow them to explore facets of the sites on their own; and 3) to encourage them to approach individuals to ask for guidance or help or to casually engage them in conversation during that period. Students reacted positively to the activity, stating that, even while getting lost, they enjoyed seeing different parts of the city and improving their navigational skills.

In the following days, we would have different types of encounters, followed by discussions reflecting on what those encounters meant. When visiting the Pergamon and Bode Museums, for example, students had the opportunity to view antiquities from around the world. They had free rein in those spaces to visit exhibits they found interesting, reporting back with images or leading us to exhibitions to speak on why they found those works compelling. Beyond discussing what was interesting or beautiful in these museum spaces, these visits also led to discussions of colonialism, stolen objects, and repatriation of items to home countries. We

visited multiple monuments throughout the city that spoke to Germany's role in the Holocaust—*Stolpersteine* (literally "stumbling stones," or monuments embedded in the sidewalk), the aforementioned Memorial for Murdered Jews of Europe, the Memorial for the Homosexual Victims of Nazism, the Neue Wache (a memorial to the victims of war and tyranny), the Bebelplatz book burning memorial, and the room of stillness at the Brandenburg Gate. All these spaces were intentionally visited on our various walking tours or enroute from one destination to another *to show how memorials were built into the fabric of everyday German life and are found throughout the entire city*. Some memorials receive greater prominence in the city (the Memorial for the Murdered Jews of Europe takes up a city block), while others are easy to overlook (*Stolpersteine*). We discussed which events and groups received greater memorialization and why, their symbolism, and the efficacy of each memorial space. This activity helped to show how memorials are found throughout the entire city and built into the fabric of everyday German life.

We also visited the *Gründerzeitmuseum* (a museum dedicated to the Gründerzeit, a brief time of economic prosperity in the Kaiserreich) and the *Knoblauchausmuseum* (a family home museum that displays life in Biedermeier Berlin through the late 19th century for a wealthy family). Both institutions are in former family homes, though one is a three-story house, and the other a three-room apartment. The Gründerzeitmuseum highlights both the lives that lower middle class and impoverished families lived in fin de siècle Berlin, as well as how the same home could be a space for a well-off merchant or divided by room for tenement housing. Objects in the reconstructed home were donated by families and carry with them the individual familial stories imparted to visitors, accompanied by archival photographs and excerpts from diaries. In contrast, the Knoblauch family house shows the comforts and luxuries of a merchant family with

ties to famous intellectuals and politicians, like the von Humboldts, who were family friends of some Knoblauch family members. In visiting these sites back-to-back, students had the opportunity to compare living situations for three very different socio-economic backgrounds during the German empire.

Other site visits in Berlin included the Jewish Museum and a stop at Markthalle Neun Street Food Night. Much to the students' surprise, the Jewish Museum did not focus solely on Jewish persecution during the Third Reich and Holocaust, but on the history of Jewish life in Germany. The visit highlighted the 1700-year history of Jewish history in German-speaking regions and provided an important reminder that the Holocaust is not the entirety of Jewish experience in the country. It was here, too, that students first heard about Magnus Hirschfeld, an important sexologist who supported gay and transgender rights in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Markthalle Neun is a food hall that originally opened around 1890 for food vendors to serve the Kreuzberg neighborhood. Since 2011, the food hall once again acts as a daily market for individuals and, on Thursday evenings, hosts stalls of chefs selling food from many different food cultures (from pizza to empanadas, from BBQ to Fufu).

On the fifth day, we traveled by train to Heilbronn to begin the established program there. Mornings, we traveled to the HH campus and alternated grammar instruction and practice and culture and history instruction focusing on the sixteen German states, the current educational and political systems, and an overview of the Weimar Republic leading into the Third Reich. This work was led by me and conducted in German, though students spoke English to clarify questions or to confirm comprehension. After each session, we broke for lunch in the Mensa, where students primarily spoke German to one another until they settled down to eat and our lead administrator would join us, speaking English to the students. In the afternoons, we took tours

and visited museums within Heilbronn and traveled to Bad Wimpfen, Heidelberg, Stuttgart, Schwäbisch Hall, and Neckarsulm for sight-seeing activities (museums, walking tours, a boat ride on the Neckar), with one day off for individual travel and relaxation. Most tours were in German or a mix of German and English, and many of the small museums offered no or only some didactics in multiple languages.

Perhaps the most impactful encounter that is part of the program is the experience at the *Aufbaugilde*, where students experience a language class and tour the ABG's facilities (both their education centers and their second-hand store). This site visit is the only time during the Heilbronn portion when the experiences of marginalized and racialized individuals in the city are discussed and presented. During a welcome tour of the ABG's social services and facilities, students learned about some of the services the ABG offers to individuals experiencing homelessness, immigrants, and refugees in the region, and those with alcohol or drug addictions. The director of ABG explained that one cannot only address one facet of an issue, but must look at it holistically, e.g., by providing transitional housing or job training. That, the director stated, was also the goal of the language class we would visit. Immigrants and refugees could only participate fully in society if able to understand German language, history, and culture. The ABG's goals for language classes and all their programs reflected those prized by Engle and Engle for study abroad cultural programs integration.

Student Participation and Program Reflections

This year's program consisted of four white students. Two were cismen and two were ciswomen. All have English as their first language and German as their L2, falling within the Intermediate High level, with the exception of one who would be characterized as having Advanced High listening. Three have declared German minors. Each student received an

automatic $1,200 scholarship from the Max Kade Foundation and a $500 scholarship from a center affiliated with our German program, which together covered all program fees. Three of the students applied for and received enough additional scholarship funding to cover tuition and their individual costs (flight, meals, souvenirs, additional travel, etc.). All students had GPAs between 3.224 and 4.0 and were either actively or had been on the Dean's List at some point during their college careers; two students were part of the Honors College. One student was entering their fifth and final year, another was a rising senior, the third a rising junior, and the other one was about to begin their second year, though with junior credit standing. Each student is from the state in which our university is located, though two grew up in small, rural towns (4,000 people or less); one grew up in a mid-sized town (32,000), and one grew up in the state's largest city (almost 1,000,000 residents). The university itself had a student population of 27,690 students, of whom 19,197 were undergraduates. Approximately 59% of the student population identify as women; 41% as men (only gender binary statistics appear). In 2019, our undergraduate population identified as 66% white and 29% identified as Students of Color. Though previous program years have included Students of Color, our program tends to have primarily white student participants.

As student participants in the ABG language class during a two-and-a-half-hour morning sessions, my students encountered twelve adult learners for whom German was (at least) their L3. At least three individuals were from Russia; another three were from Ukraine; one was from Georgia; one from Syria, and the remainder did not identify their national origin. The instructor was a native German speaker, working from a text on German cultural and history by the same publisher of the text we used in our classes at HH. While approximately half the class was there at beginning of class, the other half filtered in over the next hour. During the period, the

instructor largely read aloud from the text, while asking questions outlined within the unit about the transition from the Weimar Republic to the Nazi regime (approximately four pages of content were covered). The lesson was largely teacher-centered, with no group discussion or collaborative work amongst the AGB students. The American students were largely silent during the period, though listening intently. Because I attended class with my students and, as a German professor, was familiar with the content of the unit, the instructor ended up addressing many questions to me during the lesson.

Though I would not consider the class an especially productive one, both in terms of content addressed and student engagement, the encounter was an especially impactful and memorable one for my students. Before the class began and during the twenty-minute break, three of the women (two Ukrainian and one Georgian) in the AGB class were eager to talk to the students, learn about their histories, and get to know them. Conversations largely tended toward the invasion of Ukraine and the atrocities the students had themselves suffered or witnessed, but were interspersed with lighter topics about German culture, travel, and fashion. One student exchanged phone numbers with the most outgoing Ukrainian woman with whom she texted in the days after the class visit, and my student revealed that their subsequent texts also switched between German and English. These discussions contained continuous language (German and English) and code-switching from topic to topic, sentence to sentence, and even mid-sentence, allowing both participants to move between conversation topics in the manner that best allowed them to express themselves, illustrating in real-time the decentered nature of the multilingual subject (Kramsch, 2009b). Kramsch terms "a deep coordination of body and mind, of self and other" moments of "synchronicity," in which one is "in sync with itself, its language, its environment, and others" (2009b, pp. 233-234). These encounters provided concrete examples to

the American students of how German is used by many different people living in Germany, whether that language is their L1, L2, or L3. Even in a much smaller town than Berlin, multilingualism is a reality for many living in Germany. And while many students expressed in course discussions and in their assignment diaries frustration at having English spoken to them, their multilingualism became an advantage that allowed to communicate more easily with AGB students.

One interesting aside that arose during class, though, is how moments of multilingualism within the course space did not necessarily contribute to a conceptualization of individual multicultural identity. The instructor mentioned at one point, in relation to *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers in West Germany from other countries; Italy, Greece, Turkey, and more) who helped the country rebuild after WWII and contributed to its economic recovery and prosperity), that those individuals would never really be German. When I challenged his assertion, asking about second and third generation citizens, born in Germany, he maintained his position, saying they haven't abandoned "their" culture and thus could not be German. To my surprise, a few of the AGB students supported his claim, saying that they could never truly become German, even if living in Germany the rest of their lives, because they couldn't give up their own culture, and because, for example, Ukrainian culture was so different to German culture. It was clear that, for this group, culture was closely tied to identity and that each were indivisible, even if actively living and speaking between cultures daily.

In a post-class, anonymous survey completed by three of the four students, all mentioned their time at AGB in a positive light, with two reflecting on their privilege at choosing to learn German:

> "We were also fortunate to be learning German as a choice unlike these people who needed to learn it to live in the country." Another said: "It caused me to reflect on what led to me participate in study abroad. I did it as an experience for pleasure and to try and learn and experience another culture, but the people I was in class with were there out of necessity and sometimes forced to flee there". A third student stressed: "The personal encounters made it far more realistic and human to me. I was able to hear from people who were going through the process of immigrating to Germany, learning the language, and trying to work there. I would consider this a positive impact."

In addition to providing students' perspectives on why, when, and how individuals choose to learn German, students found their time at AGB to be a low-stakes environment and saw themselves in a learning community with peers versus the native speakers who "often had an accent or spoke too fast" (survey student comment).

In reflecting on their entire study abroad program on our final day, students' preferences skewed largely toward Berlin because there was more to do, places were open later, and, plainly, it was more fun. However, their comments regarding Heilbronn ("boring," "quiet," "nothing to do," "clean") hearken back to the comments of their program predecessors from the 2019 cohort. Yet, in comparing linguistic experiences, they all preferred Heilbronn because they felt they had many more opportunities to speak their L2, especially with non-native speakers. What I also glean from those comments, though, is that they understood that multilingualism and multiculturalism are part of the fabric of German identity.

Conclusion

Although the steps integrated into our short-term study abroad program were, initially relatively minor, I believe there was enough anecdotal evidence to support continuing to create

more diverse encounters for students in our program. As one survey respondent put it, "Learning the extent to which immigrants were a part of German society … impacted my understanding of Germanness." An important change will be to reframe the syllabus's course objectives in terms of experiencing many facets of contemporary German culture over experiences of authentic culture. In addition to expanding pre-departure readings (students read excerpts from Brian Ladd's second edition of *Ghosts of Berlin*, entries from Black Central Europe, and poetry from Germans of Color, among others, May Ayim and Halit Ünal[6]), my intention is to have students further reflect on their understandings of Germanness and what in their classes, experience, and even American culture have framed those views. Within the Berlin context, my intention will be to work with Querstadtein, an organization that employs people experiencing homelessness and refugees, to lead students on tours that provide insight about contemporary social issues in the capital city. In Heilbronn, I also intend to focus more on contemporary German culture and move away from the grammar training. Because students responded well to their time at the ABG, I plan not only to include more sessions in their language courses, but to seek out service-learning activities in their second-hand store. Such activities will provide space for students to have authentic German experiences and utilize their L2 with a variety of individuals. Alongside these changes, I intend to restructure assignments to focus on ongoing reflection that ties into on-site experiences and their academic and personal interests over linguistic assessment. My hope is that with small steps toward providing more social engagement of different lived experiences in the

[6] May Ayim (1960-1996) was a poet, educator, author, and activist. Her work as a scholar helped to found the discipline of Afro-German studies.

Halit Ünal (b. 1951) is a Turkish born German author whose work examines migratory experiences and living between and in multiple cultural and linguistic contexts.

German context, I can provide students with not just language and culture, but meaningful connections that shift their perceptions of Germany within our short study abroad program.

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Culturally Relevant Community-Based Learning for Heritage Students of Spanish: A Virtual Collaboration with Dual Language Immersion Schools

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Chin-Sook Pak and Lynne Stallings

Department of Modern Languages and Classics and Department of English

Ball State University

Abstract

This paper explores best practices of incorporating high impact educational practices (HIPs) such as community-based learning/service-learning into the heritage language (HL) classroom. Specifically, it presents the design and outcomes of a virtual community collaboration that 1) supports a dual language immersion program at a local elementary school; 2) promotes bilingualism in a place with limited racial/ethnic diversity; 3) provides heritage students of Spanish with culturally affirming opportunities to engage in HIPs; and 4) addresses a local need - the shortage of bilingual teachers by exposing students to teaching career possibilities. With sample activities and a video/website that documents the outcomes of the collaboration, the paper intends to promote the urgent need for world language education in the nation.

Keywords: high impact practices (HIPs), community-based learning/service-learning, heritage language students of Spanish, dual language immersion, bilingual teacher shortage.

Introduction

At a time of increased division and decreased commitment to world language education in the nation, colleges and universities have an important role in collaborating with K-12 schools to facilitate language, intercultural, and global learning and to promote equity and inclusivity. In the context of heritage language (HL) education, research calls for critical language pedagogy that offers culturally inclusive learning and equitable access to education. Although the growing number of HL programs in the nation aims to address the legitimacy of US Hispanic students' cultural and linguistic heritages and their educational needs, many heritage students of Spanish continue to experience marginalization and linguistic insecurities. Language programs have traditionally centered around the formal, "standard," and prestigious varieties of Spanish from Spain and Latin America, places where Spanish has enjoyed a dominant status unlike Spanish in the U.S. In the case of predominantly White institutions (PWIs), HL students may face additional barriers in higher education. Without a critical mass of Hispanic presence, these students may experience alienation while navigating the social and academic climate of institutions centered around the dominant group.

Although the discourse in higher education is focused on equity and inclusivity, insufficient support for underrepresented minority (URM) students remains a constant challenge. For example, research demonstrates that high impact educational practices (HIPs) such as study abroad, service-learning/community-based learning, undergraduate research, capstone experiences, and so forth, have a significant effect on student success, engagement, and retention (Kuh, 2008). Nevertheless, URM students have traditionally had more limited access than White students to these practices (Finley & McNair, 2013; Kuh, 2008).

The current paper examines the intersection of community collaboration to encourage and support promotion of bilingualism/multilingualism in a place with limited racial and ethnic diversity, as well as the creation of culturally relevant learning opportunities and access to HIPs that focus on the linguistic and cultural wealth of heritage students of Spanish (rather than their deficiencies). In particular, it presents the design and outcomes of a virtual community collaboration that 1) supports a dual language immersion program at a local elementary school; 2) promotes advocacy for world language education in a place in Indiana with limited racial/ethnic diversity; 3) provides heritage students of Spanish with culturally-affirming, community-building learning experiences; and 4) addresses a local need in which the shortage of bilingual teachers has become a barrier to world language and dual language immersion programs. Students who were enrolled in an advanced Spanish class for heritage speakers collaborated with a local dual language immersion second grade classroom, offering a 10-week virtual reading/mentoring session while also serving as Hispanic role models. This project also aimed to support the legitimacy of students' cultural and linguistic heritages and empower them to use, strengthen and maintain Spanish as their heritage language, rather than focusing on the deficiency model of heritage language and bilingual education programs. In addition, through the virtual partnership with the local dual language immersion school, the community engagement intended to foster positive identity development and expansion of career opportunities.

Dual Language Immersion Programs in Indiana

Dual language immersion (DLI) programs promote bilingualism by teaching content in two primary languages. In addition to English, the most taught languages are Spanish and Chinese. Programs are typically characterized as being either two-way, where two primary language groups (e.g., English and Spanish) are served, or one-way, where learners of one

language (e.g., Spanish or English) are primarily served. The amount of instruction in each language can also vary across programs, though typically, the model is 90/10, 80/20, or 50/50 with the partner language comprising more time in the earlier grades. Across the country, in 2016-17, according to the Office of English Language Acquisition, "[t]hirty-five states and the District of Columbia reported having a dual language program" (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). More recently, as of spring 2023, data on the DualLanguageSchools.org website suggest forty-three states now have a DLI program, with at least 4,894 dual language schools across the United States registered on their website.

In the state of Indiana, the first DLI programs began in 1994. As of summer 2023, the state has 40 DLI programs registered with Spanish as the partner language: 17 one-way programs and 23 two-way programs (Indiana Department of Education)**.** Although the figure has been steadily growing, the number of elementary schools with DLI programs constitutes less than 3% of total primary schools in the state. Locally, the city in which the university is located, one elementary school began a DLI program in 2017. In the past six years, they have added one grade each year and will host DLI classes for K-6 grades in the 2023-2024 school year. Eighty percent of daily instruction is provided in Spanish and 20% is in English for Grades K-2. In grade 3, they transition to a 50/50 Spanish/English model. While the number of heritage speakers in this DLI program is increasing, there is not yet an equal number of heritage Spanish and English-speaking students, which makes this program a one-way model of instruction.

Many DLI programs articulate inclusion in developing bilingualism in both populations of students; however, several scholars call attention to the lack of access to quality bilingual education programs for minority students (Freire, Valdez., & Delavan, 2017; Palmer, 2010; Valdez, Freire, & Delavan, 2016). For example, Palmer (2010) notes the danger of DLI

programs "serving the needs of the dominant majority, leaving Latino and other minority students out of the picture, except insofar as their interests converge with those of the dominant majority" (p. 110). To address these concerns, the local DLI program is working with Hispanic families to demonstrate the benefits while communicating their mission statement for the DLI program to "advocate for linguistic and cultural equity in the classroom, the school and the district by disrupting monocultural ideologies to uplift multicultural students, their families, and their communities." (Westview Elementary School).

While the school's culture and teaching approaches are instrumental in providing a learning community that values multicultural engagement, deep cultural understanding, and appreciation, a greater awareness and more positive attitudes towards diverse communities comes with exposure to cultures and experiences unlike one's own. Given that only 1.8% of county residents identify as Hispanic and given that the DLI program is still growing to achieve the 50/50 goal of heritage Spanish and English speakers, there is an opportunity to partner with HL speakers of Spanish as linguistic and cultural mentors to children in the DLI program. The collaboration is particularly important, considering 96% of districts in Indiana report teacher shortages (Loughlin, 2021).

Moreover, research showing that students of color benefit from having effective teachers with cultural backgrounds similar to their own (Dee, 2004; Ingersoll & May, 2011) presents another possible challenge for emergent bilingual/heritage language speaker success in DLI programs. As of 2020, although the Hispanic K-12 student population has grown to 12.8%, the 1.7% of Hispanic teachers in Indiana is disproportionately low (Hinnefeld, 2020). Indeed, one of the struggles that DLI programs encounter is finding bilingual (Spanish-English) teachers who

are also Hispanic. Thus, in addition to requesting HL college mentors, the local DLI program sought collaboration with the university in an effort to increase the pipeline of bilingual teachers.

A Community-Based Project Design and Implementation for Heritage Students of Spanish

Hispanic students enrolled in the HL class, Advanced Spanish for Heritage Speakers, at the university typically consist of second-generation Spanish speakers with parents who immigrated predominantly from Mexico. The goals of the community-based learning project (i.e., service-learning in this case) were to: 1) design and deliver a meaningful service to the community (e.g., linguistic, cultural, and mentoring support for children in the dual language immersion program at a local elementary school); 2) provide underrepresented minority students (i.e., Hispanic students at a predominantly White institution) with culturally affirming and high-impact learning (HIPs) opportunities that promote HL maintenance; and 3) address the shortage of bilingual teachers by exposing HL students to meaningful teaching career possibilities in programs such as DLI.

Developing and strengthening reciprocal partnership. At the core of meaningful community engagement is building mutually beneficial campus-community partnerships. Scholarship on effective partnership development for service-learning/community-based learning highlights several important factors, such as clear articulation of a broad mission and particular goals, roles, and responsibilities of the collaborating parties, as well as a focus on relationships that promote closeness, equity, and integrity (Bringle, Clayton & Price, 2009; Bringle & Hatch, 2002; Dumlao, 2020). In the case of partnership development between higher education and K-12 schools, Furco (2013) delineates additional factors critical for ensuring "internal legitimization" for high quality engagement and buy-in from K-12 educators. These include grammar of schooling (i.e., respecting school norms such as schedules, curricula, contractual

commitments, and so forth), depth of knowledge on the school's unique culture for trust building, authenticity that results from full participation and commitment by both sides, and finally, status projection of equitable power relationships conducive to democratic decision-making processes.

The university with its long-standing prestige of Teachers College programs in the state has maintained close working ties with local community school corporations. Thus, when the only district elementary school with DLI contacted the university for collaboration possibilities, the partnership development became a natural fit with shared interests and goals to promote bilingualism and inclusion in the local community, as well as providing students with quality learning experiences. During the initial exploratory meetings with the DLI teachers and administrators of the elementary school, university liaisons who worked with the school, and the faculty member teaching the course offered space to share needs and interests, possible collaborative tasks, and resources for implementing the community project. In the case of the partnering elementary school, although the benefits and successes of the DLI program have been recognized, the program faces several obstacles. First, the challenge of hiring qualified bilingual teachers has been a constant hurdle. Second, the program has not been able to attract as many children from Spanish-speaking homes as those from English-speaking homes. To make DLI become more accessible to local Hispanic families, culturally appropriate promotion of the program and communication of its benefits to the families were needed. For example, some Hispanic families fear that the DLI program would delay the English language skills development of their children, even when research demonstrates the opposite results. Third, predominantly Anglo children in DLI programs have limited contact with Spanish-speakers beyond their bilingual teachers. Thus, the busy DLI teachers welcomed opportunities for

individual sessions of their students to have direct contact with heritage speakers of Spanish from the university.

For college HL students enrolled in the course, the partnership also offered numerous opportunities, in line with the specific learning objectives of the course and the mission of the university. First, one of the main goals of HL education is to promote HL maintenance as learners build their HL skills. An important determinant for HL maintenance is related to positive identity formation (Beaudrie et al., 2014; Leeman, 2015). In this respect, the collaboration focused on culturally relevant and affirming learning experiences for US Hispanics (rather than focusing on their deficiencies, which is too often the case). It also provided these underrepresented minority (URM) students with opportunities to engage in HIPs (Kuh, 2008). US Hispanics, along with other URM students have traditionally had limited access to these practices such as service-learning/community-based learning (Butin, 2006; Finley & McNair, 2013; Kuh, 2008). Furthermore, by offering personal support to young children in DLI, college HL students served as role models and funds of knowledge. Finally, the collaboration offered the college students first-hand experience to reinforce the value of their HL and cultural competence while introducing them to teaching careers.

Going virtual due to COVID-19. Although the COVID pandemic severely limited experiential learning opportunities involving the originally intended in-person activities, it has also expanded and affirmed quality virtual collaborative possibilities. Instead of college students visiting DLI classrooms and working with children in-person, the activities centered around zoom sessions with a second grade DLI class. The virtual collaboration eliminated the typical transportation issues that demand more time and coordination work for college students to get to the service site. Furthermore, by aligning the zoom sessions during class time for both parties,

the virtual platform facilitated supervision needed for interacting with minors, as well as supporting and guiding college mentors during the zoom sessions.

Identifying the service product: Weekly reading/mentoring sessions. Upon discussions with the local elementary school DLI teachers and administrators, we identified a project that would be beneficial and doable for both parties. The service product was to deliver ten-week virtual sessions, for 30 minutes each, considering schedule constraints, attention span of the children, and so forth. The linguistic and cultural input centered around reading books in Spanish, which were recommended by the DLI teachers. Each DLI child's iPad was set up for the zoom connection, and children would wear headsets to minimize distraction.

Equipping and preparing for weekly virtual mentoring sessions. At the beginning of the semester, college HL students received two training workshops to better understand the context of the community collaboration project. A faculty member with expertise in bilingual education and experience working with local community schools guided the class on the goals, benefits, and challenges of DLI programs. Another faculty member in elementary education and bilingual education equipped the class with practical suggestions on working with K-3 children and lesson planning. Next, both groups of college mentors and second graders introduced themselves to each other by making and sharing video messages in Spanish (see a sample video introduction by a college heritage speaker). Then, both groups met via zoom for 30 minutes each week during the class time. They began with group greetings and then divided into breakout sessions in which two college mentors would work with two DLI children. Given unpredictable absences, pairing in small groups better ensured continuity.

Prior to each virtual session, college students took turns in groups to prepare a lesson plan in Spanish based on a children's book recommended by the DLI teacher (see Appendices for a

sample lesson plan). First, some basic conversation questions were developed, taking into consideration what would be appropriate for the age and the language proficiency level of the children. Then, the lesson included a pre-reading activity, time to read aloud a book in Spanish together, and a post-reading activity that checked comprehension and highlighted cultural content. The lesson plans were shared with the DLI teacher for any feedback. After the completion of the breakout session, the two groups gathered back and took turns to share what children liked and what was meaningful as a class.

Documenting learning outcomes for college heritage students. Reflection is a key component of community engagement work. Regular, structured reflection activities with timely instructor feedback not only help students connect their community service experience to specific learning goals of the class, but also offer a space for them to share emotions, questions, and needs that arise during the community project (Ash, Clayton, & Atkinson, 2005; Correia & Blesicher, 2008; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hatcher, Bringle, & Muthia, 2004). In the case of language courses, oral and written reflection activities serve as a platform for generating meaningful language use while also creating accountability for community engagement (Pak, 2013). Thus, at the beginning of the semester, the class discussed the relevance of reflective activities, the structure of reflection journals, and the evaluation criteria. At the beginning of the semester, the class reviewed 1) the project goals and rationale, 2) information on the community partner, 3) the service product(s) and expectations, 4) a timeline of service activities, 5) outlets for sharing the class work with a larger public (e.g., a regional conference presentation, university presentation, and incorporating the work in students' CVs), and 6) guidelines on structuring written reflections.

Four reflection journals and a final reflection essay were collected during the semester. These writing assignments also offered an important vehicle to focus on language form (e.g., vocabulary, grammar, spelling, writing conventions, etc.) to strengthen their HL skills. Students were guided to describe their activities - what worked or did not work well and how they arrived at their conclusions, feelings about the project and what they learned (e.g., knowledge on bilingual education, DLI, language and cultural topics, teamwork, coordination/organization skills, interpersonal skills, community learning, self-awareness, advocacy for world language education, etc.), and any support needed. Regular class time was devoted each week to discuss their reflections and to problem-solve any challenges as a class and offer resources and support to one another. For the final reflection essay, students were asked to re-read their reflection journals and elaborate on how the experience met (or did not meet) the project and course goals, facilitated the use and maintenance of their HL, affected their evolving thoughts on what constitutes a good community service and meaningful learning, and influenced recommendations for future community projects and their interest in future community work.

Project Outcomes, Implications, and Limitations

Support for a dual language immersion program at a local elementary school. For the partnering school, the collaboration provided the children in the DLI program with an opportunity to connect with heritage speakers. Given the limited racial and ethnic diversity of the county, the project offered individualized Spanish language and cultural support to promote bilingualism/biliteracy. In particular, as Collier & Thomas (2004) note "[T]he respect and nurturing of the multiple cultural heritages and the two main languages present in the school lead to friendships that cross social class and language boundaries" (p. 11). The HL students served as role models for the young children in the DLI class. More importantly, all too often people are

unaware of DLI programs. In fact, none of the college HL students had heard about the program; the collaboration increased student awareness of not only the program, but also the benefits that DLI programs offer to Hispanic families.

Promotion and advocacy for language education and bilingualism. Quality DLI programs are instrumental in promoting bilingualism and intercultural learning particularly in places in Indiana with limited racial/ethnic diversity. At the end of the semester, several college HL students embraced the importance of advocacy as one student described:

> "Growing up, it was hard to maintain my heritage language as I was put into programs that pushed English and diminished the value of my native tongue. Dual Language Immersion is impressive because it accepts and celebrates culture and the power of bilingualism. Seeing bilingualism gain importance in primary education is incredibly validating and gives students of all different kinds of backgrounds hope that the future is *bilingüismo/multilingüismo*."

Furthermore, the collaboration resulted in additional post-semester community projects during the following semester's Spanish courses in which many of the HL students were enrolled. These projects included the design, production, and distribution of bilingual promotional materials for the DLI program (see website) in the community and expansion of collaboration to another elementary school with DLI in a different area of the state.

Access to culturally relevant HIPs for college heritage students. In their *Tension and contention in language education for Latinxs in the United States: Experience and Ethics in Teaching and Learning*, Martínez and Train (2020) contend that "[i]nequality and inequity are at the heart of the ongoing state of emergency in language education for Latinxs" (p. 8). Calling attention to the historical patterns of ignoring the lived experiences of U.S. Latinxs, the authors

stress, “the pedagogical and ethical urgency of teacher responsibility and learner agency” (p. 34). Indeed, even with the advantages of having grown up in bilingual and bicultural settings, many HL students have been subject to a deficiency approach to language learning (Beaudrie et al., 2014). Their HL has often been subjugated to the “standard,” “prestigious,” and formal varieties of Spanish that academia assigned in the language departments. In this respect, an important goal of the project with DLI was to place heritage learners of Spanish in the position of abundance, rather than the place of deficiencies.

The project embraced the “capacity-centered approach” (Martínez & Train, 2020) to language education for US Hispanics that stressed the value and power of further developing and maintaining their HL for advocacy and their vital presence in the community. First, as the post-project video interview demonstrates, students articulated leadership development through mentoring and serving as role models for the DLI students. They also discovered new interests such as teaching, mentoring, and working with children. They became aware of DLI programs, the state of bilingualism/multilingualism in Indiana and the need for language advocacy in the nation (e.g., the US lags behind on its commitment to language education among developed nations). The community work also became a vehicle to strengthen the sense of belonging at a PWI (Pak, 2018) as students came together to support children and the elementary school’s effort to promote the only DLI program in the city. In addition, the project allowed HL students to add their experience to CVs and accomplishments for scholarship, internship, and employment opportunities. For example, after the semester, one student applied and received a community service scholarship based on her work on this project; another received a job offer from a school with a DLI program in her hometown. Finally, another student used her community engagement experience to apply for and secure a bilingual position at a Social Security Office in the area.

Pipeline for bilingual teachers. Although Indiana's strategy for meeting the DLI programs' needs includes recruiting bilingual teachers from outside of the U.S. such as Spain, Puerto Rico, and several Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America, there has not been enough effort to recruit and equip heritage speakers of Spanish in the U.S. To this end, the university and local DLI program collaboration intended to inform as many HL students enrolled in the advanced Spanish class about teaching career opportunities. It is possible to begin work at DLI schools, while enrolled in a licensure program offered by the university, often with significant tuition support. Although we do not have information on the direct impact on the pipeline of bilingual teachers, we underscore the intentional exposure of HIPs opportunities in DLI settings as an important step to expose and recruit HL students for future bilingual teaching positions.

Limitations and challenges. Despite many benefits of community collaboration between higher education and local K-12 schools, the community work requires addressing a number of challenges. First, most HL students enrolled in the class were not education majors. Consequently, the project involved additional training and supervision for all activities for working with minors including background checks, mandatory training sessions required by the university and local schools for working with minors, as well as general lesson planning principles, which required interdisciplinary collaboration with faculty outside of the language department. This additional training better equipped students for the project and enhanced their comfort levels and interest in working with children in school settings. Second, although both parties had access to the necessary technology, at times, the internet connection was not always reliable. Third, unpredictable student absences had the potential of interfering with group activities and, therefore, required flexibility and adjustments. Fourth, to ensure quality,

community engagement work demanded more time commitment than traditional classes in order to form reciprocal partnerships and ensure quality service products. Fifth, given the increasing work demands placed on k-12 teachers, the university partner took responsibility for providing lesson plans to the teachers in advance for feedback. Finally, the focus on this paper is limited to college HL students and does not incorporate the voices of DLI children. Future research can survey DLI teachers to ensure K-12 perspectives.

Conclusions

World language programs at many universities and colleges in the U.S. have faced an alarming enrollment decline during the last several years. At this challenging time of declining interest in and commitment to world language education and bilingualism in the nation, there is a greater need for collaborations between higher education and k-12 schools to promote and support dual language schools.

The current paper examined the benefits of partnership with dual language immersion (DLI) schools and culturally affirming community-based learning for heritage students of Spanish, especially at predominantly White institutions. The paper highlights the importance of a reciprocal university and K-12 partnership via service-learning/community-based learning projects to support the only DLI program in a community with limited racial/ethnic diversity. The project provided HL college students with the opportunity to support a DLI program in the local community by preparing and implementing virtual Spanish lessons with DLI second graders on a weekly basis. In this one-way DLI program with more mainstream English speakers than HL Spanish/Emergent Bilingual students due to a community with a low proportion of racial/ethnic diversity, the HL college students were able to serve as mentors for second graders who benefit from interacting and building relationships with HL speakers serving as role models.

The community project further provided HL students with culturally affirming opportunities to engage in HIPs while strengthening HL skills and capitalizing on their linguistic and cultural heritages to build community. Finally, while it is too early to tell how directly this project will impact the teacher pipeline for DLI teachers of Spanish, the partnership exposed HL college students to both teaching career possibilities and the benefits of DLI instruction for their home communities. The knowledge and the experiences they are taking away about the benefits of such programs are invaluable.

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Appendix

Sample Weekly Lesson Plan for Virtual Mentoring

El plan para la sesión

El libro (Selected book): *Alma y cómo obtuvo su nombre* ("Alma and How She Got Her Name") por Juana Martínez-Neal. (In this book Alma feels awkward about her long Hispanic name and her father explains to her the cultural heritage behind it.)

I. Conversación para conocerse (*to get to know each other)*

- ¿Cómo te llamas? *(What is your name?)*
- ¿Cuántos años tienes? *(How old are you?)*
- ¿Tienes hermanos? ¿Cómo se llaman? (*Do you have brothers/sisters? What are their names?)*
- ¿Cuál es tu color favorito? => Mi color favorito es xxx. ¿Y tú? (*What is your favorite color? My favorite color is xxx. And you?)*
- ¿Cuál es tu comida favorita? (*What is your favorite food?)*
- ¿Cuál es tu juego favorito? (*What is your favorite game?)*
- ¿Te gusta bailar? ¿Cantar? ¿Ver la televisión? (*Do you like to dance? To sing? To watch TV?)*

II. Pre-lectura (para prepararse con el tema del libro) "Alma" => screen share (*Pre-reading activity)*

- ¿Te gusta español? (*Do you like Spanish?)*
- ¿Te gusta leer? ¿Cómo se llama tu libro favorito? (*Do you like to read? What is your favorite book?)*
- ¿Me quieres ayudar a leer cómo se llama el libro? (*Do you want to help me read the title of the book?)*
- ¿Cuál es tu nombre completo? ¿Cuál es el nombre de tu padre? ¿Y su apellido? ¿Cuál es el nombre de tu madre? (*What is your complete name? What is the name of your father? And his last name? What is your mom's name?)*

III. Lectura (=> leer MUY lento y claro) (*Reading together => very slowly and clearly)*

IV. Pos-lectura (*Post-reading activity)*

- ¿Quién es Alma? (*Who is Alma?)*
- A Alma, ¿le gusta su nombre? ¿Por qué sí o no? (*Does Alma like her name? Why or why not?)*
- ¿Quién ayuda a Alma? (*Who helps Alma?)*
- ¿Cuáles nombres te acuerdas de Alma? (*How many names can you remember about Alma?)*
- ¿De dónde viene su nombre? (*Where does her name come from?)*
- ¿Te gusta tener un nombre más largo como Alma? (*Would you like to have a long name like Alma?)*

- ¿Cuál fue tu parte favorita? ¿Por qué? (*What was your favorite part of the book and why?)*

V. Tarea y despedida (*Homework and farewell)*

- Pregúntales a tus papás de dónde es tu nombre (y de dónde son los apellidos de tus padres) (*Ask your parents where your name comes from and where their last names come from)*

Incorporating Culture into a Language Classroom through Chinese Character Teaching and Practice

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Ming Wu

Department of Classical and Modern Languages, University of Louisville

Author Note

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Ming Wu, Department of Classical and Modern Languages, University of Louisville, Louisville, KY 40292

Contact: ming.wu@louisville.edu

Abstract

Acquiring Chinese characters is essential for improving students' overall Chinese language proficiency. However, American students often feel intimidated when it comes to reading and writing Chinese characters. This paper introduces a comprehensive approach and provides Teaching Chinese as a Second Language (TCSL) teachers with specific strategies for incorporating culture into Chinese character teaching and practicing activities. The author points out that incorporating cultural elements into teaching helps to build the three-way connections between the shape, meaning(s), and pronunciation(s) of a Chinese character. Through stories, pictures, animations, video clips, and hands-on activities, students are introduced to a fun, engaging, and effective way to master Chinese characters as well as exposed to the fascinating culture and wisdom of ancient Chinese as conveyed by the unique writing system. This approach also nurtures students' interest in learning and practicing Chinese characters through poetry and artwork, brings their attention to the close connections between characters and phrases, and leads to a deeper understanding of Chinese language and culture.

Keywords: Teaching Chinese as a Second Language; Chinese characters; Chinese culture; language and culture

Introduction

In world language classrooms, it has become common sense that language and culture are inseparable. Language is a vehicle that carries and expresses culture. Understanding of the target culture will significantly improve learners' sociocultural competence and cross-cultural communication skills. Brown (2014) described the relationship between language and culture as follows:

> It is apparent that culture, as an ingrained set of behaviors and modes of perception, becomes highly important in the learning of a second language. A language is a part of a culture, and a culture is a part of a language: the two are intricately interwoven so that one cannot separate the two without losing the significance of either language or culture. The acquisition of a second language, except for specialized, instrumental acquisition (as may be the case, say, in acquiring a reading knowledge of a language for examining scientific texts), is also the acquisition of a second culture. (p. 171)

The importance of integrating culture into language classrooms has been commonly recognized among TCSL teachers. However, as Chen (2018) pointed out, "Although many researchers and practitioners commonly regard culture as important in foreign language (FL) education, cultural instruction remains insufficient" (p. 94). According to Yu (2009), cultural information is very often presented as an "add-on" to language learning in Chinese language classrooms and textbooks. We need better approaches to truly place Chinese language in its cultural context and boost student engagement and learning.

On the other hand, Chinese character teaching is the weakest link in TCSL. To American students, character acquisition is often the most intimidating and challenging aspect of learning Chinese. Unlike languages in the Indo-European family, Chinese words are recorded in characters. Each Chinese character has its own shape, pronunciation(s), and meaning(s). To

acquire a character, a three-way connection needs to be built. This is very different from what American students are used to.

However, Chinese characters are of utmost importance in improving students' overall language proficiency. They are the building blocks of the Chinese language. One Chinese character is repeatedly used in forming multiple compound words and phrases. Mastery of characters leads to a more efficient path toward understanding words and sentences. It also bridges the formal language with the colloquial language and connects Classical Chinese with modern Chinese. The importance of acquiring characters and the amount of cultural information carried by this unique written system cannot be overlooked in TCSL teaching.

In reality, many teachers only involve Chinese etymology when students first start to learn the most simple and basic characters, and they believe this is the most expedient means by which teachers bring culture into character teaching. Moreover, after that initial stage, character teaching itself is also drastically reduced. Little time is allocated to character instruction and practice activities in class. The process of acquiring characters often becomes a long and tedious process in which students feel as if they are left on their own.

Like the concept of incorporating culture into Chinese language classrooms, the importance of Chinese character teaching is highly recognized but is not sufficiently implemented. This area needs the most help in TCSL, but there are not many new or effective methods. If teachers want to enhance student engagement, strengthen student retention, and make the learning process of the Chinese language easier and more fun, they must adjust their teaching strategies to help students enjoy learning and practicing characters. Aiming at finding a different way to integrate culture into Chinese language classrooms and improve character teaching, this research developed three specific strategies to incorporate cultural elements into

the classroom. They make the process of learning more fun, engaging, inspiring, modern, and efficient.

Strategies for Incorporating Culture into Chinese Character Teaching and Practice: Incorporating Traditional Culture into Character Learning through Etymology

Many teachers use etymology to introduce the origins of Chinese characters and the evolution of the basic Chinese characters in the first weeks of character instruction. However, they often stop soon after this step because this practice requires teachers to be more knowledgeable about etymology. The way most TCSL textbooks are compiled does not support the systematic teaching of etymology because textbook composition typically follows communicative guidelines. The appearance of characters in textbooks is decided by the content of communicative tasks and conversations in texts. It is impossible for individual teachers to conduct rigorous research to find out every single character's etymology before they can teach it. In addition, character derivation does not always help. Some modern characters look very different from their ancient scripts, and meanings of some characters have completely changed compared to their origins.

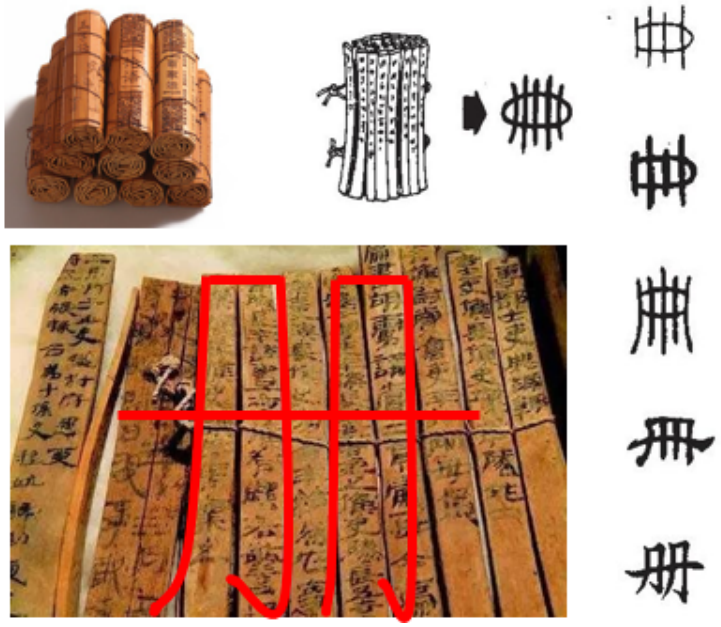
To successfully incorporate traditional culture into character learning through etymology, the key is to identify characters that best fit this approach. Introducing every single character through etymology is neither necessary nor practical. In addition, for the characters chosen to be taught through etymology, a way must be found to make the process useful instead of distracting. Introduction of the origins and evolution of a character can help to draw the connections between the shape of certain characters and their meanings.

Etymology is useful for more than the simplest characters at the beginner level. In fact, at the intermediate and advanced levels, if used properly, etymology can also help to incorporate

culture and make it easier to acquire certain characters. For example, Hanyu Shuiping Kaoshi (HSK) is an international standardized exam which tests and rates Mandarin Chinese language proficiency for non-native speakers. 册 is a HSK level 5 character, which means students will likely see this character for the first time in intermediate Chinese classes. The character 册 (book or volume) originated from the image of bamboo strips strung together because the ancient Chinese people wrote on bamboo strips. The oracle bone script and other ancient scripts of this character look similar to its modern form. The historical and cultural information carried by this character is easy to understand and fun to learn. If teachers show a picture of bamboo strips strung together when teaching this character, it will help students connect the character with its meaning and understand its cultural and historical information as well as make it easier to explain other characters that share the same cultural elements. For example, after learning 册 (book or volume), students will encounter a more difficult character—删 (to delete, eliminate, remove, or erase)—in HSK level 7 to 9 vocabulary. 删 consists of 册(book or volume) and 刂 (knife radical). Miswritten characters on strung bamboo strips had to be scraped off by a knife in ancient China. Therefore, 册 (book or volume) + 刂 (knife radical) = 删 (to erase). By simply showing a picture of ancient Chinese scraping characters off bamboo strips, 删 will be easily explained and remembered in the cultural context.

Figure 1

A PowerPoint slide showing the evolution of the character 册 and tips to memorize it.



Note. The image of ancient bamboo strips is from http://www.sohu.com/a/135462830_523099
The images showing the evolution of 册 are from 字源网
http://qiyuan.chaziwang.com/etymology-20513.html

Figure 2

An image showing a man scraping characters off of bamboo strips

Note. This image is from https://www.zhihu.com/question/41739911?sort=created&page=1
The original picture was a screenshot from the 2017 Chinese TV drama *The Advisors' Alliance (Part 1)*.

Properly incorporating cultural elements through etymology into Chinese character teaching can also help to distinguish characters that confuse students, such as 天 versus 夫, 高 versus 亮, 目 versus 日, 既 versus 即, and 见 versus 贝. For example, if students cannot tell the difference between 天 (sky, day, heaven) and 夫 (adult male, a married man, husband), the instructor can introduce the ancient Chinese capping ceremony, show related pictures or video clips, and explain that, during this ceremony, a male's hair was bound with a clasp and capped to suggest the beginning of his adulthood. The "sticking-out cap" on 夫 is what makes it look different from 天. An image of a man wearing traditional Hanfu costume and a cap on his head while opening his arms wide will give students a strong visual impression. Teachers could even invite students to wear a Hanfu cap and imitate the character 夫 with their body language. This type of act-it-out cultural activity is a fun and engaging process to help students discern the differences between characters.

Figure 3

A PowerPoint slide showing the evolution of the character 夫 and the capping ceremony.

Note. The image showing the ancient capping ceremony is from https://baike.baidu.com/item/%E5%86%A0%E7%A4%BC/816971. The etymology images are from http://qiyuan.chaziwang.com/etymology-5450.html

For some Chinese characters, although their original meanings remain, it is difficult for a second language learner to draw connections between the now very abstract shape and its original meaning. For example, the character 心 represents "heart," which originated from the pictogram of a heart. However, the modern shape of 心 does not quite look like a heart. In this case, teachers can adapt or even create a more intuitive image to help build the connection.

Figure 4

A PowerPoint slide created by the author to connect the character 心 with its meaning "heart."

Bringing Art into the Language Classroom through Character Learning Activities

Practicing the writing of Chinese characters should not entail mere mechanical copying of them in the right stroke orders. Chinese characters are naturally in connection with visual art, such as calligraphy. Calligraphy is the art of beautiful handwriting. Many teachers treat it as an extracurricular cultural activity. They give students limited opportunities to try calligraphy with

traditional writing brushes, rice paper, and ink. This kind of activity can be intriguing at the beginning, but it can also be problematic because 1) the preparatory work for writing with brush and ink takes a great deal of time and sometimes becomes very messy, and 2) students can become frustrated quickly because of how difficult it is for beginners to use traditional calligraphy tools.

Bringing visual art into the language classroom can go beyond traditional calligraphy with writing brushes. Teachers should observe student reactions closely and adjust strategies according to feedback. In contemporary China, calligraphy with a pen is also very popular. A pen or even a pencil can be used to produce inspiring calligraphy art pieces as well. During the COVID-19 pandemic, some Chinese calligraphers shifted to online teaching and produced high-quality instructional video clips, such as Zhi Xing Calligraphy School's recorded demonstrations of calligraphy with pencils. This variant of Chinese calligraphy is closer to American students' reality and easier to implement.

Other than considering different choices of writing tools, teachers should also ask themselves this question: Is writing the standard script the only option when bringing Chinese calligraphy into character teaching? The truth is that, when given freedom to choose their own styles, writing tools and surfaces, students are more engaged, focused, and creative. They can produce beautiful character artworks on rice paper, card stock, blank bookmarks, blank red envelopes, fans, umbrellas, and pottery. In the largest Chinese teachers' online community on Facebook, Lin (2021) even shared her lesson plan for teaching students how to make their own Chinese seals with craft foam sheets, which are easy to find and very affordable in the US. Bringing visual art into the classroom ignites students' passion for practicing character writing.

Figure 5

University of Louisville Student Atticus Card's calligraphy art (2019): An ancient Chinese poem on a paper umbrella

Figure 6

University of Louisville students' artworks in various scripts, produced with different writing tools on a variety of surfaces.

It is not only traditional Chinese art that can be incorporated into character teaching and practice: Various other art forms can also be utilized to stimulate student interest in learning. When the character 米 (rice) is taught, students can be encouraged to make their own character art by arranging grains of rice in the shape of the character. Yan Huang created a website to show her and her students' creations of Chinese character art. Her approach involves encouraging students to draw pictures based on their own understanding of a specific Chinese character. This method is highly successful in her K-12 classrooms and has been implemented by several other teachers.

Figure 7

Character 米 (rice) art with grains of rice by the author.

Figure 8

Middle school students' creations of Chinese character art.

Note. Chinese teacher Zhigang Liu tried Yan Huang's approach. His middle school students created these character artworks in 2019. Zhigang Liu owns the copyrights for these photos.

Chinese folk art can also be used to integrate culture with character learning. Chinese characters with vertical symmetry features are perfect for papercutting designs. During the Spring Festival celebration, a hands-on 3D 春 (spring) papercutting activity can give students a deeper impression of the structure and meaning of this character. They will also be exposed to China's papercutting folk art, which has a history spanning 2000 years. In recent years, realizing the value of papercutting in classrooms, several teachers and organizations have designed new papercutting patterns around traditional festivals and have shared them through social media. For example, Taipei Confucius Temple has been sharing their new modern papercutting designs frequently through their Facebook Fans' Club page during major traditional Chinese festivals. These designs are often perfect combinations of Chinese characters and vivid patterns of flowers or animals. Chinese language teachers around the world can access these designs for free and use them in classroom teaching. The need for incorporating culture into a language classroom also

has a positive impact on reviving and preserving traditional Chinese culture. It even plays a role in modernizing traditional folk art, such as papercutting.

Figure 9

2022 Spring Festival "Year of the Tiger" Papercutting Design 春虎 (Spring Tiger). Shared by Taipei Confucius Temple on January 22, 2022.

Note. The copyright for this image belongs to the Taipei Confucius Temple. https://www.facebook.com/taipeiconfuciustemple/photos/pcb.4819375478114302/4819117584806758/

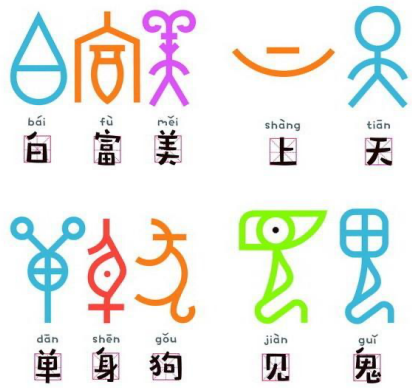
Some professionally made masterpieces of animation loaded with cultural elements are also great resources to boost students' interest in learning Chinese characters. One is called the *Story of 36 Chinese Characters*, which is a remarkable animated short film that shows the

formation of basic Chinese characters. It consists of a brush painting in motion accompanied by traditional music.

Even emojis, an important element of pop culture, can be used in character teaching. In recent years, oracle bone script emojis have been trending in China. According to Ying (2018, para. 2), "the emojis use the oracle bone script to illustrate online buzzwords and internet slang. They combine the pictographic nature of the characters found on ancient 'oracle' bones with color and animation." These oracle bone scripts with a modern twist are perfect examples to show how traditional and modern Chinese culture are bound together by Chinese characters.

Figure 10

Examples of oracle bone script emojis.



Note. The image is from an article introducing oracle bone script emojis on Sohu.com. http://www.sohu.com/a/218591510_162522

Incorporating Culturally Rich Idioms and Ancient Chinese Literature into Character Learning

Do students need a high Chinese proficiency before they start learning and understanding idioms and ancient literature? The answer is "no" if their method of learning Chinese characters is correct. Kecskes and Sun (2017, p. 127) introduced "character-unit" theory and "word-unit" theory in their book, as follows:

> The main tendency in Chinese as a Foreign Language (CFL) teaching is to assume that the word is the basic lexical unit, as confirmed by the vast majority of handbooks available. This approach is regarded as representative of the tradition in pedagogical studies and is responsible for relegating vocabulary instruction to a marginal position compared to grammar. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that a debate, which started in the 1990s, has increasingly focused on the opposition between the so-called character-unit (zìběnwèi) theory and the word-unit (cíběnwèi) theory, with a number of Chinese scholars supporting the idea that, as the convergence of the phonetic, semantic, lexical, and grammatical levels, character, rather than word, should be considered the basic unit of analysis (and of vocabulary teaching).

Modern Mandarin Chinese vocabulary is primarily composed of compound words made up of two or more morphemes. Each morpheme is recorded by one character and pronounced in one syllable. Therefore, modern Mandarin has more disyllabic words. Conversely, disyllabic words rarely appear in ancient Chinese literature. Classical Chinese is based on single morpheme words recorded by only one character. On this basis, culturally rich idioms and ancient Chinese literature, especially poetry, can be integrated into character teaching if the classes are carefully designed. Seeing characters in meaningful and beautiful literary works will also make acquiring

them and memorizing them easier and more fun. For example, at the beginner level, right after learning the basic characters 一 (one), 二 (two), 石 (stone, rock), and 鸟 (bird), teachers can use the simple idiom 一石二鸟 (kill two birds with one stone), which also has an English equivalent, to tie the characters together and raise students' interest.

For intermediate and advanced level students, an even more important step is to help them recognize the meanings of characters in compound words and help them realize that what they assume are "fixed" structures are actually combinations of detachable and reusable characters. For example, when students study the word 新闻 (news) at the intermediate level, most textbooks do not divide this word and explain the meaning of each character. Teachers should step in and point out that 新 is "new" and 闻 actually means "to hear." When 闻 is used alone in modern Mandarin, the meaning is very often "to smell." However, its original meaning, "to hear," still remains in more than 30 compound words and idioms, such as 见闻 (what one sees and hears; knowledge), 举世闻名 (the whole world has heard its name; be known to all the world), and 百闻不如一见 (hearing one hundred times is not as good as seeing it once; seeing is believing). One of the greatest ancient Chinese poems, *春晓* ("Spring Dawn") by the renowned Tang Dynasty poet 孟浩然 (Meng Haoran) can also be integrated into the teaching of 闻. The full poem, with Shawn Powrie's 2015 translation, is quoted below:

春晓 Spring Dawn

春眠不觉晓, Sleeping in on a spring morn — sensing not the dawn,

处处闻啼鸟, Everywhere is heard the tweeting of the bird,

夜来风雨声, Come night and the wind-rain sound,

花落知多少. Unknown how many petals fell to the ground.

The character 闻 (to hear) itself actually originated from the combination of 門 (door) as its phonetic component and 耳 (ear) as its semantic component. Analysis of the formation of characters and their functions in compound words, idioms, and ancient literary works can help to connect the shapes with meanings and bridge modern Mandarin and Classical Chinese. In fact, for advanced level students, this is an easy path to the accumulation of more idiomatic terms, which is necessary for improving their language proficiency to the Superior level described in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines (2012).

Conclusions and Future Study

Learning Chinese characters does not need to be painful. The process can be fun, inspiring, and engaging when proper cultural elements are included in teaching. Incorporating culture into a Chinese language classroom is a win-win strategy. Students are exposed to the fascinating culture and the wisdom of ancient Chinese as carried by the unique writing system. Cultural elements help to motivate students and accelerate language acquisition.

This method also nurtures students' interest in learning and practicing Chinese characters through poetry and artwork, draws their attention to the close connections between characters and phrases, and leads to a deeper understanding of the Chinese language and culture. However, currently, bringing culture into Chinese character teaching still depends on individual teachers' efforts. Limited time, energy, and resources dictate why this effective approach is not yet widely adopted in world language classrooms. Future research should focus on building the much-needed supporting resources, such as a database with accurate cultural information carried by every character and details about proper teaching methods.

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Listening to Our Learners: A Thematic Analysis of U.S. College Students' Preferences in Language Education Resources

■

Giovanni Zimotti,[1] Rachel A. Klevar, [1] Gabriela Olivares-Cuhat, [2] Eden G. Jones[3]

1 Department of Spanish and Portuguese, University of Iowa

2 Department of Languages and Literatures, University of Northern Iowa

*3 Office of Teaching, Learning, and Technology, University of Iow*a

Author Note

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Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Giovanni Zimotti at giovanni-zimotti@uiowa.edu

Abstract

Commercial language textbooks are utilized by many professionals in higher education. Unfortunately, these second language learning textbooks are prepared without direct input from their users, are primarily based on stories of fictional characters, and may not always relate to the reality of the student population. Due to this situation, this article describes a project which aims to find out what content interests U.S. college students to design an open educational resource that is more inclusive and relatable to the learning needs and lives of our students. To this end, 283 students provided feedback through an online questionnaire. The thematic analysis of the responses indicate that students view language learning as a process of intercultural discovery, value the understanding of different cultures, and are interested in social justice topics. The article concludes by giving pedagogical recommendations for the creation and adoption of OERs best suited to meet the needs of a diverse student population.

Keywords: Open Educational Resources, language textbooks, language topics

Introduction

Over the past two decades, there has been an emergence of more affordable alternatives to textbook publishing than the traditional commercial textbooks from established companies. These alternatives use Creative Common licenses that allow instructors to freely adopt, share, and modify these pedagogical resources which are commonly known as Open Educational Resources (OER). However, while teachers and scholars have a wide range of free resources at their disposal, the process of promoting and implementing these materials has proven to be slow. For example, even as late as 2012 a faculty and administrator survey in Florida reported that more than half of respondents "were 'not at all familiar' with open access textbooks" (Morris-Babb & Henderson, 2012, p. 151). While the adoption of this resource has increased since the early 2000s, many instructors remain unaware of their existence and pedagogical benefits.

There has, however, been a marked increase in research on the effectiveness of OERs as learning materials, including direct comparisons between OER and commercial textbooks. For instance, studies have found that OERs are perceived to provide content on par with that of commercial textbooks (Hilton, 2019), their cost-effectiveness enhances student learning outcomes (Hilton, 2016), and their usage is associated with improved academic performance and reduced course drop-out rates (Colvard et al., 2018; Clinton & Khan, 2019).

OER textbooks allow instructors to tailor the content of their offerings to the needs of their students, both financially and pedagogically. They also provide authors with the flexibility to create materials for specific instructors' needs. Moreover, OER textbooks provide an unparalleled opportunity for authors to adapt and modify their work according to the diverse needs of various educators.

The creation and use of OERs has attracted increasing interest in the field of L2. A significant number of Spanish OERs released in recent years support this trend, as shown in Appendix A. To better meet the unique needs of our students, the goal was to create an OER Elementary Spanish textbook specifically designed to address the reality of our students. We decided to consider their backgrounds, interests, and previous experiences learning Spanish. With this in mind, we provided students with a survey in order to collect their perceptions of their current textbook, thoughts and opinions on topics of interest and suggestions for improvements.

In addition, we aimed at creating a community of language learners through topics that genuinely interest students and trigger an intrinsic motivation to learn an L2 while making the learning process more enjoyable and meaningful (Gardner, 2010).

Also, by involving students in the early development of a textbook and considering their feedback, we believe we made them feel like active members of the L2 community, an idea supported by Bernaus (2010), who stated that students "will be more motivated to engage in a task if they have some say in what the task is" (p. 186). Moreover, when students envision themselves as active members of a community or classroom, they are more motivated to direct their language learning process and achieve effective communication (Dörnyei, 2009)

On the other hand, few studies have analyzed the type of content of L2 commercial textbooks from different points of view. For example, Siegel (2014) looked at the authenticity of the topics of a textbook for Japanese learners of English and concluded that more authentic topics were needed to "better prepare students for the world out there" (p. 363). Other researchers have focused on the role of gender (Korell, 2021; Robles, 2007) and cultural representation (Hilliard, 2014) in L2 textbooks. Robles (2007) reported that women were

underrepresented and were portrayed executing stereotypical activities assigned to women while never in roles such as firewomen, lawyers, directive jobs, etc. Additionally, in textbooks published by Spanish companies, women from Latino countries and the U.S. were usually left out (Robles, 2007). Hilliard (2014) stated that there was an underrepresentation of minority groups and cultures in images and listening activities. In her analysis, Korell (2021) showed that, while some progress has been made (e.g., textbooks assign less stereotypical roles to women), textbooks "still contribute in a subtle way to the social construction of gender inequality" (p. 219). Thus, gender is still presented as a binary norm, there is no inclusion of LGBTQ+ people, and gender-neutral language is absent from advanced language textbooks.

On the other hand, the presentation of culture in OER textbooks was discussed by McKay (2003), who recognized the importance of incorporating the local culture into L2 learning to facilitate interactions. Using an OER framework for the dissemination of quality educational information is an act of social justice since it provides free access to an otherwise inaccessible content. It is important to remove the substantial barriers that book purchases bring to a vast majority of students, a fact that is exacerbated among historically underrepresented college students (Jenkins et al., 2020). What is more, OERs should ensure that students see themselves reflected and enfranchised in the coursework (Seiferle-Valencia, 2020) through explicit representations and perspectives which include antiracist, antisexist, queer, and those from marginalized groups. Therefore, creating an OER textbook through a process-centric approach that queries students about content rather than imposing it, was considered a main tenet of this project as it "will foreground the value of diverse opinions" (Bali et al., 2020, p. 2).

To address these issues, our study was guided by the following research question: *In what ways can a Spanish OER address the L2 interests/needs of our diverse student population?*

Methods

This project stems from an online survey given to college students in order to provide feedback on their learning practices and preferences. The idea behind this approach was to put participation and action research at the forefront of education. The researchers' concern was to give students a voice to create a learning resource based on their needs and wants. The data gathered was used to guide the book creation and activities.

The Context of the Project

This study was conducted at a large public R1 institution in the U.S. and an online questionnaire was distributed to all students enrolled in courses in the Spanish Basic Program. The program is structured as a four-semester sequence, which, upon completion, allows students to fulfill the general education requirement for World Languages. True beginners start by taking Elementary Spanish I, while other students are enrolled in language classes according to the scores obtained in language placement test. By the end of the fourth semester, students are expected to reach a minimum of Intermediate level of proficiency (ACTFL) in the target language, although many of them go beyond that level.

When the questionnaire was distributed, the program was using a flipped, or hybrid, approach, in which students were introduced to new language concepts through online activities outside of the class time. By utilizing this flipped approach, students were able to work at their own pace by watching pre-recorded video lectures and completing daily online activities included in the publisher's learning platform. When students returned to the class, they engaged in a range of communicative activities aimed at developing language skills and intercultural competence, without explicit focus on grammar. In this manner, most of the class time was devoted to the fostering of oral communication while a small portion of the class-time was

dedicated to teacher-guided clarifications of difficult concepts. At the time of the project, the Spanish program relied on a commercial textbook called *Protagonistas* (Cuadrado et al., 2018), which was based on a communicative approach and emphasized "task-driven communication within meaningful, pragmatic contexts of everyday life." (Cuadrado et al., 2018, p. IAE-5).

Participants

283 students attending a large U.S. research university participated in the study, which followed IRB protocol. All participants were enrolled in a required general education course as part of a language requirement. All students enrolled in one of the four elementary and intermediate levels of Spanish were invited to participate and received a link via email to complete a survey voluntarily. The majority of the students' ages ranged from 18-21 (n = 243) and only 20.5% (n = 58) identified themselves as being part of an underrepresented group. In this latter division, the most representative category selected was "Two or more races", and the second most representative responses were "Hispanic/Latino" and "African American." In addition, first-generation students were also represented and comprised 23.32% (n = 66) of the sample.

Tools

An online questionnaire created using the software Qualtrics was used to collect information. Demographic questions were used to gather information which included questions about age, minority group, and first-generation status based on a belief that all voices should be included in this exercise. The remaining five open-ended questions inquired about topics that students liked or disliked and future topics of interest, which were further examined via Taguette, a free and open tool that allows researchers to codify qualitative data in order to find common patterns (See Appendix B).

Data Analysis

First, the questions regarding the participants' demographics were tabulated and are provided in the participant section of this article (see above). Then an inquiry was conducted by means of a thematic analysis through implementation of Taguette-a text tagging tool to start a coding process. After removing the answers from the participants who did not complete the qualitative part of the survey, we were left with 1130 responses to the five open-ended questions out of 283 participants.

The analysis of the open-ended responses involved a line-by-line coding process, which facilitated the grouping of distinct categories and themes as proposed by Charmaz in 2006. In this process, an initial coding was done by the team leader, who then presented the analysis to the research team. In this second phase, the investigators discussed the pre-identified themes and categories to reach consensus. In case of disagreements, the team engaged in discussions until a mutually agreed-upon resolution was found.

Findings

While coding the answers, we observed that some major themes emerged from our students' voices. The emergence of these themes reshaped our research goal towards identifying which topics ought to be included in our textbook leading to a broader and more compelling analysis. This study grouped the themes that emerged during the coding procedures into four main categories. We first focused on why our students are learning a language. Then, we discussed the topics that most or least interest them, which was the initial goal of this study. The third topic addressed the importance of introducing social justice themes, such as inclusive

language in the Spanish classroom. We ended this analysis with an evaluation of the value students assigned to their teachers and to language-learning tools.

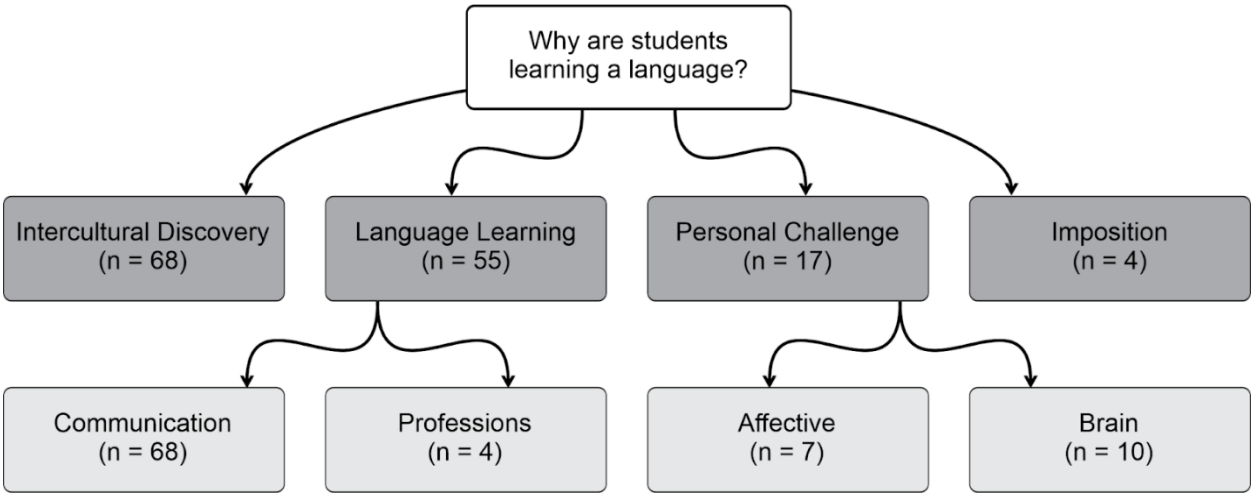
Why Are Students Learning a Language?

The answer to this question was not part of our initial purpose; we wanted to get information about the topics that most excited our students. However, the majority of students took the opportunity to tell us why they were learning a language. We were pleasantly surprised by this outcome, since their responses provided a snapshot of the motivations behind their learning. When analyzing the results, it is important to underscore that most of the participants were taking a Spanish course as part of a university language requirement. Therefore, we were pleased to find only four students who expressed dissatisfaction with being required to take a language class. For example, one student said that he "hated this course", while another said that he had "no passion or interest in this language."

Besides the responses of the few students who did not show interest in learning a language, three main types of themes emerged from the analysis of our students' opinions. The largest group, which we define as *intercultural discovery* (n = 68), included students who were excited and motivated by the possibility of learning about different cultures, traditions, and communities in a Spanish classroom. The second group, identified as *language learning*, includes all the responses that demonstrate our students' enthusiasm about gaining the ability to communicate with other Spanish speakers. The third group, labeled *personal challenge*, is smaller but not less important. The group consists of students who viewed learning a new language as a task they were eager to tackle. The hierarchical framework of all the tokens identified for this section is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Hierarchical Framework of All Tokens Regarding the Reasons Why Students Are Learning a Language.



One main finding is that undergraduate students indicated a willingness to learn about the heritage, culture, and traditions of Spanish speakers who reside in the US. Many students said that what excited them the most "in a language is learning about other cultures." Another participant further explained by saying that what was most appealing to them consisted of "being able to expand my horizons and absorb as much of another culture as possible." This willingness to learn about other cultures can also be seen in the various answers that mention learning and actively participating in various Day of the Dead events. Such responses tend to indicate that our students recognize the importance of a multicultural society and enjoy learning about other cultures on both a local and global scale.

Some of the respondents' statements indicate that their primary motivation for learning a new language is the desire to communicate with their local communities. For example, one participant looked forward to "getting to use it in the real world. In my hometown, there is a little

Hispanic grocery store, and the owner and I have some pretty neat conversations in Spanish." Consistently with the importance that language teachers give to the practicality that students see in L2 learning and the importance they give to L2 communication, various answers reflect that students enjoy learning "real conversational skills" and "knowing how to better communicate with it both foreign and domestically."

In recent decades, many language professors have made the case that a growing number of students are interested in learning languages for specific purposes. This phenomenon led to the creation of many courses of Spanish for the professions (e.g., Spanish for Business, Spanish for Healthcare) around the country (Doyle, 2019). This trend is also supported by research that highlights the traction gained by these types of language courses (Lafford et al., 2014) and the need for additional training and research around this topic (Hardin, 2015). Accordingly, Doyle (2018) stated that "Spanish for the Professions and Specific Purposes (SPSP) should flourish in the future as a paradigmatic curricular mainstay (p. 95)." However, the results of the study showed a notably different picture. Indeed, only four students expressed interest in learning Spanish as a way to improve their future professional careers. That being said, it is necessary to point out that our research did not focus on SPSP and that while many students may have a different primary motivation for learning a new language, they might also consider the benefits afforded to their future careers.

Finally, we consider the third group which includes students who were motivated to learn Spanish as a personal challenge. Some of them viewed learning an L2 as an educational goal or a way to prove to themselves that they can learn something new. As this student suggested, "the excitement for me came from having a new challenge that I was going to be able to try to master", and this respondent also loved the idea of "being able to make sentences out of

unrealistic ideas in the Spanish language". As part of this category, we identified a group of heritage speakers of Spanish who may not feel confident in their grasp of the language. For them, studying Spanish is something of a very special nature, as it provides them with a potential means of connecting with their families and culture. These heritage speakers indicated that they were eager to communicate with relatives, e.g., "to talk to my aunt" or "being able to speak a language my grandparents speak," to further develop their family relationships.

Topics of Interest of L2 Spanish Students

This section reviews the topics that our students reported as the most and least exciting. While these findings may not be surprising for language teachers, we believe they are useful for informing instructors about current students' opinion on themes and topics. This proves to be helpful, as teachers may then capitalize on their students' preferences to make classes more engaging and appealing. Before diving into these results, it is important to emphasize the role teachers play in selecting curricular content. Although students may dislike certain topics, some of these are actually necessary for developing language skills and are therefore non-negotiable components of a Spanish language course.

The previous section showed that students understand the importance of learning and practicing language components that allow them to easily communicate in the TL. Many of them also recognized the value of understanding different cultures and are eager to learn about them. Besides learning about communicating in the TL and its cultures, we identified several themes that seem to spark our students' interest, as shown in Table 1, which includes the topics that were mentioned by more than 3 respondents. For the sake of simplicity, we focus here on traveling and food, as these were the most often mentioned topics.

Table 1

Preferred Topics by Students Learning Spanish

Topic	n
Traveling and cities	17
Food	15
Personal activities/interests/hobbies	14
Grammar (Future)	7
Grammar (Past tenses)	7
Talking about the weather	7
Giving directions	5
Clothes	4

It should be noted that question 7 of the survey explicitly asked students to express their opinion about a series of topics to be included in an Elementary Spanish textbook and requested suggestions for additional topics. Most of the respondents expressed a favorable opinion about the proposed topics (food, family daily routine, free time, shopping, traveling, and sports). As indicated by some respondents, these topics seemed "like good important topics to cover" and "useful topics" worth keeping. Other respondents highlighted that while they "like these topics [they] would like to see more everyday discussions that [they] would encounter at [their] job that are super essential."

The desire to learn "everyday phrases", "speaking routines", and "basic conversations" was a common answer. Additionally, various respondents restated that, besides these common topics, they would like to learn more about cultures of Spanish-speaking countries and that "ideally maybe there would be more Hispanic/Latinx cultured centered topics."

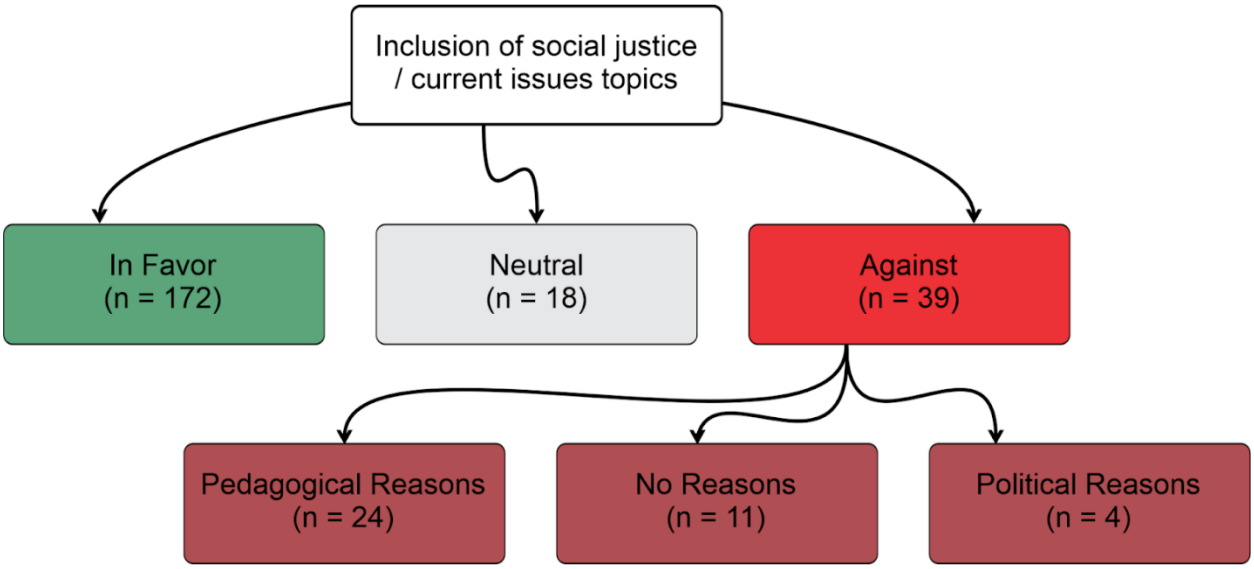
Another expected result was learning which topic was viewed unfavorably by our students. To no one's surprise, grammar is one of the least preferred topics for students learning Spanish. The usage difference between preterit and imperfect verbs gave "nightmares" to multiple students, while many confessed to "struggling" with all the different conjugations. However, many recognized that although "grammar isn't fun to learn, [it] is necessary." Another common theme that emerged (among our students) was their dislike to learning vocabulary or grammar topics that were deemed impractical for communication in the TL. For example, various respondents expressed frustration for having to learn about the pronoun "vosotros" ["You all" in Spanish]. They considered this "unnecessary," since the overwhelming majority of Spanish speakers in the U.S. do not use this form. In the same vein, the respondents strongly opposed the idea of being taught vocabulary that was rarely used in everyday conversations, seemed outdated and had no apparent connection to the main topic of a lesson. For example, a respondent commented that "sometimes there will be a vocab word and I don't even know what that word means in English, so I just feel it doesn't help me." Other respondents rightly pointed out that words related to technology (when not amended frequently) could quickly become outdated.

Inclusion of Social Justice Topics

To further understand the needs of the students, we asked them how they would feel if a language textbook explored more in-depth current themes and issues that seemed relevant to them. We classified the students' responses into three categories, based on whether they were in favor, indifferent, or against the inclusion of these topics. Furthermore, we identified three more categories. The actual number of respondents per theme are shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

Hierarchical Framework of All Tokens Regarding the Inclusion of Social Justice and Current Issues Topics.



A small portion (n = 39) of the students' responses expressed opposition to the inclusion of these topics in the language classroom. Some of the students who were against it indicated that they believed it would not be helpful for their learning experience and would not provide pedagogical benefit, while others stated that they were against it for political reasons. For instance, this was evident in the following direct quotes: "If I wanted to learn politics, I'd take a politics class," "I don't think it is necessary…[to be] political when I just want to learn the language." It is worth mentioning that some students did not like learning about social justice topics because they considered them above their level, e.g., "that may be for more advanced speakers, keep it simple for beginners. We don't need to always be talking about world issues, it can be exhausting and not necessary for a beginning level Spanish course."

On the other hand, the majority of the responses (n = 172) indicated a willingness to learn about social justice issues in the class. Accordingly, the students linked their interest to the feeling of being more engaged and connected to the world around them. Also, they stated a desire to learn about current themes and real-life scenarios instead of fictional situations. For example, a student commented: "I would love if the textbook handled contemporary issues or if it did not stray from talking about topics that do affect students' lives. I use they/them pronouns but have opted to use "ella" [she] in Spanish as it aligns with my birth gender and usual gender expression in Spanish."

In summary, it is important to provide a variety of topics/themes in the language classroom. The survey results suggest that current students would benefit from the inclusion of social justice topics to which they may relate. For instance, this was illustrated by the desire to use inclusive language so that all students would feel represented. In doing so, teachers should remain aware of the specific sensitivities as certain topics may be viewed as exhausting or anxiety-provoking, thus potentially leading to feelings of discomfort and a disengaged attitude. Overall, it is important to cultivate a relaxed environment that is conducive to learning and allows students to express themselves freely.

Teachers and Other Tools for Language Learning

Besides their motivations for learning a language and the types of topics they would like to see in a language classroom, many respondents had strong opinions about the homework learning platform, the textbooks used in their classes, and the ways they learn best.
Let us start with the negatives. Students were clearly unhappy with the current homework learning platforms used in our language classrooms, which many teachers relied upon heavily for a hybrid or flipped approach as they seemed disconnected to the textbook. According to the

responses, “online learning is sometimes very difficult and the pages it refers to in the textbook are not very helpful,” and “it is hard to recall the homework without being able to access specifically what has been completed.” Although some students have strong feelings against these learning platforms, they still recognize their importance, and they “think something like that connected to a new textbook would be beneficial”. Other students asked us to find “a better platform out there for [them] to use.”

The negative comments regarding the current textbooks used in our classrooms, combined with a few additional responses highlighting the importance of the teachers, painted a clear picture of students’ learning needs. Not surprisingly, they “learn most while being engaged in the classroom” and recognized the important role played by a language teacher in helping them develop language communication skills. They also wish for a well-formatted textbook in which all information is easy to find. One respondent said, “The textbook has made it extremely difficult for me, someone with ADHD, to be able to use it due to how cluttered it is.” Students also would like to see more grammar explanations connected to the online homework. Finally, many students wished us luck with writing a textbook for Elementary Spanish learners, and they seemed engaged and happy to provide comments and suggestions for new learning resources.

Discussion

We sent out the student survey with the initial and rather narrow objective of gathering student feedback on potential topics to include in our OER Elementary Spanish textbook. We were pleased to receive so many responses and felt confident that they would guide our content selection process. What we did not expect to find was the overwhelmingly positive character linked to the set of motivations driving learning a required second language. Encouraging patterns emerged from the data which we found enlightening. Our students’ collective voices

extolled the virtues of studying Spanish as a means of interfacing with other cultures and communities. Overall, we confirmed that our students are open-minded and accepting of others.

The survey responses further informed us about which themes should be given a top priority for our students. While we expected to find a standard list of topics such as food, clothing, and travel to be popular; we did not anticipate that a large number of respondents wished to see the inclusion of social justice issues and inclusive language in future iterations of their Spanish textbooks. We were also heartened to read comments that affirmed the crucial role of the instructor in helping engage students in the language learning process. Finally, the students who found fault with current homework learning platforms induced us to think critically about possible solutions or alternatives.

By analyzing our findings, we were able to develop many ideas about ways in which an OER textbook may address the needs of a diverse student population. One of the primary advantages of an OER text is its adaptability. Since these materials rely on electronic media and open-source content, they can easily be personalized based on the needs of a particular class or population. OERs' adaptability also lets instructors modify a textbook to align more closely with their own needs or their institution's L2 curriculum. This versatility allows teachers to feel confident that they provide a content that is both instructionally effective and supportive for their students.

To this end, we set to create a unique OER Spanish textbook based on the answers collected through a qualitative survey. Namely, we listened to the student voices that cited a desire for multicultural awareness and the ability to communicate with Spanish speakers in their hometowns. With this in mind, we designed a textbook featuring activities, information, and protagonists connected to the region where the majority of our students reside. Our expectation is

that these personalized materials will resonate with our students and help them feel more motivated and engaged with the lessons.

As noted above, one of the student complaints about traditional textbooks is that the content quickly becomes outdated. For example, most of our students are well versed in technological trends and do not have any interest in learning out-of-date vocabulary. However, with traditional textbooks, students must wait years for a new edition, and given the fast rate of progress in technologies, it is very challenging to keep printed textbooks current. Adopting an OER textbook gives agency to instructors, not only by being able to update relevant information but also by having the capability of adapting and improving textbooks based on the students' needs.

One of the most significant takeaways from our student survey and one that directly guided the way in which we address our students' interests was the high number of responses that favored the inclusion of social justice topics. From our own experience in the classroom, we know that today's students are educated about social issues and willing to talk about them. While we were already inclined to include current events in our Spanish textbook, the survey responses encouraged us to highlight social justice topics such as an immigration raid on a local meat packing plant and its devastating effect on the residents of a rural town in our region. Our students' comments also reinforced our plan to feature inclusive language in our textbook. We chose to use the non-traditional feminine form as the base form in our vocabulary lists and presented the non-binary *elle* pronoun as part of our standard grammar. We made these decisions with our learners' survey responses in mind and hoping that it will make them feel represented and valued.

In sum, OERs allow instructors to tailor their textbooks to include pertinent topics that directly impact their students. While most of our students favored learning about social justice topics in Spanish, we do acknowledge that this opinion was not unanimous. We thus encourage instructors to be cognizant that some students might be upset or anxious about discussing political topics in their language courses. OERs allow teachers to gauge their students when selecting material for their classes so that the classroom environment remains conducive to learning.

Limitations

The present study is not without limitations, and certainly the design of the survey to collect the data could be improved. First, the open-ended question, that required responses on the most common topics of Spanish textbooks, could have been presented free of examples in order to allow students to be more creative and spontaneous in their responses.

A second limitation is the lack of information about gender and gender identity in the demographic data which could have provided more information about the students' preferences and wants. Among the background questions, we did not include one that inquired about the gender of the participant; adding this question could provide an extra layer of answers. We recommend further research about the students' reasons to learning an L2, their topic preferences, and the inclusion of social justice topics—all within an OER framework; and also, we suggest the need for additional investigations on the type of themes developed in current OER language textbooks.

Conclusion

Many of our students' responses showed a general sense of appreciation for our Spanish textbook project and wished us the best of luck. This demonstrates that our students felt engaged

and happy to offer their suggestions for an improved textbook, even if it would only benefit future students. Certainly, textbooks are not dead. Rather, what is now defunct is a type of textbook unable to keep pace with our rapidly changing world. Our students have valuable input to offer about their L2 learning process, and they want to see their experiences and voices represented in the materials they use. OER textbooks are the next generation, and their ability to evolve and adapt may eventually render traditional textbooks obsolete.

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Appendix A

A selection of recently published Spanish OER textbooks.

Name of textbook	Authors (year)	Link
Mi idioma, mi comunidad: español para bilingües	Foulis & Alex (2019)	https://ohiostate.pressbooks.pub/idiomacomunidad/
Acceso, 2nd edition	Rossomondo et al. (2019)	https://acceso.ku.edu/
Spanish I: Beginning Spanish Language and Culture	Dean (2020)	https://open.umn.edu/opentextbooks/textbooks/920
Entrada Libre: Intermediate/Advanced Spanish Manual	Ballesteros, Lee & Moon (2020)	https://human.libretexts.org/Bookshelves/Languages/Spanish/Intermediate_Advanced_Spanish_Manual_(Entrada_Libre)
Pluma. Historias en Español	Hernández (2020)	https://sites.google.com/view/tupluma/home?authuser=0
Beginning Spanish ¡Empecemos por aquí!	Ceciliano & Notman (2021)	https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/pdxopen/41/
Trayectos	Zapata & Ribota	https://trayectosoer.org/
Yo puedo: para empezar	Silvaggio-Adams & Vallejo-Alegre (2021)	https://milnepublishing.geneseo.edu/yo-puedo-uno/
Author	Author (2021)	Author
Author	Author (2023)	Author

Appendix B

Survey questions

1. Consent agreement.
2. What is your age?
3. Are you a minority student?
    1. What is your background?
4. Are you a first-generation student (meaning a student whose parents did not complete a four-year degree)?
5. Based on your current and past experience, do you remember the topic that most excited you while taking a language course?
6. Is there a topic you really hated, and you hope to never find again in a language textbook?
7. What types of topics should be included in your ideal Elementary Spanish Textbook? Many textbooks cover the following thematic topics: la comida, la familia, la rutina diaria, el tiempo libre, las compras, los viajes, los deportes. Do you like these topics, or would you like to see other topics covered by our textbook?
8. How would you feel if your language textbook included more in depth/relevant (to you) topics that explore current themes, issues, etc.?
9. Use this space to leave any additional comments for us as we plan our textbook.

Designing the Modern World Language Classroom: How to Guide Students to Proficiency

Megan King

Reviewed by Oriette D'Angelo
The University of Iowa

Designing the Modern World Language Classroom: How to Guide Students to Proficiency
Megan King
Tandem Light Press (June 27, 2022)
140 pp. ISBN-13: 979-8985640403 (Paperback: $17.95)

Designing the Modern World Language Classroom:

How to Guide Students to Proficiency

Reviewed by Oriette D'Angelo
The University of Iowa

Designing the Modern World Language Classroom: How to Guide Students to Proficiency (2022) by Megan King is a book that contributes to the field of language learning by explaining how to incorporate student's voices in the teaching process. Organized into 13 main sections and one "Foreword," "What's next," "An afterword," "Acknowledgments," and "About the author" segments, the book presents itself as a practical guide for teachers, principals, and district leaders, expanding the teaching roles to those in charge of learning environments.

The first section, "Why you need design in your world language classroom," explains how conscious building of a classroom can lead to student success and shows the involvement of instructors in all the steps of the teaching process, carefully creating a way for mutual engagement: "Teachers must design work for their students which has inherent, tangible, and unquestionable value. The study of world language must cultivate an awareness in our students

that knowing people, interacting with people, and being a good communicator are equally as valuable" (p. 11).

Then, "An introduction to the classroom standards and some assumptions" explains how Phil Schlechty's philosophy and the Schlechty Center create a guide for teachers to understand design as an engagement practice that leads to "assessment," meaning an "evaluation of progress towards goals" (p. 13). Phil Schlechty was a leader in education who founded the Schlechty Center, a non-profit organization that promotes teaching practices and offers advice for schools and school districts. By explaining tenets such as working without fear of punishment, working with authenticity, and working towards products or performances, the chapter offers a compelling argument about the importance of giving students responsibilities to participate in the classroom.

The third section starts explaining these tenets, being the first one "Protection from adverse consequences for initial failures." This section explores how frustration towards language learning could harm the process, both for students and teachers. King offers a possible solution to avoid this outcome, explaining that "as a teacher develops knowledge in her students, she integrates formative tasks and assessments to give students feedback that helps them grow towards proficiency" (p. 19). According to King, designing a safe space where mistakes are welcome enhances a proactive and positive response from students, relieving frustration and improving both the teaching and learning process.

Then, "Authenticity" is defined as "learning materials that are artifacts of life in the target language" (p. 29). King proposes that, while designing classes for students, the goal is to consider student's needs, motivations, and purposes for them to be engaged in the language learning practice.

The fifth section, “Choice,” explores how giving responsibility to students enhances their involvement. King argues that “in world language we [teachers] have more liberty than most precisely because our standards relate to proficiency” (p. 37). This means that students need to have some space and control to make critical choices to dictate what could be useful for them. Moreover, “Product focus” explains how proficiency is key while designing a world language class: “Learning a foreign language is entirely about performance because without using language proficiently, communication cannot happen” (p. 47). In this sense, the work of a teacher is designing a class that leads to communication as an ideal outcome.

The seventh section, “Clear and compelling standards + assessment,” explains how students expect mastery from teachers, and how this expectation leads to success in their learning process. In this sense, assessment tools are crucial to valuing student’s progress. King argues that teachers need to be aware of the evolution of teaching trends to keep themselves updated and to incorporate those innovations into their teaching.

“Content and substance” states that content needs to be engaging for students so that they can avoid losing interest in the language learning practice: “If we (students and teachers) are truly going to achieve a quality result, we have to connect learners to rich, relevant, contextualized content and then empower them to use it” (p. 72).

The ninth section, “Organization of knowledge,” argues that “In world languages, we’ll refer to knowledge in terms of proficiency because it represents the degree to which a student can use information” (p. 73). King states that it is crucial for language instructors to organize classes by thematic units to present information in a condensed way. In this sense, knowledge must be accessible at different levels to enhance comprehension and facilitate student goals.

Moreover, in the section "Affirmation," King proposes that a sense of community improves the language learning process and allows students to connect with different audiences. The section emphasizes the possibilities of the internet (with blogs and forums, among other platforms) to engage with broader audiences as well.

The next section, "Affiliation," emphasizes the independence that students must have in the classroom. These practices give students agency to be in charge of different tasks around the learning environment, promoting self-reliance in a collaborative form.

The twelfth section, "Novelty and variety," states that is important for instructors to be aware of new trends to incorporate them in class. This tenet also considers what is new for students and enhances their engagement in the language learning course.

Section "Engagement" emphasizes that students who are involved in the classroom have the opportunity to ask questions and encourage teachers to ask questions to them as well, helping teachers to create a community that considers students' needs.

Then, "An afterword: implications for digital learning" explores how COVID-19 and its aftermath highlighted the importance of creating digital spaces for both teachers and students, emphasizing how designing these digital spaces is equally important as designing face-to-face instructions, also considering the pace in which students are going to learn.

This book is a crucial contribution for world language instructors who are looking to improve their teaching practices, considering both teachers' and students' involvement in the classroom in order to create a participatory learning process, thus giving everyone a sense of community and enhancing students' participation. Megan King presents information clearly and concisely, and the book's structure condenses important principles for instructors to improve their teaching while always considering students' needs.

D'Angelo, Oriette (2023). [Review of the book *Designing the Modern World Language Classroom: How to Guide Students to Proficiency* by M. King]. Tandem Light Press (June 27, 2022), 140 pp. ISBN-13: 979-8985640403 (Paperback)

The Literacy Approach to Teaching Foreign Languages

Ana Halbach

Reviewed by Gaye D. Walton-Price
The University of San Francisco

The Literacy Approach to Teaching Foreign Languages
Ana Halbach
The Literacy Approach to Teaching Foreign Languages
Palgrave Macmillan (2022)
108 pp. ISBN: 978-3-030-94878-8 (Hardback)

The Literacy Approach to Teaching Foreign Languages

Reviewed by Gaye D. Walton-Price

The University of San Francisco

The Literacy Approach to Teaching Foreign Languages (2022) by Ana Halbach is a well-researched, compact book whose aim is to inform and instruct world language instructors who teach in primary and secondary schools the "literacy approach" to world language instruction, in order to enhance students' and instructors' engagement with respective target languages. This book is arranged in 7 chapters, each of which has its own abstract at the beginning, along with ample references provided to further inform the reader. Also included in the book are illustrative figures and tables which depict the concepts and frameworks the book is explaining. At the end of the text, the author includes 2 appendices and an index. Also, there is the "Forward" and "Acknowledgement" in the detailed "Contents" followed by a list of the "Figures" and "List of Tables", both of which are numbered consecutively.

Halbach informs the reader that "shifting the focus of foreign language teaching to literacy development makes . . . a multilingual approach possible" (p. 96). The author's approach is a seasoned one which has been developed, practiced, tried out in many classrooms, and based on numerous teacher trainer courses they have led over the years. They state, "What we are necessary for, is to make sure that students develop their ability to acquire, create, connect and communicate meaning in a wide variety of contexts, through a variety of languages" (p. 96).

Chapter 1, "Communicating to Learn: Giving Language Teaching a Content of Its Own", delineates the basic characteristics of the Literacy Approach pointing out the contrasting overall aim of this methodology versus the more traditional approach in language teaching: literacy development operates by moving towards "communicating to learn" rather than the accepted process of "learning to communicate" (p. 1). And this approach necessarily takes some time and practice to develop effectively. The book's aim is to provide instruction on the methodology of the literacy approach with ample examples, actual testimonials from teachers and from students, as well as copious tables and figures illustrating the fundamental structures of this approach to language teaching and learning. "Despite the fact that the communicative approach has dominated foreign language teaching for almost 40 years now, students in formal education settings often leave school without being able to truly use the language for communication" (Eurostat, 2020, p. 2).

The second chapter, "The Literacy Approach", clearly explains the rationale for the Literacy Approach in terms of the foreign language classroom and its curricula. The literacy approach requires careful examination of the desired end results and proceeds to plan backwards from the desired outcome and then moves into developing the process or path of learning based

on where it is that students are expected to end up. There are three basic steps to Backward Design:

> 1. identification of the final result of the unit of work, or the question "What should students come away understanding [or being able to do]?" (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005);
> 2. definition of learning goals and standards that we want students to achieve, or the question "What will count as evidence of that understanding [or ability]? (ibid.) and
> 3. selection of contents, teaching tasks and materials, or the question "What texts, activities and methods will best enable such result" (ibid.) (Halbach, 2022, p. 14).

Detailed figures and tables are provided to offer instructors visual aids to elucidate the various phases in the literacy approach.

In chapter 3, we examine the Reception Phase of the Literacy Approach: "Designing the Learning Path: The Reception Phase". Since the goal is to move away from the traditional language textbook, the first challenge the student will encounter in this phase will be to getting a grasp of/comprehending a text that, though appropriate to their level, will require an adaptation to approach and understand authentic material. And further, Halbach explains that "where the Literacy Approach definitely departs from normal classroom practice is in the work done on the question of "how the text means" (p. 33).

The next phase of Literacy Approach's Learning Path is The Production Phase which is the focus of chapter 4: "Designing the Learning Path: The Production Phase". The purpose of this chapter is to describe how students go about crafting a 'production', or a written example of a text which they produce through guided work.

Chapter 5 provides further illustration of the literacy approach when applied in the primary education context: "A Literacy Unit in Primary Education". Herein, the author quite

exquisitely explains and illustrates how they envision the literacy approach functioning well in the context of primary school. “This unit exemplifies how literacy units work and illustrates how the planning grid can help give shape to this approach to foreign language teaching” (p. 61). This chapter deftly describes the necessary phases of a literacy unit with Table 5.2 (p. 65) to visually explain the process involved. There are two main components: Reception and Production. In each component there are specific phases of each process. Within Reception, there is phase 1: pre-reading, listening, open gateway to literacy, contextualize, aid understanding. Then, in phase 2, there is understanding and connecting, and so forth. An important aspect of the literacy approach is that the teaching starts from students’ experience of a specific text and that it helps them reflect on the nature and the effect of the given text.

The book’s penultimate chapter is “Integrating a Literacy Approach Into an Existing Curriculum”. The author here explains the importance of including this perspective because of the many instances in their experience when seasoned teachers have complained about fitting a literacy approach into the current (and mandatory) curriculum they are supposed to be delivering to their students. “This chapter focuses on long-term planning and on how to align literacy units with the existing curricula for EFL” (p. 73).

The Literacy Approach to Teaching Foreign Language by Ana Halbach is an excellent resource for teachers and administrators to guide them to enrich the foreign language curricula in a variety of contexts. It presents a fresh approach to pedagogy that has many advantages for successful, innovative and creative methodologies for updating and revolutionizing foreign language teaching. Just as important, Halbach’s book also has strong cultural components, bringing it forward in time to meet current pedagogical requirements and to benefit students’ appreciation for all kinds of texts in target languages, and for their learning in new ways.

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