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Integrating Classroom and Community: Service-Learning in the Spanish Conversation Class

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Introduction

One of the many challenges that foreign language departments face is how to make sure their majors, including those who begin acquiring the target language in elementary classes, develop oral, aural, reading, and writing skills to a level that would allow them to participate actively and intelligently in the learning experiences they have in their upper division courses. Not surprisingly, there is no magic formula that states how much emphasis must be placed on each skill in order to guarantee a successful participation and, as Steinhart argues, the result is usually a clear disconnect between content and language. She points out that "collegiate language courses are typically viewed as supporting the goals of academic work and preparing candidates for more intense content study, typically literary-cultural content" (260). The problem with this unsystematic and incoherent articulation model is that many professors of upper division courses presuppose that students are prepared to function appropriately when, in fact, this might be an unrealistic assumption.

Of particular interest is the acquisition of oral communication skills. With the development of more communicative approaches to the teaching of foreign languages (FL), most first- and second-year FL programs claim to apply a methodology that encourages learners' oral expression of meaning in classroom situations that try to resemble real-life situations, placing speaking at the core of their course objectives. This is often carried out through the use of small-group and pair activities meant to simulate a real-life conversation. Research on oral

communication skills at this level has been quite prolific: since the years of the audio-lingual method, we have gone beyond the mere assumption that speaking is a direct byproduct of listening (Kalivoda) to a paradigm that emphasizes the importance of comprehensible output (Swain) and pushed output (Grove); strategies such as the use of oral journals (Mir), human-computer dialogue systems (Stewart and File), and oral communication strategy training (Nakatani); and the potential role that linguistic attitudes, cultural attitudes, and motivation play on oral proficiency (Yager).

But how much should we focus on speaking once students complete the basic FL sequence and begin taking upper division courses? In many institutions, the solution is to assume that learners will continue making gains in this area in their literature, culture, and linguistics courses; however, many of these courses consist of lectures that lend themselves to almost no sustained and meaningful verbal interaction between the professor and the students and between students. In fact, as Rifkin says, "The successes associated with first- and second-year FL courses may be seen as the yin that is inversely related to the yang of the failure of upper division and graduate courses to enable students to use language consistently for understanding and creating propositionally and linguistically sophisticated texts" (*A Ceiling Effect for Communicative* 262). While the learners become more proficient in their listening, reading, and even writing skills, the oral component can end up being neglected in favor of maximizing the time for the presentation of new content.

Offering conversation courses is another common and logical solution. In some institutions, these courses take a non-traditional approach in that they allow students to learn about discourse functions and strategies that are used to carry out those functions, providing them with a communicative framework within which they can structure their discourse (e.g., Koike and Makara Biron). These courses, nevertheless, usually consist of lessons structured around readings on various topics; these readings are usually supplemented with oral in-class reports and presentations, pair and group activities, and special projects whose purpose is to "push" students to communicate in the target language. Unfortunately, many of the activities and exercises that are designed to promote oral communication never require the use of the type of connected discourse that these students need to learn to produce. On the other hand, professors rarely have the time to provide detailed

explanations and models on how to use the cohesive devices and discourse markers that will help them communicate at the discourse level or the sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills that will deem their speech linguistically effective and appropriate. One may also observe that these courses lack a real communicative component as the members of the class tend to be sympathetic listeners who are willing to overlook all types of errors, grammatical or otherwise. Additionally, professors are limited by the size of the class and the time constraints as to the amount of individual attention and correction they are able to provide. Many of these courses fail to deliver what they promise: students do not show significant improvement and those professors who never (want to) teach them but expect them to be the solution find yet one more reason to question their relevance in FL curricula.

Despite the fact that many students, if not most, do not attain the desired oral proficiency levels after taking conversation courses, these courses can serve a purpose in FL curricula if certain changes are implemented to meet the students' needs. First, according to Schulz, "anecdotal evidence, frequently offered by faculty teaching literature or cultural studies courses at the advanced level, . . . maintains that, as a group, students from communicative classrooms have more problems with accurate language use than had their predecessors" (254). This observation calls for a conscious and planned effort to offer courses that specifically focus on the importance of communication using the target language with a certain degree of precision and accuracy. Furthermore, many conversation courses provide a platform for the review of key grammatical points for the purpose of communication, and, as research by Brecht, Davidson, and Ginsberg suggest, grammatical competence is the best predictor of advanced level proficiency attainment, at least during study abroad (21), for which Rifkin emphasizes the role that classroom instruction plays in long-term proficiency attainment (*A Ceiling Effect in Traditional* 12). The question continues to be how we can maximize the time students spend in the classroom, how professors can provide oral communication tasks that capitalize on the students' strengths and serve as a platform for more complex communicative acts, and how we can think outside the box to design these courses in a way that relies less on what happens in the classroom and more on how the language can be used in real-life interactions. This article deals with the latter part of this question.

Service-Learning in Higher Education

Interest in service-learning has increased dramatically in the last decade.¹ In addition, we have seen a significant increase in the number of studies that evaluate its applicability, effects, and impact on administrative decisions such as tenure and promotion. In general terms, service-learning is a teaching method that uses community involvement to apply theories or skills being taught in a course and thus may also be referred to as experiential learning. The idea behind it is to further the learning objectives of the academic course while addressing community needs. By doing so, students take academics out of the classroom and into the community in an effort to promote civic engagement. Moreover, it is considered a reciprocal process in that faculty may be able to reinvigorate their teaching or add diversity to their teaching, students connect theory to practice, and community members receive an infusion of people power and access to university resources, which allows these community members to explore new ideas and generate energy in their agencies.²

One of the key elements of service-learning is the ongoing reflection process required of students. They are expected to not just develop a relationship with like-minded community partners, but also to reflect on their activity in order to gain an appreciation of the relationship between civics and academics. This reflection process is key to helping students see the real purpose of service-learning and the applicability of what they learn and do in the classroom.

The value of service-learning has been highlighted by numerous studies that have taken a close look at how this teaching method has been applied in a wide variety of subjects and courses. For example, it has been found that service-learning helps bring the study of linguistics to life, particularly issues related to language variation, language change, and sociolinguistics in American English (Charity et al.); and ESL students are able to personalize the content of a literary piece and gain knowledge about migrant workers in rural areas of California by working on a farm (Elwell and Bean). Other studies have demonstrated how students of FL education are able to witness first-hand and put into practice the content of the methodology course in credible situations (Gascoigne Lally) and how college students from different classes can become more culturally aware about the Hispanic population by providing a needed service (Raschio). Fortunately for those involved in

service-learning projects, college-level students think favorably of it whether they have engaged in it or not (Bordelon and Phillips), which provides an excellent opportunity to, as Russell puts it, help them answer the question "Why do we have to learn this?" (771).

Service-learning is an obvious pedagogical tool that can be implemented in FL courses since, as Lee argues, "opportunities to use the language outside the classroom should be created to help students attain higher levels of language proficiency" (134). Several studies have demonstrated its positive effects. For instance, Morris found that students' attitudes towards learning a foreign language and those who speak it improved; while Carney claims that her students became more aware of social problems, changed their perceptions of the "immigrant problem," and applied their knowledge in meaningful contexts. In addition, Plann notes that a group of students of Spanish working as tutors at literacy centers deepened their understanding of literacy, built communicative competence, and developed insight into the nature of the target language; whereas Jorge claims that most students considered that this unique experience was "a major factor in gaining a better facility with Spanish, more developed intercultural social skills, and a more nuanced understanding of many complex contemporary socio-cultural and socioeconomic issues" (122). Other studies have focused on the positive impact that service-learning has on the co-creation of spaces in which students can have authentic dialogues (Tacelosky) and on helping students reach the goals (the "five C's") outlined in the *Standards for Foreign Language Learning* (Weldon and Trautmann).

There is no doubt on the advantages of service-learning research in Spanish and on any other FL for those who use it. As Hellenbrandt says, it "advances their teaching and advising, helps departments gain recognition for their service-learning efforts, and connects individual faculty work to disciplinary and higher education efforts off campus" (925). Nevertheless, there are many areas that need to be explored particularly its usefulness in courses whose goal is specifically to provide opportunities for students to use their oral communication skills. This is the primary objective of our study.

Methods

Participants. The participants for this study included two classes of advanced conversation (SPN 3760 and SPN 4410) from the

University of Central Florida. These classes are for third- and fourth-year majors and minors. The lower-level class is limited to non-native speakers though some heritage students tend to make up the composition of the class. It is a required course for the Spanish major and minor, but native speakers are given the option of taking SPN 4410 or another advanced course as a substitute for the 3000-level communication course. SPN 4410, on the other hand, is designed for both native and non-native speakers; it is considered a Spanish elective course. In this study, there were a total of 42 students, with 20 from SPN 3760 and 22 from SPN 4410.

Procedures. The students were informed at the beginning of the semester that both conversation courses would have a service-learning component. All of the students in both courses were given the same list of ten agencies that had been pre-selected by the professors/researchers as well as the option of finding their own agency to work with, given prior approval by their professor. The agencies were chosen based on their stated need for bilingual speakers to help with their organization. The majority of the agencies were non-profit entities who were pleased to have the assistance and especially to receive help from bilingual volunteers. A broad range of agencies were chosen to give the students the flexibility to select one of interest to them. The different agencies that the students chose were Junior Achievement, a day care center, a community center, a health care center, a youth program, an Alzheimer's awareness program, and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce.³

While all of the service-learning agencies had different roles that they needed filled, the end result was that students were engaged with Spanish-speaking community members during their time giving service. With Junior Achievement, the day care center, and the youth program, students were teaching young bilingual community members in small classroom settings. With the community center and the Alzheimer's awareness program, students worked with Spanish-speaking community members teaching them about resources and services available to them. In addition, in the Alzheimer's awareness program and Junior Achievement, the students had to translate the materials used by the organizations from English to Spanish in order to be able to use them to teach the community members. Finally, the students who worked with the health care center and the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce acted as translators and the first point of contact for the people who needed assistance. The students were able to assess

the needs of the community members prior to them meeting with time staff at these different organizations.

All of the students were required to complete at least 15 hours of service in the different community organizations. During the course of the semester, each student had to make a diary entry related to their experience after each visit with the requirement of completing a minimum of six journal entries. In addition, students in both courses were required to give a 5-6-minute presentation of their service-learning experience at the end of the semester. During this presentation, students described to their classmates and professor/researcher what they had done, stated what they had learned, shared any interesting experiences they had had, and reflected on how this experience led them to improve both their language skills and understanding of culture as it relates to the community. Upon completion of the presentations, the students were given a series of questionnaires in order to measure their understanding of service-learning prior to this experience and to determine what the affect of this experience had on their linguistic and cultural knowledge.⁴ The students also participated in an online survey administered by the Office of Experiential Learning at the University of Central Florida.

Survey Questions. The first questionnaire consisted of 26 questions: 5 questions about the students' perceptions before the service-learning experience, 16 questions about the students' perceptions throughout the semester, and 11 questions about the students' reflections on the entire service-learning experience (see Appendix A). Students used a five-point scale (1 = Strongly agree, 5 = Strongly disagree) to indicate their answers (with the exception of four Likert-ended questions in the third section). A sixth numeric alternative (Not applicable) was provided.

Data Analysis. The results of the surveys were gathered and inferential statistics were run to better understand the students' responses. In addition, 2-tailed two-sample t-tests were run comparing the questions to see if significant differences could be identified between classes. Given that the two classes represented students at different levels of proficiency and academic progress, these statistics were run in order to better understand the role and impact of service-learning across levels. This information is thus useful in providing a greater understanding of how to more effectively tailor programs geared towards a more varied student body. Finally, the qualitative

were analyzed from the two post service-learning questionnaires to determine whether certain trends existed among the different students both from the same level as well as between levels.

Results and Discussion

The averages of the means for each question from the Student Evaluation questionnaire (see Appendix A) are included in Figure 1. As it shows, the answers provided by the students indicate that, with very few exceptions, they agreed with the statements. Given that these statements were phrased in such a way that highlighted positive aspects

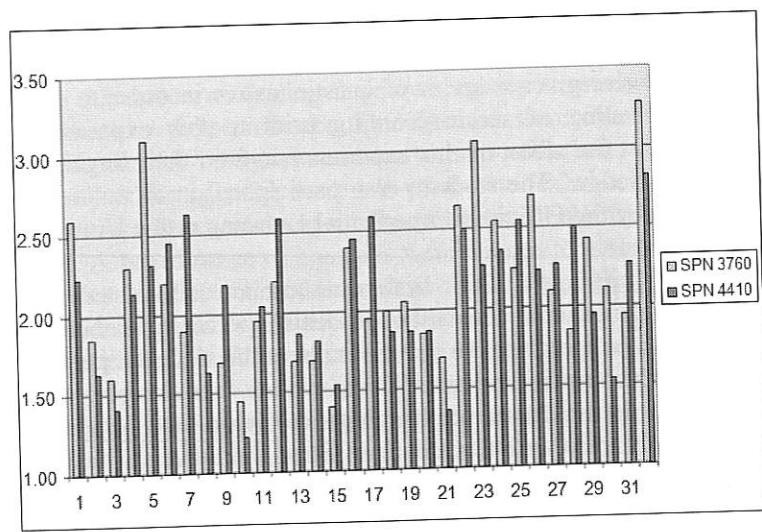


Figure 1

Averages per Question

of service-learning prior, during, and after the actual service-learning experience, the results suggest that generally students evaluated relatively favorably their perceptions before starting their projects, their perceptions throughout the semester, and their views on their projects upon completing them.

After conducting a 2-sample t-test comparing the means of the two Spanish classes' responses on these 32 questions, the results showed that 5 of the questions on the survey showed significant differences with $p \leq .05$ and with one question approaching significance with $p = .067$. The first question that showed a significant difference between levels was question # 5, which stated "I was eager to begin my service-learning project." The results show that the lower-level conversation class was less interested in beginning the service-learning project than the upper-level class ($p = .03$). An exploration of this issue revealed that the lower-level students were actually less familiar with what service-learning consisted of and what it entails, as can be seen in question # 1, which asked about the familiarity of the students with this type of learning activity. The more advanced class was more familiar and thus more likely to understand the work involved in successful completion of a service-learning course, but they seemed to have been more interested to begin their service-learning experience. In fact, many of them had taken other service-learning courses at this institution or knew somebody who had participated in this experience. While the results can be very rewarding from meaningful engagement in a service-learning class, these types of courses tend to require students to leave their comfort zones and make an extra effort to work and travel in the community and thus cause some anxiety in FL learners.

The second question which reflected a significant difference between levels was question #7, which stated "There was adequate communication between the community partner(s) and me." In this case, the students from the lower level felt that the community partner(s) did a satisfactory job with their communication with the students whereas the higher-level students found the communication to be adequate but with more students struggling to successfully communicate with their different organizations ($p = .05$). It is important to say that many students in the higher-level conversation class selected a particular site that they evaluated poorly at the end of the semester for several reasons, and the answers to this question clearly reflect the students' dissatisfaction.⁵

The lower-level students not only felt that the communication was better with the different organizations, but also felt there was a more direct connection between the course and their service-learning experience ($p = .05$). This was evidenced in their responses to question

17, which stated "The work I did helped me see how the subject matter of the course can be applied to everyday life." We found this to be a surprising result because of the difference in the instructional materials used in both courses; in the lower-level course, students use a commercially available textbook for Spanish conversation that includes readings that, in our assessment, have no connection whatsoever with the type of service they provided. In contrast, the higher-level course is based on controversial topics, many of which have a direct relationship with the service provided in most of the aforementioned agencies. These results suggest that it is more difficult for students who have attained more advanced oral proficiency skills to feel that what they do in class has genuine value in real, everyday situations; which posits a clear challenge for professors of more advanced conversation courses

Another question that yielded a significant difference between levels was question # 23: "This course helped me gain a clearer idea of my professional goals (for example, my career)." Other studies have reported the effect that service-learning may have in professional and career decisions, including Raschio's, who points out that some of the participants in his study felt reassured that they wanted to become teachers (124). With respect to this issue, our results show that higher-level students felt that the course had a more direct effect compared to their lower-level counterparts ($p = .049$). Perhaps this can be explained by the fact that most students who enroll in SPN 3760 are juniors and sophomores still exploring different major options whereas most students in SPN 4410 are seniors who are finishing their degrees and were able to confirm that they want to have a career that allows them to use their Spanish skills. Although the data collected in our study does not allow us to attribute the answer to this question to the service-learning experience per se, interestingly SPN 3760 students reported that this experience was worthwhile and that they would take the course again, more often than SPN 4410 students (questions # 26 and # 29).

Lower-level students considered that the service-learning experience had a direct impact on their oral communication skills (question # 28). In contrast, higher-level students did not feel as strongly about the impact it had on their skills ($p = .067$). The difference was not statistically significant, but it merits attention. At first glance, these results may seem contradictory, but perhaps they can be explained by alluding to the fact that students in SPN 4410 had "better" skills to begin with, and felt they could have participated actively in interactions

such as those that took place in the agencies they selected before actually taking on their projects. Furthermore, these results reveal the necessity to reevaluate how we conceptualize conversation courses designed for students who have taken most of the courses required by FL programs; these students might be approaching or be close to what Rifkin (2005) refers to as the ceiling that prevents learners in traditional FL instruction settings where there is contact only a few hours a week from achieving advanced proficiency levels. Students at this stage, as the author suggests, need to be exposed to experiences that go far beyond those provided by a classroom setting and a project of this nature (*A Ceiling Effect in Traditional* 13).⁶

The last question that also reflected significant differences was question # 30. It stated "I would recommend this course to a friend." In this case, more SPN 4410 students would recommend their course than SPN 3760 students ($p = .049$). This is yet another surprising result because our data suggests that students' impressions about a course that integrates experiences such as service-learning, with all their demands, do not depend necessarily on the perceived relationship between the course content and the experience itself and the effect that the experience has on the students' gains in the target skills.

The responses to a few other questions can help put into perspective the students' evaluation of their service-learning projects. For example, the great majority (74%) of the comments provided for question # 29 ("I would take this course again") were positive. Some of these comments were "I would take this course again because I had a chance to talk more in Spanish, something I don't get to do often;" "This class has made a huge impact in helping me increase my ability to communicate orally in Spanish;" and "My Spanish communication abilities have increased tremendously through this class." Negative comments mainly had to do with the time commitment and workload added by service-learning: "Too much busy work that I didn't learn from;" "Too disorganized;" and "I loved the conversation portion of the class, but the service-learning was a disappointment."

Question # 30, which we discussed already, also invited students to explain their answers. The comments were again mainly positive (75%): "Yes, I enjoyed it and grew a lot from my experience;" "I believe that the most efficient way to learn a language is by practicing in the classroom and in real life setting. This course provides students with the opportunity to do that;" "It wasn't a walk in the park but all of

the hard work was worthwhile;" and "If you have time to spare, I would recommend this class. The real world experience is 10Xs more important than the classroom experience." Negative comments were mainly based on the time commitment and the amount of learning that took place: "I learned a lot from my professor, but the service-learning project didn't help to the point that it was worth the time;" "I didn't like the service learning. I didn't have time for it;" and "I did not learn from the experience."

When asked to explain their answer to question # 31 ("I would recommend working with the community partner[s] with whom I worked"), students also provided very positive comments (80%): "They were amazing and grateful for all of the help;" "I loved Junior Achievement, the experience was very positive;" "They were very helpful and I had a positive cultural experience while volunteering at the chamber;" and "Yes, staff and students actively engage in Spanish." Negative comments reflected more the lack of organization of a community partner and the lack of opportunities to use Spanish than service-learning itself: ". . . there could have been Spanish speaking opportunities had the organization tried;" "Although the community service was rewarding and beneficial to the agency, I don't feel it has been extremely helpful in the field of interest;" and "Lack of communication."

The last item in the questionnaire, question # 32 ("I would take another service-learning course"), generated the most balanced responses, with 60% positive and 40% negative. Positive comments focused on the experience: "Yes, I learned a lot from my service-learning project and I appreciated the real-world connection to my studies at UCF;" "I enjoy hands-on learning experiences and I enjoy contributing to the community;" and "I enjoy volunteering for experience in my community." All negative comments reflected the previously mentioned idea of time commitment: "Too much work. I felt overwhelmed at times;" "I did not learn from the experience;" and "Generally I prefer doing service work on my own time and how I see fit—not for a course requirement."

While the initial study did not include any experimental design to specifically measure oral communication competence, we conducted a post-hoc analysis of student performance in classes in which service-learning was not employed and in the classes mentioned in this study. We found that, when compared to previous semesters, the students who

had participated in service-learning performed better on their final oral interview than students with the same instructor over the previous two years. This comparison was made between the performance of the students, as measured according to the grade received, from the previous two years with the current classes. Both of the researchers in this study used the same questions and format for the final oral assessment for the classes in this study as they had during the previous two years. Though the improvement was not statistically significant, these results hint at the possibility that even with minimal contact (15 hours) during a semester, the real interactions between the students and the community may have a positive effect on language fluency.

Conclusion

FL courses are and should continue to be seen as works in progress that are open to experimentation and the application of new ideas and new instructional strategies. Conversation courses, which are typically considered as being taught effectively as long as there are class discussions, debates, and the like, are not the exception; these courses are of vital importance in FL programs and curricula for they focus exclusively on a set of skills on which students depend if they are to be active participants in other courses and in the community. This research provides support for the fact that maybe classroom discussion and debate is not enough to achieve the levels of proficiency that language professors hope to achieve. It may be that more in-depth and real-life communicative settings are needed to break through the threshold ceiling that some advanced learners seem to reach.

Service-learning, a pedagogical tool that has proved to be effective in other disciplines and subjects, increases the amount of time student spend using the target language creatively and provides them with opportunities to enhance and enrich their linguistic abilities by interacting with real people in real situations. Students who participated in our study claimed to have a positive experience and, overall, reported gains in the areas of professional goals and communicative competence in Spanish, and more important, they connected with the community while serving others. In addition, students, both native Spanish speakers and native English speakers, were able to interact with community members who did not pertain to either their own ethnic group and/or socioeconomic level. Since culture is such an intimate and

important part of becoming proficient in a language, the interactions that the students experienced provided them with a window through which they were better able to see the Hispanic community in their area. Some of the students even expressed great surprise to find out the concentration of different Hispanic populations in their community of which they were not aware.

This research explored the differences between conversation courses of different levels and how the construction of the level itself needs to be considered in a service-learning component in the classroom. Future research needs to consider not only the effectiveness of service-learning in the classroom, but also how to maximize the experience for students at different levels. What types of experiences produce the greatest gains at the third-year level? Are these the same as the ones needed at the fourth-year level? Which agencies provide the most effective way to improve the individual language modalities? These and many more questions still need to be addressed as we further the implementation of service-learning in the FL curriculum.

It might be argued that one of the limitations of our study was that it did not allow us to measure the effect of service-learning on oral proficiency, but this was never one of our goals. Tackling such a task would entail applying a coherent theory of language acquisition in a communicative setting, adopting a set of oral proficiency guidelines such as the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines for Speaking, and administering an assessment such as the OPI before and after the service-learning experience. This was certainly beyond the scope of our study. Nevertheless, while it may be claimed that linguistic gains in the development of communicative competence should be the main motivation to implement service-learning in the FL classroom, it is important to emphasize that students can also experience gains in the areas of pragmatics, cultural knowledge, and sociocultural awareness. Future studies should look at how service-learning may have a positive impact in all of these areas.

Learning about service-learning, coordinating efforts with the institution and the community partners, negotiating with skeptic students, and monitoring these projects is a time consuming task. However, it is part of the natural process that comes when trying to come up with non-traditional ways of teaching our students and responding to the needs of our communities. Service-learning provides the unique opportunity of a reciprocal service and a learning environment

in which the students have a participatory role in their language learning and acquisition because the professor is no longer at the center of the language learning process.

NOTES

¹ According to the Corporation for National and Community Service about a quarter of all colleges and universities and more than half of all community colleges have developed service-learning programs.

² The preceding definition of service-learning is the one adopted by the Office of Experiential Learning of the University of Central Florida, the institution where the study was conducted. For more information, please visit http://www.explearning.ucf.edu/categories/For%20Students/Service-Learning/161_143.aspx.

³ The other three agencies had to be eliminated from the list due to location or inability on the part of the agency representative to guarantee that students would have the expected experience or speak in Spanish.

⁴ For the purpose of this study, we only used one of the questionnaires. See Appendix A.

⁵ Most of the concerns raised by these students had to do with the fact that they felt they were not engaged in many activities that involved speaking in Spanish, and that they felt somewhat unsafe in the community where the agency is located. They also commented on the pressures of working with children from families with severe financial problems.

⁶ Rifkin suggests immersion-like and study abroad programs to help students break the ceiling. However, we must remember that many studies have concluded that study abroad programs also fail at providing opportunities for attaining advanced proficiency in a FL.

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Appendix A

Student Evaluation

Your professor would like to know your opinion about the service-learning component of this course. He/She asks you to evaluate your experience and the responses you provide will be used to improve the project in the future. Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary and it will take approximately ten minutes. Thank you for your participation.

First, your professor would like to ask you some general questions about your service-learning experience. Using the following scale (ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree"), please indicate your level of agreement with the statements below by writing the appropriate number. If a statement is not relevant, please write 6 ("Not Applicable").

1 – Strongly Agree / 2 – Agree / 3 – Neither Agree nor Disagree / 4 – Disagree / 5 – Strongly Disagree / 6 – Not Applicable

At the beginning of the semester:

- ___ 1. I knew what service-learning was.
- ___ 2. The course objectives and how they related to the service-learning experience were clearly stated in the syllabus.
- ___ 3. The course objectives and how they related to the service-learning experience were clearly communicated by the professor.
- ___ 4. The course objectives and how they related to the service-learning experience were clearly communicated by the community partner(s).
- ___ 5. I was eager to begin my service-learning project.

Throughout the semester:

- ___ 6. The needs of the community partner(s) were clearly communicated to me.
- ___ 7. There was adequate communication between the community partner(s) and me.
- ___ 8. There was adequate communication between the professor and me.
- ___ 9. I felt I could contact the community partner(s) if I had concerns.
- ___ 10. I felt I could contact the professor if I had concerns.
- ___ 11. The community partner(s) provided me with orientation and training.
- ___ 12. The community partner(s) provided me with challenging and meaningful activities.
- ___ 13. I took the time to understand the community partners' needs.

- ___ 14. In my work, I addressed the community partners' missions and goals.
- ___ 15. I took this project seriously.
- ___ 16. The work I did increased my understanding of the academic course material.
- ___ 17. The work I did helped me see how the subject matter of the course can be applied to everyday life.
- ___ 18. The service aspect of this course showed me how I can become more involved in my community.
- ___ 19. The service aspect of this course helped me become more aware of the needs of my community.
- ___ 20. The community service involved in this course benefited the community.
- ___ 21. During my service, I interacted with people from different social, economic, or ethnic backgrounds.

Reflecting on the course and the entire service-learning experience:

- ___ 22. This course helped me gain a clearer idea of my educational goals (for example, my major or minor).
 - ___ 23. This course helped me gain a clearer idea of my professional goal (for example, my career).
 - ___ 24. The service I performed and the skills I developed helped make me more marketable in my chosen profession.
 - ___ 25. The service experience complemented the learning objectives of the course.
 - ___ 26. The time needed to satisfy the service-learning component of this course was worthwhile.
 - ___ 27. The service-learning experience had a direct impact on my personal growth.
 - ___ 28. The service-learning experience had a direct impact on my oral communication skills.
 - ___ 29. I would take this course again. (Please explain your answer below.)
-
- ___ 30. I would recommend this course to a friend. (Please explain your answer below.)
-
- ___ 31. I would recommend working with the community partner(s) with whom I worked. (Please explain your answer below.)

____ 32. I would take another service-learning course. (Please explain your answer below.)

BOOK REVIEWS

Carrigan, Jorge. *Bailar con la más fea*. Miami, FL: Atompres 2010. ISBN: 1452856788. 219 pp.

A un amigo le escuché decir que la novela debía ser como la cruz: un plano se extendería en lo horizontal, donde se sucederían las líneas argumentales, la trama, en definitiva. El otro plano, en lo vertical apuntaría a un intento de despejar incógnitas induciendo a la reflexión en otras palabras, comunicar con lo trascendente. Esta sería la parte espiritual de la novela, su metafísica, por llamarla de algún modo. *Bailar con la más fea*, del escritor cubano Jorge Carrigan y publicada bajo el sello de Atompres este mismo año me tienta sobremedida por poner en consideración el esquema que mi amigo me dibujara con un par de gestos en el aire.

El mismo autor cuenta cómo armó y desarmó el muñeco varias veces; la carpintería de la novela, según palabras propias. Se destapaba la crisis de los balseros en 1994 cuando Jorge Carrigan abandonaba la Isla en un avión rumbo a Canadá. Tiempos convulsos en que se sacudía una frágil estructura social sostenida sobre el barrido de todo intento de progreso individual, apoyada en la coacción y el miedo. De ese miedo quería hablar Carrigan en su novela, estimulado por la lectura de "Informe contra mí mismo" de Eliseo Alberto Diego. Pero sin ánimo de contrariar al autor, en mi lectura personal no subscribo que *Bailar con la más fea* resulte una novela sobre el miedo. Más bien sobre la locura arrolladora de toda una nación.

Una acumulada experiencia como dramaturgo le llevó a hacer de Gilda y Benjamín un dueto memorable, que se dividen el protagonismo como una buena pareja de baile. Ambos son hijos de los ideales de un estado paternalista que aseguraba garantizarles un sentido a sus existencias en función del bienestar común. Pero nada de ello sería gratuito. La estudiante Gilda asiste a un campamento de intercambio con jóvenes traductores extranjeros. Entre los asistentes cubanos y el aparato ideológico se busca establecer un sistema eficiente de vigilancia que la muchacha romperá al enamorarse de un joven suizo. El resultado es la expulsión del campamento y con ello comienza s