

Prepared by Douglas K. Benson

## Teaching Beyond the Classroom

### The Santa Clara University Eastside Project Community Service and the Spanish Classroom

Rose Marie Beebe  
Elena M. De Costa  
*Santa Clara University*

**Abstract:** This article presents a model of experience-based learning that can help students on the intermediate and advanced levels make the transition from language to literature courses in the context of real-life situations. The Santa Clara University Eastside Project provides a link between the university and the community. Students meet the practical needs of underserved Hispanic populations as they pursue the opportunity to practice their classroom language skills in an environment which nurtures a type of learning that cannot be provided within the traditional classroom.

**Key Words:** Community-based learning, experiential education, Spanish language, contextualized learning, service learning

The Eastside Project began in 1985 as a partnership between Santa Clara University and the primarily Hispanic and Southeast Asian community of East San José, California, a poor, working-class area. Initially, the Eastside Project did not have a specific agenda for the community, a curriculum to complete, or a specified percentage of students or service agencies to involve.<sup>1</sup> As a Jesuit institution, the university is dedicated to “educating the whole person,” intellectually, spiritually, and physically, and to community interaction to fulfill the mission of the Society of Jesus which is “the service of faith, of which the promotion of justice is an absolute requirement” (Padberg 411). The project therefore correlates with the Jesuit ideal of “contemplation through action.” David H. Gill, S.J., states that scholarship in the humanities is basically a contemplative activity and that we cannot truly solve problems of poverty and suffering just by thinking and studying. Gill’s premise is that an understanding of such issues comes only through action (192–93). Although service learning is not confined to Jesuit-run institutions such as Santa Clara University, and has indeed flourished in other universities, the challenge to integrate serious issues facing the

community at large with the “education of the whole person” has taken on special meaning at Santa Clara University with the establishment of the Eastside Project.<sup>1</sup> The project was launched: (1) to bring the life experiences of the diverse members of society into the consciousness of students and faculty by having them listen and learn from each other, and (2) to promote interaction between the university and the community on the premise that “we not only increase the likelihood of our being moved; we also run the risks that being moved entails. For we are moved somewhere, and that somewhere is further into life, closer to those with whom we live” (Privett et al. 2).

The Eastside Project today serves more than 25 agencies with several hundred students from scores of classes, as well as faculty and staff. Students may volunteer their services for the Project or their participation may be a requirement of their classwork. While successful experiences of service learning within this community-university partnership have taken many forms, all have three elements in common: 1) clear academic goals in harmony with the specific discipline and course content, 2) concrete and well-defined experiences for the student participant at the placement site,

and 3) a reflective component which could be referred to as a “debriefing” session with the instructor and other student participants. As in any learning situation, designers must *not* assume that learning by student participants is automatic, especially in non-academic surroundings. The Eastside Project largely services the marginalized segments of the population—the homeless, the poor, the illiterate or undereducated, the elderly, those limited by language barriers, and other underserved or dispossessed individuals. In a similar vein, participation in the Eastside Project is not to be an act of charity but rather a mutually beneficial educational experience shared by the student and the persons being served. Otherwise, the project would not be a true pedagogical tool linking classroom theory with real-life experience, application, and practice benefiting both parties.

The participation of the Department of Modern Languages in the Eastside Project was immediate due to obvious linguistic and cultural affinities, but in order to fit into the academic curriculum, the community experience requires that class material and discussions be integrated in some way with student experiences outside of the class. How, then, has the Eastside Project effectively incorporated active learning into the existing curriculum of diverse Spanish language, culture, and literature courses? How has it achieved a partnership between the community and the university within a multicultural context and in response to classroom instructional objectives such as proficiency and cross-cultural awareness? In short, how has the foreign language experience become a part of the more holistic concerns of social and civic responsibility, career exploration, and social/civic, moral/ethical development for personal growth?

The Eastside Project allows students to apply knowledge and skills gleaned from classroom lectures, textbooks, and proficiency-oriented linguistic activities to their own neighborhood and vice versa. In the process, the program has become an invaluable component of our diverse curriculum at the intermediate Spanish level. The goals

of the project, together with their implementation, are outlined below.

### **1.) THE EASTSIDE PROJECT ARTICULATES CLEAR SERVICE AND LEARNING GOALS DETERMINED JOINTLY BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS AND FACULTY IN THE DIVERSE DISCIPLINES.**

Whether it be engaging in a friendly conversation with an elderly Spanish-speaker in his native language or comforting a homeless Hispanic by taking the time to listen to his story or teaching a newly arrived Guatemalan refugee the bus route from her home to the nearest Catholic Church to hear Mass, students involved in the Eastside Project combine academic learning with community service. The practical goals of learning to speak a foreign language and discovering the rich cultural heritage which is a part of that linguistic group are coupled with the equally practical goals of meeting the human and routine needs of underserved populations. At all levels of language instruction our institution emphasizes learning about the culture and its diverse manifestations, to which language is inextricably bound. Foreign language study thus extends beyond the rudiments of communicative skills to encompass socio-cultural knowledge and sensitivity to human needs within their community.

Students first interview speakers of Spanish from a particular service agency linked to the Project and keep a regular journal of their experiences. Both activities are in Spanish. Students receive a set of questions which are meant to provoke thought and lead to personal reflection as they begin to participate in the interviews and begin writing their journal, i.e.: If I were a refugee on foreign soil, how might I think, feel, and react faced with an unfamiliar language and culture? Questions also focus on the specific life experiences and family backgrounds of the people to be interviewed: Who were the most important people in your family and how were you influenced by them? How did your family cel-

celebrate Christmas, birthdays, saints' days, weddings? Such questions could lead to discussion of broader elements of Hispanic culture such as the extended family and customs associated with common family events.

The journal is a valuable reflective tool that gives each student the opportunity to focus on what is happening around him or her, to think about the experiences (positive or negative), and to verbalize their meaning (see Appendix 1). Journal entries might include autobiographical data of client native speakers of the target language, personal student reflections or reactions to native-informant conversations, commentaries on socio-political events in the native speaker's land of origin, linguistic barriers, and cultural stereotypes of Hispanics prevalent in some communities. The following journal entries, by a biology major enrolled in an Intermediate Spanish I class, are typical of the observations and sentiments expressed by students participating in the project.<sup>2</sup>

10-8 "Today was my first trip to work with the day laborers at the corner of King and Story in East San José. A group of women and men from Most Holy Trinity Church bring homemade Mexican food to a parking lot on this corner each Thursday morning from 10:30-11:30 AM. Approximately 200-300 men (and a few women) come to receive this meal, which for some is the only food that they will eat that day. Most of the laborers are Mexican and speak no English. They work on a day to day basis doing home improvement and gardening jobs. Since most are undocumented, do not speak English, and are from rural backgrounds, they are often taken advantage of by the people who employ them. The people who serve the Thursday meal also try to assist them and inform them of their rights as workers. I was a little nervous when I first arrived because so many people were there. During the hour, I served food to about 300 people and spoke to a few in Spanish. I noticed that many of the laborers are very young, even teenagers. Most of them were very polite to me, and they smiled and said "Hello." I anticipate getting to talk to many of the "regulars" in the coming weeks and I hope my conversational Spanish will improve."

10-14 "I was more comfortable with the people and location today. I distributed papers to the laborers about their rights and responsibilities. The papers also had information about shelters, food, work and legal aid. I spoke with two men as they waited in line. One man came here from New York and has a family there.

He said that he works like a burro and is treated like one, too. They talked about college and medical school with me. They encouraged me to study because they said you don't get anywhere without education. They also encouraged me to continue with my Spanish so I can use it as a doctor."

10-22 "Today I took people's blood pressure. This is a good opportunity for me to talk with people, use my biology and Spanish and just interact with people on a more "up close and personal" level."

10-29 "It was raining today so I couldn't take blood pressure because most of the men were wearing jackets, etc. I was saddened to see many young and old men without coats or warm clothes. There was also a drunk man (which is unusual among the laborers who are usually present). He was disorderly and was staring at me and trying to harass me, but Fr. Dan and some others were there to have him move on. I was surprised to see how kindly the volunteers treated the drunk man. They were kind to him although they did not condone his behavior. One volunteer was talking with him, and the drunk man noticed that the volunteer was wearing a scapula. Immediately, the volunteer took it from around his neck and gave it to the man. That is the kind of action which is my concept of the best kind of service."

11-19 "Today I was fasting for the Oxfam Fast. Since I hadn't eaten, I had a *small* experience of what it might be like for some of these workers."

12-3 "I will be continuing to volunteer next quarter with this same program. It has helped me with my Spanish and has given me insight into the problem of lack of health care for the poor and homeless."

As students' contact with the native informants increases, not only do journal entries become more complex and developed but the friendships established with the informants deepen as well. Many students are "adopted" by their new friends and these relationships last far beyond the scope of the class project. As students and their informants further their understanding of each other's culture, they begin to break down stereotypes and build cultural bridges.

As students reach the more advanced language classes, specifically the third year, the focus becomes oriented toward continued study and practice of complex grammatical structures, but also includes the reading and analysis of progressively more difficult literary texts beginning with short stories, plays and short novels (see Appen-

dix 2). For third-year language courses the faculty chose texts which illustrate not only the struggles of Hispanic peoples but the universality of human experience as well. After reading and discussion, students undertake a term project which involves interviewing a senior citizen of Hispanic origin in Spanish and recording the individual's oral history on paper. Students conduct their interviews, two hours per week for ten weeks, at the Eastside Senior Day Center. The interviews have been particularly fruitful for students and informants alike because the informants draw on personal experiences that transcend cultures and decades as well.

Regardless of the language proficiency level and the nature of learning and service goals, students are not sent to their interview site without adequate preparation. Clear cut goals and expectations of the extent to which these goals might be achieved are outlined by the instructor. In addition, the students attend an orientation session conducted by Eastside Project personnel and site administrators that prepares them to avert disappointment resulting from overly ambitious objectives. Prior to the first interview with their informant, students work in groups to formulate questions which will enable them to begin to establish rapport. Interviewers do not use tape recorders, which might intimidate and inhibit informants. Undocumented immigrants might be apprehensive about divulging personal information for fear of discovery by immigration authorities, or individuals seeking political asylum might fear that the revelation of their identity and whereabouts would have negative repercussions for those who were left behind. Taping could also weaken the student's aural comprehension in that he or she might rely too heavily on the expectation of a second chance to listen to the interview. Students must begin to depend on their ability to communicate at all levels, that is, not only to listen to the native informant but also to engage in a meaningful dialogue.

Precisely because many of the informants are seeking political asylum in the

United States, students are cautioned to avoid frightening or offending them with questions that might appear to be intrusive. Such questions might relate to their political affiliations or beliefs, or the specifics regarding how and why they came to the United States. Students have reported that usually after the first or second visit they are able to obtain the answers to many basic, biographical questions without ever having to ask the question because native informants are eager to tell their stories. Questions such as the following enable the student and the informant to find a common point of reference, because both, at some point in their lives, have been (or presently are) learners: *¿Cuál fue su primera reacción al encontrarse en un país donde no hablaba el idioma? ¿Qué es lo que más echaba de menos de su país? ¿Cuáles son las costumbres o tradiciones que trajo de su país? ¿Qué es lo que le impresionó más de los Estados Unidos? ¿Cuáles son algunas diferencias que ha notado entre su cultura y la cultura angloamericana?*

The informants' responses help students to realize that learning to communicate in a new language is inseparable from other psychological and social experiences. Students must be alert to the need to observe verbal and non-verbal styles of communication, as well as a whole host of social, economic, and cultural concerns with respect to content, and affective reactions. Learning to communicate in a second language is just as much a process of socialization as it is in a first language.

As students become more involved in their oral history project, they begin to notice a direct correlation between the informants' memories and the themes of their literature assignments. The integration of cross-cultural issues and personal feelings of uneasiness or shame in dealing first hand with the impoverished and marginalized of an otherwise "comfortable" environment in the Silicon Valley are often topics of discussion in Spanish during classroom sessions.<sup>3</sup>

## 2.) THE EASTSIDE PROJECT EFFEC-

**TIVELY MATCHES SERVICE PROVIDERS AND SERVICE NEEDS THROUGH A PROGRAM WHICH INCLUDES TRAINING, SUPERVISION, MONITORING, SUPPORT, RECOGNITION, AND EVALUATION TO MEET SERVICE AND LEARNING GOALS.**

Off-campus learning activities are carefully planned at community sites where Eastside Project staff has identified employers as appropriate participants and has oriented them to the purposes and expectations for the experience-based learning component. The classroom instructor and the service director or representative work in cooperation to train, supervise, monitor, support, and ultimately evaluate the student participant in orientation sessions, workshops, and periodic debriefing sessions.<sup>4</sup> As *facilitators*, these service and educational professionals must be aware of two separate but complementary goals—those of the service agency to provide for the specific needs of its community and those of the classroom instructor to relate the student's academic learning didactically to what is being experienced at a community site. The agency members provide initial informal sessions to advise students about their clients' personality traits, the specific socioeconomic conditions which brought the Hispanics to the agency, and the cultural and linguistic barriers which the clients face.

Students often participate by assisting the client with simple everyday tasks which make a qualitative difference to individuals with minimal or non-existent English-speaking skills in order to more fully integrate them into the resources that the community of the adopted country has to offer. Members of the Hispanic community who have found their way into these service agencies may simply need a friend with whom they can communicate comfortably about their fears and personal problems in their native tongue.

The choice of the agency with which the individual student will work is based on a combination of student interests and course objectives. This personal interest dimen-

sion of working with a chosen age group, a particular type of community need, or perhaps a reflection of a career goal further underscores the positive attitude that is brought to the program even before the student is given an agency assignment.<sup>5</sup> While cultural identification may act as a mediator between the learner and the language to be acquired, personal involvement in language learning itself facilitates language acquisition (Lambert et al. 358–68; Taylor et al. 146–57). The manner in which an individual learns and integrates the skills and content in foreign language activities—the associations made, the emotions activated, and the responses elicited—distinguish personal from impersonal learning. And, according to some, this combination of humanistic techniques combined with culture-filled messages and opportunities for second-language practice in natural settings leads to enhanced language acquisition and may be similarly conducive to cross cultural understanding (Moskowitz 308; Oxford 35–55).

**3.) THE EASTSIDE PROJECT PROVIDES STRUCTURED OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS TO REFLECT CRITICALLY ON THEIR SERVICE EXPERIENCE.**

Once students meet with members of the community agencies served by the Eastside Project the instructor creates avenues through which the student can reflect on and derive meaning from the experience. If the student is reading Juan Rulfo's "Es que somos muy pobres," for example, and simultaneously compiling a case history or autobiographical account of a Hispanic with a peasant or agrarian background, the instructor might guide the student toward compiling a series of questions based on the attitudes that a person from a rural area might have in contrast to an urban dweller. These questions might lead to a discussion of deeper sociocultural insights achieved by the student's association with the service agency client. Other activities include: individual or small-group debriefing sessions

(see Appendix 3), in-class discussions, weekly journals, case studies, debates, panel discussions, personal experience-generating essay questions or compositions, biographies, creative interactions between the service organization(s) and the students in the form of dialogic encounters, cultural events, and oral storytelling sessions which encompass personal histories of their Hispanic contact, cultural legends and myths. These monitoring sessions are a necessary component of the service learning arrangement, since they help students to 1) use an experience to further clarify an interest or value, such as investigating the origin and validity of cultural stereotypes; 2) discover or recognize a relevance to their personal lives as a source of motivation or further learning; 3) make associations between theory and practice and between experiences in the community and academic coursework; and 4) derive from particular experiences general principles applicable in other circumstances. Lessons learned from community service can easily be applied to other disciplines of study, particularly religion, political science, history, English, psychology, ethnic studies, anthropology, and sociology. The instructor facilitates educational filtering, i.e., screening, interpreting, criticizing, by selecting the focus and method of learning, explaining concepts and experiences, assessing progress, and extending or reinforcing lessons from the field-based experience. Experience-based learning activities will produce a substantial amount of incidental learning, but optimal learning depends on carefully conceived and planned activities that promote reflection, which is as important as goal setting and monitoring.

The Eastside Project sponsors summer workshop sessions for faculty and staff, which explore how the program can be improved by providing a discipline-oriented set of guidelines for pedagogical application, student questionnaires to assist in proper placement with specific agencies, course-specific suggestions for integration with behavioral objectives, and a structured and scientific assessment of both the pro-

gram and the participating student populations. Further workshops will lead to greater faculty and staff participation, which will in turn help permit scientific appraisals via statistical studies.

Further assessment of the Eastside Project in the Department of Modern Languages might address the following questions: To what degree have students in the participating Spanish language and literature courses achieved a greater appreciation of the Hispanic culture and enhanced proficiency in linguistic competence as a result of participation in such community-based learning programs? To what extent has participation in the Eastside Project resulted in changes of attitudes, positive or negative, toward marginalized populations and/or the predominant ethnic groups in the East San José community? Perhaps of greater interest to language professionals is the question of whether cultural identification through experiential community work with Hispanics improves language acquisition. Has it resulted in more consistent and correct use of language structures, expanded vocabulary, duplication of native pronunciation and intonation patterns, and comprehension of rapid speech? Such matters require objective evaluation to validate the program with statistical data, and the Project is in the process of developing such tests and measurements.

Experience-based learning should enhance other more traditional forms of learning, with the classroom and extended classroom working together to reinforce and extend concepts and to integrate thought and action. Student comments and linguistic performance suggest that emotional associations with agency personnel and service recipients may play as critical a role (and possibly a more critical one) in language associations and proficiency as do cognitive associations. Students have appraised their experience in the following terms:

"A personal face is now assigned to these social issues. They have become more concrete, powerful, and real for me."

"I had few problems trying to translate what the forms stated in English to Spanish. I noted that I was able to use other words to express myself when I did not know the exact Spanish translation of an English word. I am starting to express myself much more quickly with other words than I have been able to do in the past. A small victory!"

"I can truly get a better sense of how difficult it can be living in a country with a new language [and that] it is important to have programs to help people adjust more quickly to a new life."

"While my intentions of participating in the project are to develop my Spanish oral skills and offer assistance, I too need to learn about the differences in society—my life as I know it in comparison to the lives of the students I am working with."

Since experiential learning is largely a matter of integrating classroom learning and the real-life world around us, the Santa Clara University Eastside Project presents a particularly appealing program for our foreign language students. The Project provides a setting for the practice of skills, a transfer of learning from the classroom to the immediate surroundings, and an environment which nurtures a type of learning that the traditional classroom cannot provide. Experiential learning animates and revitalizes the curriculum with the simple but necessary element of reality at its most human and personal level.<sup>6</sup>

## ■ NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In its early years, the project focused primarily on amnesty and legalization resulting from the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act. Students assisted with amnesty applications until May 1988, when the deadline expired, after which they began tutoring documented and undocumented immigrants in English and civics.

<sup>2</sup> This particular student was allowed to use the Eastside Project placement to fulfill requirements in a Religious Studies course as well as in Intermediate Spanish. She wrote her journal entries in English and a paper in Spanish summarizing her experiences at the placement site.

<sup>3</sup> In discussion of stories by Juan Rulfo and Gabriel García Márquez on socio-political issues, it becomes obvious that students identify fictionalized characters with real people.

<sup>4</sup> Any breakdown in communication between project site personnel, students, and instructor can

adversely affect the entire experience. For example, several students expressed frustration in their journal entries because they felt that the elderly clients tended to "ignore" them and did not like them. They also feared that their Spanish was not "good enough." The instructor spoke with the students and the director of the center and discovered that the problem was a lack of communication: the director had failed to inform the students that the seniors were accustomed to a very structured routine, and they did not wish to be interrupted at lunch time or during a game of "loteria."

<sup>5</sup> One student, who is part Hispanic and whose grandparents are deceased, expressed an interest in working with Hispanic senior citizens with the hope of filling a cultural and generational void in his life. He was paired with a Mexican lady at Casa MACSA and the two of them have been inseparable ever since. This student's journal entries reflected the pain and sense of loss that he felt for never having met his Hispanic grandparents and also the love and gratitude he felt toward Helen, his "adopted" grandmother.

<sup>6</sup> For further information on the Eastside Project contact: Fr. Bill Wood, S.J., 826 Market St. Santa Clara, CA 95053; phone: (408) 554-4549

## ■ WORKS CITED

- Gill, David H., S.J., "The Option for the Poor: A Humanist's Perspective." *America* (March 7, 1992): 192-3.
- Lambert, W.E., R.D. Gardner, H.C. Barik, and K. Tunstall. "Attitudinal and Cognitive Aspects of Intensive Study of a Second Language." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 66 (1962): 358-68.
- Moskowitz, G. *Caring and Sharing in the Foreign Language Class. A Sourcebook on Humanistic Techniques*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House, 1978.
- Oxford, Rebecca L. "Language Learning Strategies and Beyond: A Look at Strategies in the Context of Styles." *Shifting the Instructional Focus on the Learner*. Ed. Sally S. Magnan. Middlebury: Northeast Conference on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1990. 35-55.
- Padberg, John W., S.J., ed. "Our Mission Today: The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice." *Documents of the 31st and 32nd General Congregations of the Society of Jesus*. Vol. 32.2-3 St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 411.
- Privett, Stephen A., S.J., Gerdenio M. Manuel, S.J., Daniel V. Germann, S.J., and Peter Miron-Conk. "Santa Clara University's Eastside Project: Bridging the Chasm." Assembly of Jesuits in Higher Education. Washington, D.C., June 6, 1989.
- Taylor, L., J. Catford, A. Guiora, and H. Lane. "Psychological Variables and Ability to Produce a Second Language." *Language and Speech* 14 (1971): 146-57.

## APPENDIX 1: SAMPLE JOURNAL EXERCISES

1. Describe what it was like to go to your placement for the first time. Include all your reactions.
2. In your imagination, recall the face of a person with whom you have had some experience at your placement. Begin a written conversation with that person. What do they want to tell you? What do you want to tell them?
3. Trading places: Call to mind a person with whom you have had some interaction at your placement. Let yourself trade places with that person, see yourself through their eyes. Escort that person through your day, your home, your room. How does your transformed self react?
4. List three of the most nagging or pressing questions you have been considering since your placement began.

## APPENDIX 2: SUGGESTED LITERARY SELECTIONS FOR READING AND DISCUSSION

*Cajas de cartón*, Francisco Jiménez  
*Eva y Daniel*, Tomás Rivera

*Las canas*, Angel Castro  
*Garabatos*, Pedro Juan Soto  
*Es que somos muy pobres*, Juan Rulfo  
*¡Diles que no me maten!*, Juan Rulfo  
*Luvina*, Juan Rulfo  
*No oyes ladrar los perros*, Juan Rulfo  
*La siesta del martes*, Gabriel García Márquez  
*Rosas artificiales*, Gabriel García Márquez  
*Réquiem con tostadas*, Mario Benedetti  
*Juan Darién*, Horacio Quiroga  
*Al otro lado*, Ignacio Aldecoa  
*En una noche así*, Miguel Delibes

## APPENDIX 3: SAMPLE DISCUSSION TOPICS

- Questions for reflection, consideration and discussion.
- A. Identify several practical issues that you wrestle with. What experiences do others have that might be helpful?
  - B. Tell about a frustrating, exciting or inspiring moment.
  - C. Given that this is an educational experience, what learning goals have you set for yourself? How do you plan to attain them?