

Is service learning valuable to the university Spanish major? Examining students' motivation, acquisition, and attitude in a Spanish service learning course

¿Es el aprendizaje-servicio útil para la especialidad universitaria de español? Análisis de motivación, adquisición y actitudes en un curso de aprendizaje-servicio

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ABSTRACT

Service learning courses have seen a sharp increase in a variety of disciplines in universities internationally. Language classes, in particular, enjoy the advantages of offering students exposure to the languages and cultures about which they are studying. With the rise in the number of Spanish speakers around the world, university instructors are realizing the benefits of using service learning (SL) as a means to connect students with the community while putting them in direct contact with the target language (Bettencourt, 2015). Because of the variations of Spanish spoken worldwide due to the diversity of Hispanic populations and cultures, educators can also observe whether students recognize differences between the Spanish with which they come in contact during a SL course and the textbook Spanish they are exposed to in the classroom. Based on the outcome of a Spanish SL course, this study examines how SL affects students' motivation towards learning Spanish, as well as their recognition and learning of a Spanish variety different from what they may have been exposed to previously. Additionally, the research determines if students recognize, and in turn, react towards the Spanish variation spoken by participants in the SL project. The overall objective the researcher sought to determine with this study was if SL is beneficial to the curricular demands of Spanish language programs.

Keywords: service learning, native-speaker, linguistic variation, language community.

RESUMEN

Se ha visto internacionalmente un fuerte aumento en los cursos de aprendizaje-servicio en una variedad de áreas académicas. En particular, las clases de lengua aprovechan la posibilidad de ofrecerles a los estudiantes una exposición a las lenguas y culturas sobre las que estudian. Con el crecimiento del número de hispanohablantes por todo el mundo, los instructores universitarios se están dando cuenta de los beneficios del aprendizaje-servicio (AS) ya que pone a los estudiantes en contacto con una comunidad y a la vez en contacto directo con la lengua meta (Bettencourt, 2015). Debido a la gran variedad del español hablado en las diferentes partes del mundo, atribuida a la gran diversidad de las poblaciones y culturas hispánicas, los educadores pueden observar si los alumnos reconocen las diferencias entre el español con el que entran en contacto durante un curso AS y el del libro de texto que usan en sus clases. Basado en los resultados de un curso AS de lengua española, se examina en este estudio los efectos que el AS tiene en la motivación de los estudiantes

por aprender español, así como en su reconocimiento y aprendizaje de una variedad diferente de la que hayan estudiado previamente. Además, tal estudio puede revelar si los estudiantes reconocen y, a su vez, reaccionan hacia la variedad del español que hablan los participantes del proyecto AS. El objetivo principal de la investigadora fue determinar mediante este estudio si AS beneficia las exigencias curriculares de los programas de lengua española.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje-servicio, hablante nativo, variación lingüística, comunidad de habla.

1. INTRODUCTION

There has been a rise among university departments to incorporate service learning (SL) in their course offerings, but perhaps the greatest increase has been in language courses, especially Spanish language classes (Bettencourt, 2015). The sharp rise in using service to foster learning and the realization of a material's use outside the classroom are reasons SL has become a staple in modern language curriculums. Due to the increase in Hispanic populations around the world and the limited resources available to them, Spanish classes are ideal recipients to include SL projects.

When SL first became a popular addition to Spanish language departments, it was questionable exactly what could be expected of such a course and how one should be organized. After all, service can be performed in several ways for different groups of people. For example, students can teach the target language in order to raise awareness of the importance of the Spanish culture and language in the world. On the other hand, they can teach their native language to Hispanic immigrants aiding in their transition into a foreign culture. Furthermore, they can serve as translators and interpreters. Other than helping Hispanics better adjust to their new home, students also serve the community in which they are located by meeting the needs of peoples whose needs are not being met through other avenues. Perhaps more importantly than the service, is what the students are gaining from their experience. The second component of SL is *learning* and begs to question what exactly students learn from the service they are offering. In order for students to perform a service, they must already have a basic set of skills needed to meet the objectives set forth prior to the project or course. They would not be able to translate, teach, or interpret if they did not have a certain level of proficiency in Spanish. If students already have the skills needed for the service, what will they learn from doing it?

A promising learning opportunity Spanish SL courses offer is students' exposure to variations within the Spanish language and culture. The Hispanic demographic in the U.S. and around the world is changing rapidly (Lopez, Gonzalez-Barrera and Cuddington, 2013; Seele, 2019). There are many different groups of Spanish speakers resulting in variations in Spanish grammar, vocabulary, and cultural traditions. SL courses are especially advantageous for University Spanish departments internationally because through a SL project, students can gain knowledge about Spanish variations and diverse cultures their instructors may be lacking. Spanish instructors share information and material with students regarding the variations they themselves have experienced, which may not be the variations used by Spanish speakers in the local community. SL can successfully fill in these gaps while enabling students to provide vital resources to people in their communities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Research surrounding SL states that although SL enriches students' experiences with the language and cultures it represents, it is extremely difficult to statistically pinpoint how and what students are learning by participating in them (DuBord and Kimball, 2016; Hale, 1999; Marijuan and Sanz, 2018; Medina and Gordon, 2014; Overfield, 2007). Service learning instructors find standard test instruments fail to document the students' true gains in language courses (DuBord and Kimball, 2016). However, DuBord and Kimball (2016) argue the outcomes of SL on student learning can and should be measured by nonconventional standards such as an increase in ability to communicate with the target community and a demonstration of better problem solving skills. Similarly, Benson, Harkavy and Hartley (2005) argue, "the impact of service-learning on student learning should be one component, not the primary focus, of any evaluation of its utility" (p. 190). The current study exemplifies the necessity to use nonstandard means such as the instructor's qualitative analysis of journal entries and students' self-evaluation as a means of measuring their progress in the language.

Although it is difficult to obtain clear, precise results after students complete SL courses, there have been studies that agree that they are worth offering to students because they provide a learning environment unique and advantageous from the typical language classroom (Arnett, 2013; DeKeyser, 2014; Martinsen, 2010). Additionally, the experience students gain by participating in a SL course cannot be replicated in the typical language classroom, and as detailed below, students have shown to benefit from taking such courses. In a recent study, Palpacuer Lee, Curtis and Curran (2018) confirmed SL aids in accomplishing the objectives and curriculum goals many second and foreign language programs seek to accomplish such as increasing students cultural knowledge of the target language's communities through the ability to effectively communicate with native speakers of the language.

The primary benefit to many of SL courses including several described in Hellebrandt and Wurr's volume is an increase in student motivation to either continue learning the language or put forth more effort to learn in present and future language courses (Grabois, 2007; Pak, 2007; Pascual y Cabo, Prada and Lowther Pereira, 2017; Stewart, 2007). Both Pak and Stewart found that by using the target language with people who needed to communicate with them, students became active participants in their learning and saw an authentic side to the material. Furthermore, they realized how much was at stake in what they studied and acquired during their language courses. This rise in awareness of the usefulness of learning the target language resulted in an increased drive to understand and produce as much of the language as possible. In addition, as Stewart points out, it made them want to participate more in the learning process, increasing their class participation and use of the language outside the classroom. Students no longer saw their Spanish speaking skills as something limited to using exclusively in their classes, but rather sought out avenues to use the target language in their communities. As is the case with the current SL course, Grabois had students keep journals detailing their experiences, including successes, failures, and recognition for improvement. Echoed throughout the students'

journals was how much more interested they had become in learning the target language after their participation in the SL course.

A second advantage to offering SL courses in language classrooms is the shift in teacher-student role placing the student in an autonomous role in which s/he has more control over his/her learning (Whittig and Hale, 2007; Moreno-López et al., 2017). The reason students are able to become more active in their learning, according to Tilley-Lubbs (2007), is due to their decreased level of anxiety to participate. In the SL course in Tilley-Lubbs' study as well as the SL course described in this study, students were forced to communicate with native speakers of the target language in order to fulfill the responsibilities of the course. The students felt like they had more control of their participation because they were essentially leading the conversations and their teachers were not telling them what to say or correcting their errors. In a more recent study, Pascual y Cabo, Prada and Lowther Pereira (2017) found learners discovered a sense of purpose for learning Spanish when they saw how useful and important knowing a second language was after participating in a SL course. A similar outcome in the present study, the students' confidence increased, resulting in a sense of accomplishment. Similarly, Moreno-López et al. (2017) discovered Spanish students who participated in SL reported gains both linguistically and an increase in their confidence and motivation to use the language outside the classroom.

A third repeated benefit to incorporating SL in language courses is the students' increased awareness of other cultures and dialects representing the target language as well as their feelings of a sense of accomplishing a civic duty (Baker, 2018; Belpoliti and Pérez, 2019; Bettencourt, 2015; Centeno, 2007; Perren, 2007; Spack, 2007). After incorporating an ESL SL project in a business course, Spack noted that students' knowledge and understanding of their own culture was greatly enriched. Similarly, Belpoliti and Pérez's (2019) SL course taught students the potential for using their Spanish speaking abilities outside the classroom once they saw firsthand the benefits of knowing a second language in healthcare environments. SL can be especially advantageous for Spanish heritage learners who, through their involvement with other Spanish speakers in their community, can feel an added sense of pride and usefulness, a key finding in a study by Petrov (2013). SL is not limited to projects in the U.S. Perren's (2007) study demonstrated an increased awareness of dialectal and cultural variations with a project in which students worked with different groups of people in the Philippines to build houses. After the project, the students reported an increased cognizance of other dialects native to the Philippines, and they were quicker to accept these other dialects in more positive terms.

The beneficial aspects students experience and gain during SL, although difficult to statistically show, are significant. The above studies have mentioned the main benefits of SL as increased motivation, learner autonomy, and multicultural awareness. The current study recognized similar benefits from a SL course offered at a mid-size university. However, the researcher also questioned whether students would recognize Spanish language variations among the participants of the SL project, and would they in turn react, whether negative or positive, to the varying Spanish dialects spoken in their community.

3. SERVICE-LEARNING DETAILS

This study began as a pilot study in order to determine if a SL course could be successful in a small Spanish department at a university located in a relatively rural area. Furthermore, it questioned if SL should be required to obtain a Spanish major because it gives students

more exposure to native speakers of the language. Prior to the course, the advantages of SL had been recognized from current research and it was a desire for the department and university to incorporate courses with SL related projects to better connect students with the community. In the spring prior to the course, a local, public preschool called the Spanish department requesting students' help with the growing Hispanic population in their school. The director of the preschool expressed a desire and need to communicate with Spanish speaking parents who did not speak English and were struggling to understand the schools' procedures and regulations. At the time little was known surrounding the background of the Spanish speakers, and it was later determined that they were from Mexico, Guatemala, and Nicaragua. The researcher realized this would be an opportunity to fill a gap in the department by designing a SL course where students would have direct contact with native Spanish-speakers in the community.

When the planning initially began for the course, it was discovered that organization, patience, and consistency would be crucial for such a course to be successful. The faculty member designing the course knew this from previous educators' experiences with designing similar classes in their Spanish curriculum (Ebacher, 2013; Sánchez-López, 2013; Taylor, 2007). It was vital for the objectives of the course to be clear and for students to understand the course expectations and requirements. It was also important that students realize that although they were "helping" the Hispanic population in the community, they needed be open to learning from their experiences as well.

The objectives were two-fold: (1) the preschool was asking Spanish students to serve as interpreters for the Hispanic parents in order to communicate their questions and/or concerns to their children's teachers, and (2) the students would interpret for the teachers so the parents could understand issues that may be transpiring with the children in the classroom as well translate any documents the teachers had for the parents.

3.1 Participants

The course was offered as a one-hour credited course for students who had completed at least 15 hours of Spanish previously, were native Spanish speakers, or had lived or studied in a Spanish speaking country for a time approved by department faculty on a case-by-case basis. The first quarter it was offered, six students signed up for the course. They were all either junior or senior Spanish majors. Four of them were double majors with primary majors in Education, Political Science, English, or History. Four of the students were females, and 2 were males. Two of the students had participated in a study abroad program to Madrid, Spain for four weeks. Two students had visited Central American countries for short times on vacation. One student was a heritage speaker whose family came from Mexico. And one student had spent six weeks in Mexico on a mission trip.

3.2 Procedure

The students were required to meet once a week at the preschool for one hour to accomplish the objectives mentioned above. Initially, the students composed a letter in Spanish to the Hispanic parents outlining when and why they would be at the school. By writing the letter, students further practiced their Spanish writing language skills. The instructor indicated any grammatical or structural errors for the students having them revise and make necessary corrections. The teachers distributed the letter to the Spanish-speaking parents.

During the first meeting with the parents, the students and parents introduced themselves, and the students translated questions parents had for the teachers. This gave students firsthand practice in Spanish conversation with native speakers as well as a translation exercise with the parents' questions. They wrote the questions down in English and gave them to the administrative staff to give to the teachers. The remainder of the time, students conversed with the parents, asking them questions about their homelands. To aid with the flow of the meeting time, the students were instructed to have a running list of questions in Spanish they had previously approved with the instructor. These questions were about the parents' homelands and families. The researcher, always present during the student-parent meetings, observed the interaction and noted that many of the words and phrases the parents used were regional variations from their native countries. As will be shown in a later section, the students also recognized some of these dialectally varied vocabulary items and listed them in their journals as such.

Over the next eight weeks, students continued to meet once a week with the parents. On average between two and four parents would attend the meetings. After the first five meetings, there was one day when no parents who showed up for the meeting. The instructor anticipated that this may happen, and in order for students to have something to do, the students had prepared Spanish lessons to teach in the classes in which there was a Spanish-speaking child. The students were instructed to bring their lesson plans and props with them each time in the event no parents showed up so they would be prepared to teach the children. The lessons were 30 minutes and included basic Spanish vocabulary such as greetings, colors, and numbers. The students did this two times in two different classes.

3.3 Instrument

Prior to the course, the instructor sought to determine to know how much the students interacted with or knew about the Hispanic community where their university was located. This was important because it would show how much they knew about the cultures and Spanish dialects with which they would potentially come in contact prior to them beginning the course. The means to determine this was a survey (Appendix A) the instructor administered during a pre-meeting to the course.

In order to evaluate the students' performance in the SL course, they were required to write a journal entry in Spanish between 150 and 200 words after each meeting with the parents and/or lesson with the children. In the journals, they would recount their experience including where they felt they succeeded and and/or failed. The journals were analyzed using the abbreviated grounded theory (Charmaz, 2006; Willig, 2013) in order to determine the worth and validity of the course. Participants were also instructed to keep a log of anything they learned during the meetings and lessons with the preschoolers including vocabulary words or phrases and cultural, historical, political, or geographical details about the participants' countries. In addition to the journals, students were to compose a final paper between four and five pages at the end of the quarter with a detailed account of what they feel they learned and gained from having taken the course. The researcher analyzed the journals and final papers searching for patterns and repeated themes amongst the students as well as individually. In order to extract salient features from the journals, the researcher determined comments that were along the same thread and repeated among all six participants were significant. The instructor's presence during the meetings with the parents ensured the students were complying with the course requirements. The researcher's firsthand observations of the student/parent meetings also verified the

information students detailed in the journals and papers actually happened in the meetings, triangulating and strengthening the results.

Once the journals and papers were collected, the researcher gleaned three core themes echoed in all six of the students' journals and/or papers: awareness of linguistic and cultural variation among Spanish speakers in their community, increase in motivation and a shift in attitude towards learning and speaking Spanish, and validation and purpose to study Spanish as a second language

4. RESULTS

Based on the survey, the instructor determined all the students assumed the Hispanic families living in the community would be of Mexican heritage. Furthermore, none of them had contact with the any of Spanish speakers in the community. This was significant because it meant if the families were from another Hispanic culture, the students were unaware of it at the start of the course. Although there were other items on the survey, how much students knew about and had contact with Hispanics in the community where the study took place were the items salient to the study. This would allow a comparison of what students thought about the demographics of the Hispanic community before and after the course. This will be discussed in more detail in later sections.

Once the students turned in all their journals and final papers, the researcher analyzed their comments and self-evaluation searching for commonalities in their perceived language learning. Upon doing this, three themes emerged: (1) an increase in Spanish vocabulary and awareness of the diversity amongst Latin American dialects; (2) an increase in their motivation and receptive attitude to practice their conversational Spanish with local native speakers; and (3) a heightened sense of validation and purpose for why they were studying Spanish. The researcher determined these three categories to be the results based on each student making at least one comment that would fall under each of the categories.

4.1 Linguistic and cultural discoveries

Optimally, the course's objectives were that students would gain more linguistic competence in conversational Spanish as a result of spending time each week conversing with native Spanish speakers in a natural environment. It was difficult to determine prior to the course how much Spanish students would be exposed to and exactly which grammar features they could potentially acquire. The researcher decided vocabulary and especially terms that were unique to the countries and regions from which the parents were from would offer the clearest results. Mentioned previously, students were asked to list any Spanish terms or phrases they learned as a result of the time they spent with the Hispanic parents.

In their journals, each of the students mentioned at least two new words they learned or had learned differently. Some of the new words included "cierre," "folleto," "ayudante," "estuche," "chupete," "estar brava," "catarro," "cobija," "recreo," "calabaza", and "pelear". The words the students had learned differently than they previously learned or heard were "torta," "levantarse" and "feria" for "sandwich," "pasar por," and "cambio". Additionally, two students stated that they heard parents saying "que padre" for something that was good, and this reinforced what one student said he had been taught in a previous class was an expression used in Mexico.

Although this may not seem like much progress in terms of language learning, the students ended the course knowing more vocabulary than when they started. Furthermore, the course was only a one-hour course, severely limiting the time students spent with the native speakers. As mentioned previously, gains in language acquisition during SL are very difficult to measure and verify for a three- or four-hour course, much less a one-hour class.

In addition to linguistic gains students made during the course, they learned aspects about the variety of cultures represented by the participating families. Although initially all students believed all or the majority of the families they would be working with would be from Mexico, they realized Mexicans were not the only Hispanic group living in the community. While every student made a comment about the families coming from Latin American countries other than Mexico, these are only three students' comments:

"De la Señora aprendí varias cosas de Guatemala. Aprendí que la palabra Guatemala significa 'tierra de árboles,' también aprendí que el idioma Español es realmente utilizado como segunda lengua ya que en Guatemala existen 21 idiomas diferentes."

"Aprendí mucho sobre el sistema escolar de central américa. Me di cuenta que es muy diferente que el de los EE.UU."

"Vi que hay muchas diferencias entre la vida cotidiana de México y de Nicaragua. Aunque hay semejanzas, tienen sus propias tradiciones y costumbres."

As mentioned earlier, the students completed a survey prior to the course giving their preconceptions of where they thought the Hispanics in their community came from. All the students assumed that the Hispanic families, or at least the majority, were going to be of Mexican descent. Although some of the families in the preschool were indeed from Mexico, there were also families from Nicaragua and Guatemala. It was encouraging to see students discover that the Hispanic community they may have previously thought was part of their community was in fact different from the reality.

4.2 Motivation and attitude

The students who participated in the SL course had varying backgrounds with Hispanic and Latino populations, as determined by the survey they filled out during the first class meeting. In order to determine how much contact students had with Hispanic families in the community prior to the course, one of the survey items questioned their previous contact with Spanish speakers in the area. The survey included questions like "how often do you have contact with Spanish speakers in Ruston or the surrounding areas?" and "if given the opportunity would you desire to meet with native Spanish speakers in the community?" Other than the heritage speaker, all the other students answered that they had spoken little to never with Spanish speakers in the area because they did not have the opportunity to do so and because they were not aware of the Hispanic population in the community or how they could get in contact with them. However, they all did express the desire to make contact with native Spanish speakers, if for nothing else than to have an avenue to practice their conversational Spanish. The present course would provide a much-needed bridge between Hispanics in the area and students wishing to get authentic practice with the language.

In their journals, all the students expressed their surprise at the number of Spanish speakers living in the community. Some of the comments in the journals were:

"Me sorprendí el número de hispano-hablantes en Ruston. Nunca había notado el número de familias hispano-hablantes en Ruston."

"Esta clase me ayudó conectar con los latinos en la comunidad. No sabía que había tantos viviendo en Ruston."

"Hay muchos hispano-hablantes en esta área para ser un lugar tan pequeño. Y esto me sorprendí."

"Al principio del curso pensaba que no había muchos hispanos en Ruston, pero me equivoqué. Me alegré ver el gran número de hispanos en una comunidad tan pequeña. Y ahora sé que hay una manera para poder aprender de los nativo hablantes aquí."

It was not only the large number of Spanish speakers in the area that was surprising to students, but the diversity of the Spanish speakers was a discovery for them as well. This was seen with the following comments:

"Como soy mexicana, pensaba que la mayoría de los latinos con quienes iba a trabajar también serían mexicanos. Pero no era así. Hay muchos hispanos aquí de Guatemala y unos de Nicaragua."

"Me sorprendí con la diversidad de hispano-hablantes porque pude hablar con personas de México y Central América."

"Me gustó poder hablar con personas de varias culturas y países."

One obstacle many Spanish programs in schools and universities have is providing a means for students to benefit from authentic contact and practice with native speakers. Many programs encourage study abroad to students in order to overcome this obstacle. However, not every student can participate in study abroad for a variety of reasons, and even the students who do participate may desire to continue to develop relationships with native Spanish speakers after their return. This SL course demonstrates a practical way to give students the contact with the target language and culture they desire. Furthermore, heritage speakers can greatly benefit from working with native Spanish speakers with backgrounds different from their own.

4.3 Encouragement and Validation of Spanish Studies

The most recognizable gains in the SL course were in the encouragement students received to continue their Spanish studies and validation of the knowledge they acquired in their previous classes. Each student commented on how they felt their Spanish studies had successfully equipped them to speak with native speakers and/or how they now realized the importance of being able to speak Spanish. Although it was a requirement that students

have completed at least 15 hours of Spanish, there were some students who had very little practice conversing in Spanish in previous classes. Prior to the course, some of the students expressed concern in their lack of fluency in Spanish to be able to effectively communicate with the Hispanic families. This was not an issue, however, as expressed in the students' journals:

"Vi que no tengo que ser fluente para poder ayudar a otras personas."

"Las familias se parecerían estar felices que habían americanos tratando de comunicarse con ellos y no les importaban los errores en el español."

"Al principio me sentí que no sabía suficiente español para poder comunicar con las familias, pero al final aprendí que no tengo que saber todas las palabras o reglas de la gramática para poder hablar en español."

This class enabled students to use the skills they had learned in the classroom to talk with and help the Hispanic community in their town. They were also able to speak Spanish without worrying about being penalized if their grammar or pronunciation were not perfect. Additionally, the course pushed them to speak Spanish even when they were not completely confident with their skills. One student in her journal expressed the confidence gained from the course:

"Hablando con hispano-hablantes en la comunidad me hizo sentir más segura de mi habilidad de hablar español y ahora siento como puedo hablar con hispano-hablantes afuera de la escuela pre-escolar."

The same student reported to the professor of the course that when she saw a Spanish-speaking woman struggling to communicate with a pharmacist one day at a local pharmacy, she was compelled to approach the woman and ask if she could interpret for her. The Spanish-speaking woman accepted her help, and the student successfully translated the pharmacist's questions. The student said she never noticed situations like that before and is now much more aware of what she can offer to Spanish speakers struggling to communicate. Awareness of the Hispanic communities' needs is an objective SL courses strive to meet. Once students realize there are opportunities to use their Spanish skills in the community, they will be able to do so after the SL courses have ended.

Some of the students realized a greater importance of their Spanish studies as a result of the course. They noticed the need for Spanish speakers in their community and the need to include Hispanics in mainstream activities of the community such as school meetings and events. As mentioned above, students did not know there was such an extensive, varied Hispanic community in their town due to their lack of opportunity to interact with them. The eye-opening experience this course provided is seen through journal entries:

"Creo que hay una necesidad para los hispanos a tener un lugar en nuestra sociedad. Hay una falta de comunidad para ellos."

"Una señora me dijo que ella tiene que pagar para un intérprete cuando ella va al hospital. Este intérprete cobra \$500. Es una lástima que haya estudiantes que pueden ayudarles pero

ellos no sabían que estamos aquí. Ahora espero que sepan que podemos ayudarles y no tienen que pagar el intérprete."

"Este curso me ayudó a ver la gran necesidad que existe en las escuelas al no contar con maestras bilingües. Es impresionante la cantidad de niños que día a día necesitan ayuda en la escuela y por falta de alguien que hable su idioma ellos no pueden progresar en la vida como los demás."

"Este curso me ayudó a valorarme a mí misma como persona porque pude darme cuenta de lo afortunada que soy al poder hablar dos idiomas y de lo mucho que puedo ayudar a las personas gracias a esta habilidad."

"Con esta clase vi que los estudiantes universitarios no solo contribuyen a las vidas y educación de los niños, sino también les dan a los padres bienvenidos y un sentido de que son partes de la comunidad."

5. CONCLUSIONS

An objective for many language instructors in schools and universities today is for students to use the skills they gain in the classroom to effectively communicate with others in the target language outside the classroom. SL courses provide a way for students to accomplish this by placing students in direct contact with native speakers of the target language. In addition, SL courses accomplish a second objective: to enable students to use their knowledge to serve others in their community.

The course analyzed in this study reiterated what previous language SL courses discovered in that results can be difficult to measure and are many times qualitative and subjective in nature. The results in this study, for example, cannot be measured through statistical advances in grammar or acquisition. The advances students made, however, are valid and important to their Spanish language learning experiences.

Through journal entries, three main results surfaced as a result of the course: an increase in students' target language vocabulary and cultural knowledge, recognition and change in their attitude towards the numerous Spanish speakers in their community, and validation and encouragement to continue their studies in Spanish. Students' growth in these areas alone proves the course to be successful, especially when considering it was limited to one hour per week.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDIES

Although there were positive aspects to the course, there were also challenges and drawbacks. Little was known about what to expect when initially designing and preparing for the course, making it difficult to pinpoint realistic objectives. It could not be predicted how many Hispanic parents would participate. While there was a regular attendance of Spanish speakers in the weekly sessions, students reported feeling they exhausted the conversational topics in a few weeks because it was the same parents who attended the meetings. For future courses, a way to remedy this issue would be for students to go to the sessions with a more extensive list of conversational topics and/or questions for the parents so if it is the same people every week, they will have a different point to discuss.

A second issue that arose during the course was that some students felt the Hispanics were more comfortable speaking to the student who was a heritage speaker, and therefore addressed all their questions to her, limiting their speaking time. This could also be addressed by students being better prepared with topics and questions prior to going to the weekly sessions. This would allow students to take turns speaking and addressing the parents.

Overall, there were many positive aspects to the course, and it proved to be an effective, relatively easy way for students to make contact with native Spanish speakers. Additionally, it is an option for students who cannot participate in a study abroad program to gain cultural insight and language practice. After presenting the results to the university's Spanish department where the course was offered, the faculty decided to incorporate service learning as a requirement for students who are unable to participate in Spanish study abroad. While it is more work for the instructor designing the course, it is well worth the effort.

One of the main goals and proven successes for starting this program was to enable students to connect with the Hispanic community in the area where their university is located. This would allow them to have an avenue to practice their Spanish and learn from native Spanish speakers. From the students' reported experiences and the instructor's observations, this course serves as an effective tool to accomplish these goals.

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APPENDIX A

1. Do you think Spanish speakers in the U.S. should learn English?
2. Do you think U.S. born Americans should be encouraged to learn Spanish?
3. Do you think Spanish should be required in U.S. education?
4. Why did you study Spanish in college? Be honest.
5. Have you ever been to a Spanish-speaking country? If yes, when, for how long, and for what purpose?
6. Do you think there is a large Hispanic population in Ruston? Why do you think this?
7. Which Hispanic country do you think the majority of Hispanics in Ruston are from?
8. Do you think there are Hispanics from other countries too? If so, which ones?
9. Do you think the majority of Hispanics in Ruston are:
 - men over age 18
 - women over age 18
 - children under age 18
 - equal amount of all three
10. How often do you have contact with native Spanish speakers in Ruston or the surrounding areas?
 - More than once a week
 - Less than once a week
 - Never
11. Why?
12. If given the opportunity, would you desire to meet with native Spanish speakers in the community? Why or why not?
13. Do you consider learning Spanish in the U.S. to be important? Why or why not?
14. How do you feel when you hear a Spanish speaker someone who can't speak English in the U.S.?
15. Rate how important you think the ability to speak Spanish in relation to each of the following activities is in the U.S. (1=not important, 2 = somewhat important 3 = very important):
 - Getting a job
 - Higher education
 - Conducting business
 - International relations
 - Getting a higher salary