

BOOK REVIEW

CAMBRIDGE SCHOLARS' LANGUAGE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

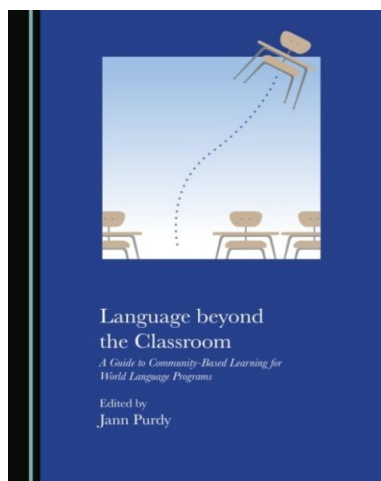
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Language beyond the Classroom:
*A Guide to Community-Based Learning
for World Language Programs*

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From this year's panel of publications of the prestigious Cambridge Scholars Publishing, UK, the 304 pages work entitled *Language beyond the Classroom: A Guide to Community-Based Learning for World Language Programs* is a valuable compendium of case studies edited by Jann Purdy and featuring 9 contributions of 16 reputed authors, mostly academics from various universities in the USA.

Dr. Jann Purdy is an Associate Professor at the Modern Languages Faculty, Pacific University of Oregon, and Chair of International Studies. Her areas of specialization include 20th-century French, autobiography, and language pedagogy. Teaching since 2004 in the areas of French, Modern Languages and International Studies, she covers courses in all levels of French language and literature, and courses in language pedagogy. Her research in the field is proven by several conference papers and a series of published works. Her preoccupation for the topic of civic engagement in language programs is also demonstrated by her presenting at, chairing panels in and mentoring students for numerous conferences.

Structured in three sections each consisting of three chapters, *Language beyond the Classroom* thus brings one title in each chapter, namely one elaborate contribution authored or co-authored by scholars in the fields of languages and

education, academics and renowned researchers: Anna Alsufieva, Andrew Blick, Dominique Butler-Borruat, William Comer, Irène Lucia Delaney, Kirsten Drickey, Amy George, Delphine Gras, Jessica K. Haefner, Angelika Kraemer, Christine Coleman Núñez, Agnès Peysson-Zeiss, Alexandra Reuber, Teresa Satterfield, Theresa Schenker and Kyle Patrick Williams.

The volume begins with an eloquent foreword by Stephanie Stokamer, Ed.D., the director of the Center for Civic Engagement and an assistant professor at Pacific University of Oregon, bringing details from her own experience of integrating the institutional language learning with exploring the civic area by non-profit work in health care, noting the importance of institutional focus on civic engagements in the process of effective, meaningful and integrated language learning. The researcher then elaborates on the diverse types of institutions' approaches to the community and to civic engagement concluding that "variables of curricular integration, engagement philosophy, and function of supporting offices are related to institution type, mission, and priorities, all of which also influence and are influenced by faculty culture, administration, financial standing, community-campus history, and the student body at any given college" (p. xiii). She remarks that Editor Jann Purdy has successfully managed in this volume "to pull together a fantastic array of chapters that demonstrate the variability [...] and shed light on how faculty have undertaken civic engagement in their respective contexts."

After the Acknowledgements page, Editor Jann Purdy proceeds with some words about *The Return on Investment of Civic-Engagement Teaching*, an introduction to the volume edited. This introduction gives clear account of the concepts involved in the case studies that will follow and provides the acceptations of the terms used along the volume, the editor explaining that "experiential learning entails projects or activities that take place or focus on contexts outside the traditional classroom; this learning is often interchangeably referred to as service-learning (SL), civic-engagement (CE), community-based learning (CBL), community service learning (CSL) or community engagement." (p.2) Here, Jann Purdy also remarks that despite the fact that "civic engagement is considered crucial for *high impact* educational practices," (p.2) the process of its consideration and usage still faces serious challenges: "the greatest obstacle to creating community-engagement courses, however, is finding the models, resources, and pedagogical support, especially if one doesn't have institutional support." (p.3) Backed up by thick references, she shows the challenges of implementing service-learning curricula, then summarizes the contents of each chapter, the ideas promoted by each section, explains the way she structured the contributions she received and the reasons for that particular way of organizing the material in the volume, and in the end brings two valid, lucrative models of syllabus and class schedules of the civic engagement courses she created.

Implementing service learning is dealt with and exemplified in the three extensive chapters of section I, while section II puts forward ways of promoting service learning and section III reveals methods of broadening it, in their corresponding three chapters for each. Thus, the first section ("How to Implement Service Learning: Design and Support for Community Engagement") illustrates different language courses designed with a view to service learning and the institutional support provided them. The middle section ("How to Promote Service Learning") discusses how civic engagement is advantageous as it entails positive results for

the students involved, with respect to the language acquisition and enforcement and in acquiring further employment as well. The last section ("How to Broaden Service Learning to Unique Settings") shows unfamiliar, novel methods or situations of civic engagement implementation.

The volume ends with a few pages of professional profiles, entitled "Contributors", comprising one paragraph of information for each of the authors' and the editor's academic and research activities.

Each chapter brings about particular instances of the matter, linking to the others to form a comprehensive, complex and unitary volume; actual case studies, models of practices, exemplifications of own programs, applied and experimented, make the object of the nine chapters, described more specifically as follows:

In the first chapter (*Key Aspects in Program Design, Delivery, and Mentoring in World Language Service-Learning Projects*), authors Theresa Schenker and Angelika Kraemer promote the academic service learning and civic engagement facilities provided within the specific projects through the Center for Language Teaching Advancement's (CeLTA) and CeLTA Language School (CLS) at Michigan State University. "Participating in service-learning projects can lead to a stronger sense of citizenship, confidence, and increased appreciation for the value of helping others." (p.25) Civic engagement is undoubtedly depicted along the chapter as a valid and valuable opportunity to acquire language. The authors give details for three of the CLS programs, providing in the end of the chapter appendices with specific documents used within the programs. It is then shown how undergraduates are prepared for service learning projects and the learning outcomes and effects of the projects are next presented. Among the opportunities provided to the students the authors distinguish the following: using the language outside of the classroom, developing intercultural competences, communicational skills, critical thinking, leadership abilities and a sense of global citizenship.

The second chapter, *Preparing Professionals: Language for Specific Purposes and Community-Based Learning Approaches in Advanced-Level Coursework*, by Anna Alsufieva and William Comer from Portland State University (PSU), shows how the Russian language translation programs developed at the aforementioned institution meet the specific needs of the community. After exposing the specifics of their language learning community and the PSU strategy of embedding civic engagement projects in the curriculum, the authors thoroughly detail three major projects. It is explained that "because the course focuses on the professional discourse related to the students' majors, there are opportunities to tailor the specific content of any term or academic year to fit the opportunities available for taking this language work out into the community and having students engage in experiential learning and community service." (p.52) The first two projects described by the authors involve the medical care and respectively the environmental field and were basically community translation projects - where PSU was approached by groups in the community who wanted existing materials translated into Russian-, while the third project came into being following an instructor's initiative to develop a students' assignment into an educational children's book.

Chapter 3, *Transcending Classrooms, Communities, and Cultures: Service Learning in Foreign Language Teaching Methods Courses*, is the contribution of Amy George, Alexandra Reuber and Kyle Patrick Williams, who bring up two cases

from the numerous service-learning opportunities offered through the support of Tulane's Center for Public Service (CPS) (Tulane University). They provide detailed descriptions and extensive documentation regarding the French and the Spanish methods courses. These involved methods students working with ESL students and thus engaging in a series of specific activities, from curriculum and material development to tutoring groups or even class co-teaching, applying knowledge learned in class, practicing, gaining experience and establishing long term connections that next proved effective even years after, along their careers: "many of these students continue to maintain contact with the course instructor, relating their successes and troubleshooting their difficulties in their classrooms well after they have graduated from the university." (p.85) The authors mention the beneficial effects on both sides but also put forward some academic, administrative and logistical challenges they faced and conclude giving recommendations for other institutions, based on the Tulane experience.

Recruiting Language Learners through Civic Engagement in General Education is the fourth chapter in the volume, and the chapter opening the second section. Christine Coleman Núñez from Kutztown University of Pennsylvania focuses here on the role of cultural understanding in language acquisition. She shows that service-learning language courses form practical skills, offer contextual practicability and a vivid interaction with the cultural environment, aspects that should be considered as prerequisites and frames to tackling language learning. A detailed model for incorporating community-based learning into the general education Spanish language curriculum is presented. After a description of its specificities as a community engagement project, the author elaborates on the use of a reflective journal - shown in the appendices -, and then focuses on the learning outcomes related to linguistic competence, that were assessed by means of indicators developed by the ACTFL, discussing aspects of intercultural awareness, aptitude and attitude. Several challenges faced along the project implementation are presented towards the end. As in other authors' experience, a certain inertia was witnessed with some community representatives, and a sort of a red tape can be said to have occurred in the process, probably sprung from either normative gaps or some partners' reluctance, if not lack of interest, in fully assuming the collaboration: "the burden in terms of the time commitment of establishing and maintaining community partnerships was excessive and resulted in a lack of thorough follow-up with all the agencies involved, which meant that the agencies viewed themselves as hosts for the students, not collaborative partners in the experience." (p.140)

Delphine Gras from Florida Gulf Coast University authors the fifth chapter, *How to Promote Cultural Awareness through Service Learning in a Non-Required Course*, providing the reader with demonstrations on how service learning can be a motor for students' taking up less popular courses. The case of Florida Gulf Coast University is described, where the francophone cultures bring about a positive and valuable influence. After an overview of the project, the author undertakes to "address two recommendations to facilitate the acquisition of intercultural knowledge through service-learning initiatives" (p.157), sharing then several tested and functional strategies of implementation. Making allowance for the various problematic situations in which students can be and considering diverse methods of how to facilitate maximum participation of students in such programs, are other aspects the author suggests should be taken into account when providing service-

learning opportunities. The chapter ends with reflections on the successful Francophone World service-learning project and documents attesting the work in various stages of the program's development.

The sixth chapter, by Teresa Satterfield and Jessica Haefner from the University of Michigan, is entitled *Community-Service Immersion: A New Blueprint for U.S. Social and Linguistic Engagement*. It brings arguments for using community-service linguistic and cultural immersion programs as alternatives to short-term travel courses, emphasizing the positive results herewith targeted by this university, an improved intercultural understanding and increased language skills. The model described here is that of their Spanish language and culture program, *En Nuestra Lengua* (ENL). After the presentation of the project's design and its preparation, the implementation of the community-service immersion course, the organization of the ENL academic service immersion course, and the program evaluation are detailed. As shown in the table on pages 192-193, implementation is distinctly tackled, concordant to the language proficiency levels. Referring to this approach that considered the multidimensional experiential component, the authors remarks in the conclusion, that it "is novel in that it not only links to broad interests, but also considers the university language learners' level of Spanish proficiency, such that within each category, various service vocations are available, equivalent with the student's overall competence and experience with Spanish language and Spanish-speaking culture(s)." (p.198)

Chapter 7, *Constructing Language-Learning Communities in the University Setting: An Experiment in Flipping the Teaching and Learning Paradigm*, the Western Washington University's contribution by Kirsten Drickey and Andrew Blick, opens the final section of the volume and brings into light a unique approach that this institution thought of implementing. The readers will find that here the university employees are provided various language workshops wherein they are taught by the students of the university. This project came as a response to the changes in the community, as explained by the authors: "the university's faculty and staff have an increasing need for cross-cultural competencies and knowledge of world languages. The Employee Language Program responds to these community needs by providing faculty and staff with the opportunity to develop skills that help them work more effectively with increasingly diverse student, faculty, and staff populations." (p.215) And it is not only within the campus that this practice is valid; the community also benefits from similar projects since such language teaching activities are performed with diverse external groups as well. Besides the obvious gains for the beneficiaries of the language instruction, the student facilitators also "report an increased sense of belonging to the university community and a deeper appreciation for and understanding of the languages they teach." (p.216) The program outcomes are thoroughly and pertinently presented by the authors, considering all aspects involved: curriculum, learning, participants and facilitators.

Authored by Dominique Butler-Borruat (from the University of Michigan Residential College), chapter *Learning the Ropes of Service Learning: Best Practices in a Program for Advanced Students Working with Asylum Seekers* comes as the eighth in the volume and provides a model of engagement with a non-profit organization. After the description of the course, the framework of course is explained, and then the course content is presented. The author describes the program that French students are involved in, one day per week: socially interacting, in French, with French-speaking asylum seekers while eating together,

and also teaching them English language and American culture. Best practices with respect to course content, community partners, students and logistics are clearly presented, each structured in several subtitles. As for the impact of the course, it is considered to have been undoubtedly effective for the community goal aimed at. The author notes the three methods used in this course evaluation revealed that the project proved extremely motivational for the students. Before the conclusion of the chapter and the appendices, some frequently faced challenges are mentioned, among which, as with other authors in this volume: logistical issues, "insufficient relationships with community partners" or "lack of institutional recognition of service learning as scholarship." (p.266)

Virtual Engagement in the Languages: Teaching Translation and Social Justice by Irène Lucia Delaney (University of Michigan) and Agnès Peysson-Zeiss (Bryn Mawr College) is the final chapter. It presents a program that combines linguistic and cultural education with social equality, incidentally giving premises for an online community service model that might prove quite useful in distance learning programs. The project essentially consists in the implementation of a translation program, it makes use of especially designed digital means and involves French students who are given assignments that consist in translating various texts of women bloggers from Congo, which provides the latter with the facility to extend to the English speaking communities and thus increase the number of their blog readers. The benefits for the students are also evident: " Virtual civic engagement allows students to connect with other women in the French-speaking world, to learn from and teach one another mutually and respectfully despite hugely different educational backgrounds and life experiences. It also leads to an exchange of ideas and reflections in real time. It helps create an online community of world citizens in multilingual dialogue, and create a place where the average undergraduate student of French develops connections and useful professional skills." (290)

The relevance of civic learning in the nowadays society is obvious and it has become a matter just as vivid, straightforward and assumed as the interplay of experiential learning and language learning. Hence, it can only come natural that the civic mission of education is primarily put into operation in the field of language learning. The compendium at stake is an evidence of the researchers' lively involvement and their implication, on a large scale, into advocating for community-based language learning and promoting extensive implementation of such projects. As the editor so clearly puts it, "by gathering into one volume various models for community-based language learning, the work aims to offer itself as a how-to guide for implementing and evaluating community engagement programs for a variety of languages. The structure of each chapter is designed to be specific enough to serve as a practical template, yet broad enough to be adapted to various languages, institutions, and community settings. While examples in the volume include, French, German, Russian, and Spanish, all the program models aim to be adaptable to virtually any language and any institution." (p.3).

We can only express our congratulations for the outstanding endeavor and its most valuable outcome, and salute this effective production the entire community of language learners, instructors and stakeholders can make good use of, and many institutions around the world could well benefit from.