

Tutoring for Community Outreach: A Course Model for Language Learning and Bridge Building Between Universities and Public Schools

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Abstract: *The integration of foreign language learning with service-learning has continued as a growing trend through the 1990s into the 21st century. Tutoring programs can offer unique opportunities for addressing the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning (1999). This article details one flexible curriculum-based model that promotes especially the fifth goal area of communities. A course involving collaboration between an institution of higher learning and local schools allows undergraduate students with diverse languages and competencies and a wide variety of academic and career interests to work with pupils from grades 1 through 12.*

Introduction

In recent years, increasing commitment by colleges and universities to build bridges with the communities around them has generated a growing variety of alliances between academic departments and local institutions. Along with these collaborations has emerged much discussion about the definitions of *service-learning* (Kendall, 1990), sometimes referred to as *community-based learning* (Boyle & Overfield, 1999; Shumer, 1994), *experiential learning* (Kolb, 1984), or *education-based community service* (Barber, 1991). The most commonly accepted views of service-learning emphasize balancing academic learning and community service (Avashia, 2002; Bringle & Hatcher, 1995; Campus Compact, 2000; Hellebrandt & Varona, 1999).

In the field of foreign language education, service-learning initiatives have fit with the goals set forth in *Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century* (National Standards, 1999). For example, the contributors to *Construyendo puentes (Building Bridges): Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Spanish* (Hellebrandt & Varona, 1999) describe programs with their local Spanish-speaking communities that deal in various ways with one or another of the five goal areas of the standards (communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities). Even where there are not large heritage populations, however, opportunities exist for developing links between service-learning and foreign language learning. A course like "Tutoring for Community Outreach" [described further in this article] can foster interaction between undergraduate foreign language students and younger foreign language learners in the local schools, and thereby address the two standards of the communities goal that can be difficult to address within college-level language programs.

The Communities Goal and Tutoring for Community Outreach

The communities goal sets forth two broad standards that emphasize applied learning and personal enrichment: Standard 5.1—Students use the target language both within and beyond the

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school setting (National Standards, 1999, p. 64); and Standard 5.2—Students show evidence of becoming lifelong learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment (p. 66).

Tutoring for Community Outreach engages undergraduates in meeting these general standards. By design, the course integrates the progress indicators under Standard 5.1 for undergraduates that involve using language and performing service in the community (e.g., National Standards, 1999, p. 226, 266, 350, 456). In addition, undergraduate participants as well as their pupils engage in activities in accord with many of the progress indicators for Standard 5.1 across grade levels: participating in a career exploration or school-to-work project that requires proficiency in language and culture; using community resources to research a topic related to culture and/or language study; presenting information about the language and culture to others; writing and illustrating stories to present to others; and performing for a school or community celebration (p. 65).

Regarding the progress indicators for Standard 5.2, the learning opportunities through Tutoring for Community Outreach promote personal enjoyment and enrichment. For example, undergraduates use various media in the foreign language, design culturally authentic activities, create games, plan imaginary travel, enjoy music, and research topics of personal interest (e.g., National Standards, 1999, p. 66-67, 227, 268, 352, 457).

More detail about how Tutoring for Community Outreach incorporates the recommendations of the standards emerges through a description of the course. All documents mentioned in the following course description, including the student information sheet, course syllabus, tutoring evaluation form, final project guidelines, and questionnaire, can be accessed at <http://ml.hss.cmu.edu/tutoringforcommunityoutreach/>.

Description of the Course

Offered each spring since 1996 at Carnegie Mellon University in the Department of Modern Languages, with programs in Chinese, French, English as a Second Language (ESL), German, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish, Tutoring for Community Outreach has enabled undergraduate students of modern languages to work four to six hours per week during a 15-week semester in nearby public schools with pupils learning languages at elementary, middle, and high school levels. [Since this service-learning experience involves two populations of students, for the purpose of clarity, participants in the course will be referred to as undergraduates or tutors, and the K–12 foreign language learners will be referred to as pupils.] A number of the elementary schools in the urban school system are international studies and language magnet programs where French, German, or Spanish are taught starting in first grade. Many of their pupils continue language study in

middle school and move on either to a high school that offers an International Baccalaureate program or to other high schools with foreign language courses. Tutoring for Community Outreach receives no funding for its activities, and though in some semesters a few tutors have been able to get rides to their school sites through the University's Center for School Outreach, most have walked or taken public transportation.

To date, 80 undergraduates—primarily majors and minors in modern languages—have enrolled in this course. Many have worked with pupils of ESL, French, German, Japanese, or Spanish at five different elementary or middle schools. Advanced-level undergraduate majors and minors in French, German, Japanese, or Spanish have tutored these languages at two high schools. Within the various school settings, diverse service-learning experiences have been available to the undergraduates. Some have worked one-on-one with at-risk pupils. Others helped provide enrichment in individualized or small-group settings to talented pupils. A number have had the opportunity to teach whole-group class sessions under the supervision of cooperating teachers. Tutors may help prepare high school pupils for the International Baccalaureate exams. They may ready elementary-level pupils who have not begun foreign language study in first grade to take a test to enter a language magnet program. Each semester has been quite different from the next, though there is a stable structure into which the components of the course are built for each 15-week period.

From their very early contacts during the preregistration process, students learn that this course will be unlike others they have taken on campus. During the semester prior to taking the course, prospective enrollees submit a required student information sheet (see <http://ml.hss.cmu.edu/tutoringforcommunityoutreach/>) and subsequently meet with the course professor to discuss their participation and to obtain permission to enroll. Participants must have a B average and will have named a faculty member in the Modern Languages Department who can provide information about the student's proficiency level, performance, diligence, and general suitability for this experience. The course professor stresses to the tutor the significance of the commitment required by the course. Prospective tutors must understand that they serve as ambassadors from the university to the local community, and that once their schedule for tutoring is arranged, it must be viewed as a serious work obligation. After being granted permission to participate, the student receives copies of necessary forms (state criminal record check and child abuse clearance forms) required for all individuals who work in the state school systems. Students take responsibility for processing these forms and present them at the first orientation meeting at the school site.

During the first week of the semester, prior to the initial visits to the schools, the first class session takes place.

Once all student schedules at the schools are set, the regular 50-minute weekly class meeting time on campus is confirmed. In the first class, after introductions, clarifying logistics of the first school visits, and covering the information in the course syllabus, the professor leads discussion about the local school system and encourages students to begin reflection on their own past school environments and language learning.

Later in the first week or early in the second week of the semester, the course professor accompanies individual tutors or groups of tutors to assigned schools, where there is a tour and orientation by the site liaisons or volunteer coordinators. Tutors are introduced to the principal and the collaborating teachers. The course professor provides all cooperating teachers with contact information and written copies of a letter of introduction, a course syllabus, and a sample evaluation sheet they are requested to complete at midterm and end of term (see <http://ml.hss.cmu.edu/tutoringforcommunityoutreach/>).

Generally, tutors working at the elementary and middle school locations are matched with collaborating teachers and their pupils through assistance by the site liaison, who verifies hours of availability and surveys the needs of teachers and students. At the high school level, most often the course professor makes direct contact with the head of the language department and subsequently with individual teachers of the specific languages to be tutored that semester. At the high school level in particular, the tutors, course professor, and collaborating teachers meet to share information about the service-learning course, the tutors, and the needs of the teachers and their pupils, and to discuss the responsibilities to be assumed by the tutor during the term.

During the semester, communication with the cooperating teachers continues via phone, e-mail, evaluation sheets, and a school visit toward the end of the term by the course professor. The amount of direct supervision and guidance that tutors receive from teachers and site liaisons at the schools varies. Generally, those tutors who work in classrooms alongside cooperating teachers consult more frequently than those who work with pupils outside the classroom. In all cases, cooperating teachers and/or site liaisons answer questions and share pedagogical materials and information about curricula and testing to help undergraduates prepare for the sessions with their pupils. Also, the weekly on-campus sessions and periodic individual meetings with the course professor help students to build strategies for delivering appropriate instruction and to reflect on the form and content of their lessons.

Tutors' preparations for activities at the school sites reflect progress indicators for Standard 5.2. For their lessons with pupils, tutors seek materials from the university, school, and public libraries, from online sources, from the course professor, their other language professors in the

department, and cooperating teachers (National Standards, 1999, p. 227, 457). Through the weeks of the semester, tutors and pupils develop interpersonal relations using the target language (p. 352). In the latter part of the semester, for their final synthesis projects, tutors have occasion to draw on their backgrounds in language and culture to pursue topics of personal and professional interest (p. 268).

The undergraduate tutors maintain a journal of their experiences in the schools and their reflections upon the assigned readings and topics for the course. These journals are submitted electronically or at the start of each weekly on-campus session. The course syllabus (see <http://ml.hss.cmu.edu/tutoringforcommunityoutreach/>) indicates the themes to be explored week by week. A typical class period is structured with discussion of (a) tutor-generated issues based on their work in the schools and highlights from their journal entries, (b) the weekly topics, and (c) the assigned readings. The aim is to have these three elements intersect and reinforce one another during the class period. It is hoped that in their reading and writing, tutors will address topics such as their general tutoring goals and their strategies for achieving these goals in their specific situations. The course pays special attention to motivating the pupils, teaching vocabulary, building reading skills, and dealing with different types of learners.

The readings for the weekly on-campus sessions treat theoretical and practical concerns. Students read articles from journals, newspapers, and the Internet that address day-to-day activities or the wider context of the service-learning activity. The selection of readings varies from semester to semester, depending on the students, their languages, and their placements. Shaw's "Back to the Blackboard" (1998) has proven a worthwhile first-week assignment. It offers, during this time of initial visits to the school sites, discussion about expectations versus reality, the importance of flexibility, the role of an intermediary, and learning and teaching styles. Because the author writes in journal form, the reading gives students a model for their personal reflections. Other readings utilized have provided tutoring tips (CAASA, 2000), teaching ideas for ESL (Houston, 2000), games and activities (Ortega Juárez, 1998–2000; Taiwan Teacher, 2000), information about teaching vocabulary and pronunciation (Hunt & Beglar, 1998; Swan, 1997), and descriptions of school language programs (Traub, 1999). The writings by teachers of different languages and levels in the book *Stories Teachers Tell* (Hartman, 1998) connect usefully with many of the weekly themes.

In some cases—especially where tutors are working in the same schools—they share journal writings to promote successful collaboration. The advanced-level majors and minors write their journals in the target language and thus learn "occupation-specific vocabulary" (National Standards, 1999, p. 456) as they "participate in a career

exploration or school-to-work project which requires proficiency in language and culture” (p. 65). Students with less advanced target language skills or those working only with pupils of ESL have the option to write part of their journal reflections in their target language. In cases where the journal is written in a language unknown to the course professor, the student typically provides a summary in English, and other department colleagues have generously read the journals.

Journals are assessed with a check-plus, check, or check-minus based on students’ thoughtful and well-articulated reflections on their individual experiences and their making connections with the themes and readings. The course professor provides feedback on form but does not weight language issues heavily unless they impede understanding of content. Students are directed to correct their repeated writing errors. Journal writing has the bonus that students, in addition to practicing a new vocabulary in the target language, work especially with various past tense and subjunctive structures in formulating their reflections.

All tutors complete a synthesis project, either a final paper or a school site activity, to draw together and reflect on key aspects of their service-learning experience. The diversity of the participants is reflected in the wide range of papers and projects. In accord with Standard 5.2, undergraduates derive much personal enjoyment and enrichment from this culminating assignment.

Final Course Projects

Many tutors, along with their language major or minor, have pursued a concentration in another academic area such as engineering, computer science, biology, chemistry, psychology, business, technical writing, creative writing, history, anthropology, or design. Some have taken the course as a step on a path toward a service-related career in medicine, social work, public affairs, or law, while others have used the course to explore the possibility of a career in education. A student commented:

My goal was to gain more experience working with children in a school setting to help me decide what I wanted to do for the rest of my life (social work or teaching). It worked, I want to teach now. (Psychology major)

Another student said:

I wanted to “give back” to the community in some way, and since I’d been in an International Baccalaureate (IB) program in high school, I thought the opportunity to tutor IB students was really special. Then I started working with the students and defined an additional goal of trying to make them see why I love Spanish, and sharing that with them. (Computer Science and Spanish double major)

A third student stated:

It sounded interesting as an elective and I enjoyed the idea of interacting with diverse people (as opposed to just college students) and practicing my German. My goal was definitely accomplished as I worked at the German magnet with both groups and individuals from different backgrounds. (Chemistry major, German minor)

The course thus connects with the communities goal for applied learning and enrichment, and tutors’ interests are clearly reflected in the synthesis projects.

Some tutors opt to write a paper for their final synthesis project. The following list of essay titles suggests the range of topics participants have explored: Songs in the Classroom; Games and Language Learning; “Herr Long” Ballad Poem of My Outreach Experience; Dennis Rodman vs. Helmut Kohl: How Important is Culture Versus Cool?; The Relationship Between Multiple Intelligences and Strategies for Language Learning; Motivation and High School Language Learners.

Most students have chosen the second option: to design a “hands-on” project to implement during the final week of the semester at the school site. After initial consultation with the course professor and their cooperating teachers, students refine their ideas and build their “products.” In many memorable cases, these projects have generated enormous energy, personal commitment, and continuing associations after the service-learning experience. For example, a Mexican-American student of mechanical engineering and Spanish planned a three-day show-and-tell extravaganza of history, dance, and food for a high school International Baccalaureate class. A creative writing, ESL, and Spanish student helped first graders of ESL to create a class “Me Book” with photos, drawings, and individual writings. In addition, she wrote a short story “partly for myself and partly for my Literary Journalism class” about her semester at the school. A psychology and Spanish double major constructed a felt board with a variety of accompanying games with pictures, words, and other sentence components. A student of German, Russian, and history designed an elaborate German history, geography, language, and culture board game structured through driving on the German Autobahn where players would encounter a *Sehenswürdigkeit* (place of interest, landmark) to identify, a *Stau* (traffic jam) to forfeit a turn, etc. A business major staged, produced, directed, and served as host of “College Day at Liberty School.” Twenty of her fellow students visited the school and conducted two assemblies for the entire student body with skits about college life and careers. In addition, the student created a manual for new tutors to continue this program in future semesters.

A project summary written by a student of information systems and French who helped ESL students write and perform a puppet show marks the impact of the service-learning experience and points to the value of the course in promoting the two standards of communities:

My final project was a puppet show. The entire class was excited about it because they saw some of us making the props. My four students had a lot of fun and learned a lot as they went through the different stages of creating a play. We worked on their conversation skills as we created the characters and took time to interview each one to learn about them. Then we worked on learning about stories and their components such as introduction, climax, and resolution. After that we created a story to fit the characters. They were full of interesting ideas. Then we talked about sets and their importance to the play. However, due to lack of time, I made most of the sets myself. They also made some during their discovery choice time. They were very proud of their work and they had every right to be. In the meantime, we practiced the play and went over everybody's lines. I was afraid that they would not remember their lines . . . I was worried that one of the girls would become shy and not talk in front of the class, especially since she was starting off the play. However, she had no problems and said her lines perfectly even though it was a little hard to hear. I was very happy that everything turned out so well. I hope that the experience was instructive as well for them.

To conclude her summary, this graduating senior continued:

Overall, this has been one of the best experiences I have had at this University. I learned a lot about working with children and the hard work involved in coming up with new and creative ways to teach. Spending time with the students made me realize how impressionable they are at that age and how much impact a teacher has on the way they will grow up. As I was leaving for the last time, some of the kids started crying and I realized how much I was going to miss them all. It was sad that I would probably never see them again. As I was leaving the school, I wondered what they would become and how they would act in the future as they become adults.

Undergraduates' use of diverse resources to write and illustrate papers, stories, and newsletters, to design culturally authentic programs, to create games, to organize assemblies, and to produce puppet plays represents implementation of the progress indicators for communities 5.1 and 5.2.

The course professor attends on-site synthesis projects and discusses them with the tutors. When schedules per-

mit, other tutors also attend. During the final on-campus session, the group shares its experiences with the concluding projects.

Outcomes

Tutors, pupils, teachers, site liaisons, and principals have responded positively to this partnership between the university and the local schools. The plea from the schools at the end of every semester is "Send us more students!" Many collaborating teachers have become enthusiastic repeat participants. For his work in promoting this school-university partnership, the site liaison at one of the elementary schools was recognized as a Community Champion for Children's Achievement (Spring 2002) by the Local Council on Public Education.

In early years of the course, teachers occasionally confronted a tutor's absence or lack of punctuality. Careful screening of prospective participants during registration and the emphasis upon responsibilities involved in the course have contributed to the success of the program. Also, it is important to identify cooperating teachers who welcome and feel able to accommodate comfortably the participation of the tutors. These teachers understand that the tutors are learners and show them patience and support. Appreciative of the energy and efforts of the undergraduates, teachers have praised them and the progress of their pupils. Typical comments on midyear and final evaluation sheets read "working with him has been an absolute pleasure;" "the extra experience with Spanish provided by Jesús has helped the students a great deal;" "Sandy is very creative. She has built a good rapport with the students. Because of Sandy's assistance and commitment to the students, they are able to write and read English better in the classroom;" "Jess's interaction with the students was excellent. She was able to keep them motivated during her presentations. I enjoyed sharing my classes with her. Excellent command of Spanish;" "I am very pleased with Stephanie's performance in our classroom. The children are thrilled to work with her, and I am thrilled to have her assistance! I've noticed that she is perceptive and can quickly evaluate what levels students are achieving at. She's also able to adapt activities accordingly—a real plus!"

Undergraduates have frequently commented about the impact of the experience upon them, and like that of the student who produced the puppet show, have often suggested the role of the course in advancing the standards of communities. In their final questionnaires (see <http://ml.hss.cmu.edu/tutoringforcommunityoutreach/>), students have mentioned many of the same advantages and challenges of integrating language and service summarized by Boyle and Overfield (1999). Responding to the question about what they have liked most, students wrote of the rewards of helping others, the advantages of working off campus, the joy of interacting with energetic, smiling chil-

dren, the challenges of teaching a second language, the improvement of their own language learning, and the insights into how to teach and how schools work. They have least liked needing to search for space in the buildings for tutoring sessions, the early hours of high school, and the occasional schedule conflicts that upset their regular meeting times with their pupils. Recommendations from the undergraduates have included refinements in scheduling, more direction from teachers, and working with fewer pupils at a time.

Two students' comments summarize well the productive merging of the aims of fruitful service-learning with the communities goal:

As a tutor you have an opportunity to really influence some young minds, and hopefully create enough of a good impact that will help them in the future. You will not only help them learn a new language, but in a broader sense, help instill in them the love of language learning. You will achieve a great sense of satisfaction, and improve your own language skills as well. You will also be influenced by the children themselves, by their energy and enthusiasm. (Tutor of German, elementary level)

Looking back, I liked the challenge of teaching a second language. It pushed me to work and in the process I really learned a lot about the language and the art of teaching. I also loved being a part of the kids' learning and growing. (Tutor of Spanish and ESL, elementary level)

In this especially challenging context of language learning, undergraduates have expanded their role from student to student-tutor in the educative process. Through participation in the community beyond their campus, they have interacted with age groups other than their own. They have found that language is useful beyond their own language classroom experiences and that their linguistic competence has enabled them to contribute beneficially to the lives of others.

In colleges or universities that do not have a department or school of education, this experience can serve an important motivating role in steering some of the students toward a career in education. Feedback from the 80 participants to date indicates that 16 have gone on to work for "Teach for America" or to pursue graduate work in MAT programs or Master's degrees in Technology and Education, Educational Policy, or TESOL. In institutions that have a department or school of education, this course enables even students outside such programs to have an service-learning experience in local schools and to enhance their language learning and that of other language learners.

The impact on the local school pupils can only be assessed qualitatively. There is no data on how many pupils have passed their exams or improved their grades as a

result of working with the course participants. Current tutors are considering the creation of age-appropriate evaluation forms to solicit some final input from their pupils. It is clear, however, that the college students have generated enthusiasm among the pupils. The elementary school pupils have greeted their tutors with hugs and said goodbye with tears. They have been made to feel special by the extra individual attention, stickers, and treats they received while playing language games and creating stories together with their tutors. Pupils have shared their learning difficulties and successes with their "teacher-friends" and "tutor-mentors." Undergraduate tutors have attended the high school plays and concerts of their pupils and have celebrated their passing quizzes and improved grades. One cooperating teacher related that one of her former sophomores was still wearing as a senior the *ruana*, or poncho, one of the tutors had given him as a gift. The tutors have answered many questions about college life, language study, and other academic areas. They have served as role models for language learning and beyond; yet notably most have indicated their sense that they have derived more from the service-learning experience than they have given.

Conclusion

In the field of foreign language education, partnerships between institutions of higher learning and local schools have mainly involved student teaching and other teacher-training arrangements. Service-learning opportunities outside such apprentice teaching situations typically connect with nearby heritage populations. Curricular models like Tutoring for Community Outreach can provide foreign language-related service-learning apart from student teaching programs and in areas with limited native speaker populations. Such a course offers enriching experience not only to those undergraduates preparing for teaching careers, but also to students from other fields who have some foreign language competence or interest in ESL. The course stands as a bridge to the community of local school age language learners to support the standards' goals from the primary grades to the university level. In its current form, the course is a single offering overseen by one professor in a modern languages department. It could be expanded within the departmental setting or to include other departments to incorporate contributions from university outreach centers or public and private foundations.

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