

## **Assessing the value of a community-based approach to language and cultural learning: A longitudinal study**

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*Abstract: This article reviews the results of a survey of former students to determine the long-term significance of a community-based Spanish practicum that has been offered since 2000. The respondents affirm that, even nine years later, they still remember well the Mexican immigrant families that hosted them during the course. The students were able to develop a long-lasting appreciation for the power of second language and cultural learning through a combination of meaningful communication, strong interpersonal relationships, cognitive and affective learning methodologies, and involvement in constructing their own learning experiences. As predicted, the students' immersion in a different socioeconomic and cultural context had a major impact on their sense of social justice, but, unexpectedly, did little to foster a life of political activism. For practitioners, the survey results also raise questions about the importance of reflection in experiential learning methods, and the nature and appropriate role of service learning.*

*Keywords: language learning, service learning, reflective practice, second language learning, domestic language immersion, best practices, affect in language learning, transformative learning.*

Pitzer College is in its tenth consecutive year of offering a Community-based Spanish Practicum (CBSP) as a major component of an integrative Spanish language program. Several assessments of the course have been conducted during its years of operation (Jorge 2003a, 2003b, 2006). This study and article, however, focus on determining what long-lasting impacts, if any, the CBSP has had on the students who enrolled between 2000 and 2009. Four hypotheses were examined in this study:

- 1.relationships developed in a cultural immersion course provide language learners with the motivation, self-confidence, and social connections to continue their language learning beyond college boundaries and throughout their lives,
- 2.combining cognitive and affective learning produces results that are remembered over time,
- 3.long-lasting learning occurs when students are engaged in constructing their own learning experiences, and
- 4.a memorable immersive intercultural learning experience across socio-economic boundaries would have long-lasting impacts on the students' sense of social justice and political activism.

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## I. The course.

Pitzer, a member of the Claremont Colleges consortium located on the eastern edge of Los Angeles County in California, has developed an integrative Spanish major that complements the other colleges' programs by focusing more on language, culture, and society rather than literature. From its beginning in 2000, the Community-based Spanish Practicum has played a critical role in the teaching of Spanish at Pitzer. Because the Claremont Colleges consortial arrangement allows students to enroll in courses from any of the five undergraduate schools, the resulting wealth of teaching resources has allowed Pitzer to offer three alternative tracks in its Spanish major: literature; culture (from a socio-historical and anthropological perspective); or interdisciplinary studies. The Pitzer Spanish major is composed of campus-based interdisciplinary language and content courses, longitudinal research projects connected with community organizations at Pitzer's study abroad sites, and domestic community-based courses such as the CBSP.

The CBSP is an immersion course that connects college students learning Spanish with native Spanish speakers in the nearby community of Ontario, California. Developed in partnership with a group of women from Spanish-speaking households called *promotoras*, the course sponsors weekly visits to Ontario where the students can practice conversing in Spanish, build long-term relationships with the family and extended networks of friends and neighbors, and explore the surrounding Latino community. About 45 students enroll every semester, and more than 600 have participated in the practicum over the past ten years. This study focuses on the results of a survey of 560 students who participated during the first nine years that the CBSP was offered.

The *promotoras*, a group that has numbered between nine and thirteen over the years, live in a predominantly Spanish-speaking neighborhood where most everyday interactions can be conducted in Spanish. The initial group was selected based on the advice of teachers at a nearby primary school attended by their children. The *promotoras*' agreement to participate in the program was based on their intuition that the college students' regular visits would positively influence their children, assist their own personal growth, and augment their income through a small stipend provided for their expenses and time. The *promotoras* are all first generation Mexican immigrants who speak Spanish exclusively in their homes. Some live in a modest trailer park near a highway, and others live in small to middle-sized houses nearby. All have children and many primary and extended family responsibilities; most do not work outside their homes. The families are stable, with no serious social problems. Students visit in groups of three, which has proved to be an appropriate size for collaboratively developing relationships, conversing meaningfully, reflecting seriously on their experiences, and safely interacting with the neighbors. The *promotoras* are very protective of the students as they explore the neighborhood.

The students who choose to take the CBSP are not necessarily Spanish majors. They are predominantly European American, with smaller numbers of Asian Americans, African Americans, and some Latinos who are learning Spanish as a second language. Most students are from middle to upper middle class backgrounds. The CBSP engages students at their level of language proficiency, but requires at least one year of prior Spanish courses. Most students returning from Spanish-speaking countries after studying abroad who re-enroll in the CBSP have a higher level of proficiency than the minimum required. The course's community-based

experience is paired on campus with readings and reflections through a journal and regular *encuentros* (meetings) with faculty.

It is important to note that this cultural immersion experience is very different from immersions abroad because the *promotoras*, their families, and their neighbors are part of American society. Thus, the social issues that arise in the context of the visits are an integral part of the students' own personal experiences. Many students are able to connect local and global issues as they process their study abroad experiences while engaged in the CBSP. Some students repeat the course, and some stay in touch with the families outside the course itself. Many repeating students prefer to return to the same family because they feel proud of their progress and are happy to be able to engage at a more sophisticated level of communication.

Since the CBSP strives to foster a nurturing environment where people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and socio-economic status can build meaningful relationships, there are benefits for all the participants. Students are able to develop confidence in their language skills and gain insight into one of the Spanish-speaking cultures of the area by sharing daily activities, cooking together, discussing contemporary issues, and meeting neighbors and extended family members. On the other hand, as the relationships develop, they begin to help the families with such things as school homework, bureaucratic paperwork, applications for services, or access to expertise in the mainstream society. For example, information about applying to college has been very important to the *promotoras'* children. Thus, unexpectedly, the *promotoras'* homes have turned into small hubs of information for their family, friends, and neighbors, opening up networks and resources previously unavailable to them (Jorge 2003a).

## II. Background for the study and literature review.

The CBSP course design draws from the American tradition of experiential learning (Cummings 2000, Dewey 1942), Paulo Freire's pedagogy of dialogue (Freire 1998a, 1998b) and methodologies derived from community-based research and anthropological fieldwork (participant observation). Another important influence has been Mezirow's work on transformative learning, particularly how students can grow emotionally as a result of a "disorienting dilemma" which triggers critical analysis of experiences and produces changes in perspective (Mezirow 1991, 2000). Likewise, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' *Standards for Foreign Language Education* (ACTFL Special Project 1999) embraces similar goals to the CBSP: speaking languages besides English, understanding different cultures, connecting with other academic disciplines, acquiring knowledge and insight into the nature of language and culture, and participating in multicultural communities at home and abroad. And also, Pitzer College's educational objective for understanding the ethical implications of knowledge and action has provided a supportive moral framework for the course. A strength of this process-oriented, community engaged language learning model is that the target language is acquired through meaningful experiences and deep, personal relationships in a rich socio-cultural context. Keiley's work on the integration of cognitive and emotional learning, especially in instances of contextual border crossing, has been instructive; the coping process he describes of dissonance, personalization, processing, and connecting is frequently evident among CBSP students (Keiley 2005).

The awareness of the importance of affective factors in language learning has permeated different approaches to teaching a second language since the 1970's. Krashen's affective filter, for example, is a construct that describes how low motivation, self-doubt, and anxiety can

hamper the process of language acquisition (1982). However, although this awareness has been identified, the cognitive side of learning seems to be more generally emphasized. Studies of the connections between emotion and cognition have attempted to explain how emotions might influence learning (Bower, 1992) and explored such things as the role that affective evaluation plays in the construction of knowledge (Brown 1987); emotion as a source of information and meaning for the individual (Kaufman 1993); language anxiety as a cause for individual differences in language achievement (Macintyre 1995); the importance of contexts that provide choices for matching teaching styles with different students' learning styles (Hokanson 2000); and learners' affective responses to the language learning process (Garret and Young 2009). *Affect in Language Learning* edited by Jane Arnold (1999) explored the broad influence of affect on language learning and set a useful frame by mapping affective factors related to language learning (Arnold and Brown 1999). Thus, the CBSP's design allows a more relaxed atmosphere, meaningful connections, decreased anxieties, and increased self-confidence and motivation. The interactions built into the students' visits with the families naturally incorporated the full scope of language functions usually included in a communicative language teaching approach, functions that are most often simulated instead in classroom settings.

During the past decade, community-based program practitioners and researchers identified various areas needing additional research (Eyler 2000). Among them was the need for national and longitudinal studies to track programs over extended periods of time in order to assess their long-term impacts (Perry and Imperial 2001; Levine, Brown and Flowers 2007). In recent years, some longitudinal studies of Service Learning (SL) focused on outcomes for students in terms of citizenship and civic engagement (Hauver and Iverson 2009; Bernacki and Bernt 2007; Wilson, Diaz, O'Leary and Terkla 2007; Hart, Donnelly, Youniss and Atkins, 2007); attitudinal, behavioral, and cognitive learning (Youniss and Metz 2005; Bradley, Aquila, Dodd and Jones 2004; Astin and Vogelgesang 2000; Spote and Kahne 2007); employment and life skills (Abt Associates, Inc. 2004); academic progress (Dvila and Mora 2007); and diversity (Keen and Hall 2009).

Much of this longitudinal research has focused on medium or large-scale programs that have "processed" many students over time and usually have attempted to assess a program's efficacy for different groups of students during the course itself. A few recent important longitudinal studies addressed the impact on participants some time later, such as in the transition from high school to college. For example, a national freshman survey of nearly 293,000 students in the Fall 2004 gathered data on students' high school experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and values (Vogelgesang, 2005). To track the impact of college programs, another study followed a 1994 cohort of students through their college years and early adulthood (Denson, et al. 2005). A third study, focusing on the hypothesis that service-learning offers the potential to ease the transition to adulthood, surveyed online a nationally representative sample of 3123 US adults aged 18 to 28 who had a range of different experiences with service learning (Martin and Markow 2006).

Another research project drew from a large dataset of African American and European American youth who were followed throughout adolescence and into young adulthood in order to appraise the development of personal identities in relation to civic engagement during those stages of life (Eccles, et al. 2003). A project based on data from the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988 examined the patterns and characteristics of individual involvement in community service activities from high school through early adulthood (Planty and Regnier 2003). A sample of 12th-grade students were asked about their high school volunteer service for the period 1990-92 and then re-interviewed in 1994 and again in 2000 in order to determine

whether high school volunteer service was related to volunteering two and eight years after students' scheduled high school graduation. But few studies have tried to evaluate the impact of specific courses and academic programs on a small group of identified students a few years after they were completed. Also, there is no longitudinal research on a continuing language practicum such as the CBSP.

### III. The study.

As of Fall 2010 more than 600 students had participated in the CBSP over the past ten years; this study covers 560 students who enrolled in the first nine years. The intent of the study was to determine the extent to which these former students identify their CBSP experience as fundamental for their learning to value the ability to speak a second language, to engage meaningfully with people from other cultures, to understand contemporary issues related to social justice, and to participate actively in the political life of their communities. Verification of this connection, at least as expressed by the students' self-reporting, would reinforce the CBSP's operational hypotheses cited above.

This study did not address the issue of language acquisition itself for several reasons. There are too many variables at play to be able to measure definitively the influence of the CBSP alone on improvements in oral proficiency. For example, students entered the practicum with multiple levels of proficiency. Moreover, some students took other Spanish courses concurrently. Finally, it was not possible to create a viable control group of Spanish students who did not participate in the CBSP. Thus, this study focused on the perceptions that former CBSP participants had about their development of language skills.

Because former students were scattered across both the country and the globe, an online survey was developed to obtain their input. The survey was divided into four parts:

1. Part 1 asked for personal data and information about the student's academic experience: gender, ethnicity, number of Spanish classes taken, whether they studied abroad, graduation date, dates of CBSP enrollment;
2. Part 2 asked about the student's memories of the practicum experience through yes/no responses: if s/he remembered taking the class, recollected the *promotora*, and about continuing contact with the family;
3. Part 3 asked the student to use a Likert scale to assess the extent to which the CBSP had achieved several of its goals (with 1 being the lowest rating and 5 the highest); and
4. Part 4 was comprised of open-ended questions to assess the student's perceptions about lasting learning impacts resulting from his or her CBSP experience. These questions asked them:
  - what s/he remembered about the family, the neighborhood, and the course;
  - to recall a memorable story or event and to explain its importance;
  - whether they continue to speak Spanish, in what contexts, and with whom;
  - to what extent they interact with people of other cultures;
  - to explain if and how the course contributed to the social responsibility goals of the College; and
  - to provide additional comments as desired.

The request to participate in the online survey was sent via email and postcards to 560 former CBSP students during Spring 2009, but 63 were undeliverable. 160 of the remaining 497 students completed the survey, for a response rate of 32%. However, not all respondents

answered every question. The students who responded were generally very positive about the course and were eager to voice their opinions. It is difficult to know how the course affected non-respondents. Nevertheless, the survey results paint a reasonably consistent picture of the program's impact and point towards areas of possible improvement.

#### IV. Results.

##### *A. Part 1: information about the respondents.*

- 76% were female, comparable to and therefore representative of the percentage of students who completed the practicum (78% of 560).
- Of those reporting their ethnicity, 69% were Caucasian. No ethnic data was available for the total number of 560 enrollees.
- 75% had studied abroad, were currently abroad, or slated to go in the next year. This figure is comparable to that for the general Pitzer student population. Data was not available for the total number of 560 enrollees.
- 61% were Pitzer students; the rest were students at the other Claremont colleges. This distribution is comparable to that of the total number of CBSP enrollees as shown in Table 1.
- There is no reliable data to compare the number of students enrolled in each program year and the number of respondents for each of those years.

**Table 1. CBSP enrollees.**

|                           | 560 enrollees | 160 respondents |
|---------------------------|---------------|-----------------|
| Pitzer College            | 61%           | 59%             |
| Pomona College            | 14%           | 17%             |
| Scripps College           | 14%           | 13%             |
| Claremont McKenna College | 10%           | 8%              |
| Harvey Mudd College       | < 1%          | ----            |
| Unknown                   |               | 3%              |

##### *B. Part 2: memories of the course (yes/no responses).*

A large percentage (91%) of the respondents remembered taking the course. A majority (54%) remembered the name(s) of their *promotora(s)* (some took the course several times and visited different families). And 19% had had contact with the families after completing the course.

##### *C. Part 3: Assessment of the extent to which the CBSP had reached several of its goals (Likert scale questions).*

A majority of the respondents (57%) continue to speak Spanish at least sometimes (3 and above on the Likert scale), and 26% speak Spanish often (4 on the scale) or extremely often (5 on the scale). Almost all (90%) interact at least sometimes with people of other cultures (3 and above on the scale), and 72% say they do so frequently (4 on the scale) or always (5 on the scale). And, even in light of the multiple influences in their lives, the following percentages of respondents

feel that the experience of visiting the *promotora* contributed more than average (4 on the scale) or a lot (5 on the scale) to their

- valuing the importance of a foreign language and speaking it (73%),
- being politically informed and/or civically engaged (50%),
- being concerned about issues of fairness in society (73%),
- becoming personally aware, developing strong personal relations, and exploring new social spaces (69%), and
- gaining knowledge of and/or empathy for some of the other cultures that comprise United States society (77%).

Also, 87% feel that the course contributed more than average or a lot (4 and 5 on the scale) to the goals of the College by helping them meet the educational objective related to social responsibility and the ethical implications of knowledge and action.

#### *D. Part 4: Narrative questions.*

##### *1. What they remember about the family, the neighborhood, and the course.*

Former students have vivid memories of their community experiences as the narratives in the next section below indicate. Even most of those who do not remember their *promotora*'s name actually remember other pertinent facts, such as how many children she had and what their names were, and/or can describe the family's house and neighborhood with a fair amount of detail. Responses, of course, vary, but include discussions about the composition of the family, the children, the neighborhood and the importance of community, individual *promotoras*' traits, fond memories of specific interactions, the activities they shared, the emotional connections of their relationships, values issues, and the general worth of the experience. Hardly anyone mentions the campus component of the class (readings, journals, meetings, discussions, reflection papers, etc.); one person mentions it as very useful, and one person remarks that he is conscious of not remembering that part of the course. It is difficult to interpret this absence of reference as either positive or negative, since it was not referenced separately in the survey.

Although, in most circumstances, students were not able to maintain contact with the families, the students invariably express fondness for them, and say that they often think about them and how they are doing, even nine years later. They are particularly impressed by the dedication that the parents had for their children, their hard work to support the family, that other members of the extended family lived with them even though the houses were small, and that the children enjoyed interacting with them both in play and in serious discussions about going to college and other topics. Many express great fondness for the children, tracking their maturing process, and wondering how they are coping with family difficulties they had witnessed. The *promotoras*' traits had made lasting impressions too, with students using words such as jolly, welcoming, patient, warm, friendly, kind, loving, sweet, accepting, generous, and having a great sense of humanity to describe them. Additionally, their memories of different shared activities, such as cooking, eating together, playing games and music, dancing, going to an ethnic supermarket, and discussions about a broad range of personal and political subjects, frame the cognitive and emotional outcomes of the course. All of these memories are generally positive without being over-romanticized.

A surprising finding was that male students were almost twice as likely as female students (26% to 15%) to stay in contact with their *promotoras*; this seems to indicate that, despite the stereotype that "females are more emotional," males in this instance found the

relationship with their former “surrogate mothers” to be a longer lasting and deeper bond than their female peers.

Some of the illustrative comments include:

She had a very large and supportive family. Several members of her extended family lived with her and her husband. [The *promotora*] was kind and loving and always encouraging us to speak and learn more. She and her family were extremely friendly, helpful, and patient with the students.

Female/Course 2002/P 4.2

I remember M, M and L [*promotora* and her kids] being very kind and open. The moments and intimacy they shared with the other students and me seemed very natural and, I’m certain, were very natural as the family seemed to integrate the class into their everyday life. Over time I found that many people in her community are very much the same... giving many times without expecting anything in return. I remember M’s great cooking, I never went to her house expecting to eat, but, oh, I still have not had any Mexican food as good as hers (and I just came back from Mexico this past summer).

Male/Course 2001-02/P 2.3

Many students’ responses pointed to the following aspects of the CBSP as important in positively influencing their later lives:

- their immersion in a cultural and socioeconomic community different from their own;
- being “forced” to go outside their comfort zone (the “Claremont bubble”);
- opening their eyes and heightening their awareness of contemporary social issues, such as immigration, race, and education;
- being prodded to reflect on the causes and cultural contexts of injustice, prejudice, and privilege;
- linking more theoretical discussions of social justice in the classroom setting to the direct experiences, personal observations, and social connectedness developed through meaningful interpersonal relationships in the community;
- acknowledging and valuing people and cultures in our community whose capabilities and contributions are often overlooked and even denigrated;
- being empowered to take greater responsibility for their own learning due to a different power dynamic in the course which decreased some of the instructor’s usual control in order to adapt to changing community circumstances;
- rediscovering the humanity of the immigrant other and creating empathy; and
- developing mutually beneficial reciprocal relationships with the families who provided help to the students in language and general “life” education while the students contributed “mainstream” cultural knowledge and selected expertise.

## *2. To recall a memorable story or event and to explain its importance.*

Because stories’ images and metaphors can convey deep-seated learning and feelings that endure over time, the survey asked former students to tell a story, or describe an event, circumstance, or person that was memorable. The stories are broadly classified in four groups according to the issues they bring up. Descriptions of those topics and a few sample stories follow.



- participation and integration in family and life rituals, such as birthdays, *quinceañeras*, baptisms, confirmations, school open houses, Spanish masses in church, and wakes; they also include comments recognizing bonding, trust, and caring;

I'll tell you two: One memory in which I felt the most honored to share with M. [*promotora*] and her family was M's (daughter's) confirmation. M invited some of her students, including me, to the ceremony and I swear I have never seen someone take so much pride in preparation for an event as M. did for this one. The dress (which was gorgeous), the veil or scarf, the video recording, etc. and it was not only M's family, but many other families from the community who also had their children being confirmed that Sunday (mind you, some students did not go because this was for class or extra credit; we went because we were *familia*—as M. always treated us). Anyhow, I'll never forget it. Another memory I have is of eating what I believed, at the time, was the nastiest food anyone could ever get down their throats - *enchiladas de mole chocolate*. Now, when I had these the first time, I thought they tasted like vomit with cheese on top. I ate one, politely, and even pretended it was halfway decent, but afterwards I could not get the taste out of my mouth. Fast-forward to almost seven years later—I now go in search for these chocolate mole enchiladas and can't get enough of them. I have had them in many different styles, but none taste as good as M's tasted. It just goes to show that you have to try everything at least once; who knows, if you don't like it then you still might work your way up to it later.

Male/Course 2001-02/P2.3

I remember egging on the father in one of the families to recount all his fishing stories growing up in Mexico, diving for eels in the river. He was on worker's comp and injured at the time, but to hear and see him come alive talking about one of his loves and to share and understand with him in his language really opened up a door for me in how I relate to the world. It struck me that this was possible because of studying language and using it in the context that inspires memories.

Male/Course 2005-06/P 8.3

L. [*promotora*] is very open-minded. I remember one time, two other girls and I sitting around her kitchen table, and somehow we ended up talking about sex. She told us that the first time she heard of "oral sex," she thought that meant talking during sex. We all started laughing. It was memorable because I never expected to be able to talk about topics like that with her, and thought it was really cool of her to be comfortable and open with us.

Female/Course 2006-07/P 9.4

- giving and being helpful, a major concern for students each year; they mention bringing different types of expertise and information, translating documents, and helping to fill out various forms for things like health insurance, employment, tax payer information, and grant and scholarship applications;

I really enjoyed using my knowledge of the admissions process from working admissions at Pitzer to share anything that I could with the family in order to help them manage trying to send 3 children to college. I gave them all the resources I could and told them to contact me if they needed any other information.

Male/Course 2006-07/P 11.1

- receiving comfort, support, interest, and concern about their own lives, and the personal attention of people who actually observed and interacted with them;

Each evening was like a little trip to a different country. I liked it and remember thinking ‘this is fun—I can't believe I'm getting college credit for it,’ although in retrospect, of course, it was very educational, and just practicing speaking Spanish conversationally with someone Mexican (as many of the Spanish speakers in California are) was very useful, and I got more accustomed to that accent and the particular idioms and slang words and terms that are often used. I remember helping the kids with their homework sometimes because the mom (my *promotora*) had trouble helping them since their assignments were all in English. It has been 7 years since then so my memories are vaguer and less specific, but I still have a warm feeling about that family and how welcomed I felt there. We joked a lot at dinner and just generally enjoyed each other's company and it was nice having someone who wanted to hear all about our week at college, our classes, and our lives, sort of the way a parent might.

Female/Course 2002-03/P 3.4

- understanding the broader social context of Latinos in the area, including immigration issues, economic determinants, and cross-cultural conflicts.

The most memorable part about the class for me was connecting to a community outside of the Claremont bubble. Leaving Claremont and understanding the larger context of a Latino community was really important for my Pitzer career. It helped me understand much more about immigration, schools, race, and the economic status of the area outside of Claremont and eventually made me major in Spanish at Pitzer because of the community connection. This class was an essential beginning to my Pitzer experience.

Female/Course 2003/P12.3

### *3. Whether they continue to speak Spanish, in what contexts, and with whom.*

A CBSP goal was for students to gain confidence and improve their Spanish skills by practicing meaningful conversation in an authentic context of emotionally significant relationships so that later in life they would continue to speak it outside university boundaries in order to explore new social spaces. The extent to which CBSP graduates would be able to continue speaking Spanish is clearly subject to the individual's circumstances, and also relies on other influences, such as family networks, study abroad experiences, and additional language courses. At any rate, only 6% of the respondents indicate that they do not use Spanish at all (1 on the Likert scale), but over half are speaking fairly regularly. Of the 148 (93%) of the respondents who answered this question, 41% say they speak Spanish with family and friends, 26% in their jobs, 11% in classes (still in school or graduate school), and 10% in the neighborhood (shopping, restaurants,

neighbors). Other contexts mentioned are volunteer work, living abroad, communicating with household staff, recreation (e.g., reading, movies, singing), and church.

*4. To what extent they interact with people of other cultures.*

When former students reflect on the value of the CBSP, the momentary breaching of social and cultural barriers, the friendship, and the closeness of the neighborhood stand out, perhaps even more than the learning of Spanish. The language learning process actually seems to be the medium for that rich intercultural social experience that continues for most of them in their adult lives.

As a community-based course, the CBSP created a space where people of different socioeconomic, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds could meet and learn from each other. For the students, the entree into this neighborhood was very memorable; for many it was the first time that they had crossed such a large cultural, linguistic, and socioeconomic divide. Since the students do not go into the community to provide a service to people who need help, but rather to practice Spanish in a stranger's home with a host who is much more capable and fluent in the language than they are, there is a relative balance of power among the participants, and mutually beneficial reciprocal relationships can develop. On the other hand, for ten years these students have been providing information and access to professional networks to the *promotoras*, their families, and their neighbors. Indeed, in 2003 (Jorge 2003) the author reported that because the *promotoras'* homes had become, in a sense, community information centers, the impact of the CBSP was felt much more broadly throughout the neighborhood.

*5. To explain if and how the course contributed to the social responsibility goals of the College.*

Students make the distinction between being socially responsible and politically active. Only 50% think the CBSP experience affected their political activism, but 73% say it influenced their being concerned about issues of fairness in society. It seems that the respondents moved toward a holistic awareness about social justice that integrates emotional connections with people and the community into a strong ethical foundation for informal non-governmental social action instead of overt formal political activism per se. A few students' comments illustrate how the course affected their sense of social justice.

By giving students the opportunity to step out of one's comfort zone this course forces students to ponder the ways in which the forces of language, geography, gender, race, and class shape perceptions, relationships, ways of sensing and making sense of the world. It is a hands-on experience that through reflective writing fosters critical awareness and consciousness.

Female/Course 2003-05/P 23.2

Many other universities could have created this program in any number of ways. I feel like sending young students from academically rigorous universities like the Claremont Colleges could, so easily, have turned into a charity or a cause. Not only was this program an academic experience, but also we were taught, in no uncertain terms, that we were not to descend from on-high with our ideologies and our varied backgrounds to teach these families anything. WE were the ones who were there to learn. It was those families that had so much to offer us. If I came away with a desire to involve myself in social activism as it pertained to first or second-generation Mexican immigrants it was because I was inspired by

my experience with such strong families, especially the women, and not because I felt I needed to reach a hand down to help.

Female/Course 2003-04/P 26.1

Nothing brings this point home like direct experience, personal observation, and social connectedness. Practicum exemplifies each of these aspects.

Female/Course 2005-06/P 29.3

...Many people have a detached view of social justice where they are trying to change the world without interacting with it.

Male. Course 2008/P1.1

*6. To provide additional comments as desired.*

The respondents' general comments indicate that their perceptions and opinions are that the CBSP had a lasting impact on their lives. All but seven of the 104 responses to this question speak to the positive impact they think the class had on them. The other seven say the impact was lessened because they had already lived similar experiences. Seventeen say that it was one of, or the most, memorable class of their college years, and eight add that it impacted their careers—they are now involved in social work, active in the Latino community, employed as a school counselor, or working in a medical setting. Several mention that the pedagogical model, in and of itself, was very important because it was the basis for the powerful, unique experience. And a few wish to duplicate the program in the education settings where they are working. Finally, three say that they only realized the impact of the course in retrospect.

## **V. Discussion.**

*A. hypothesis 1: relationships developed in a cultural immersion course provide language learners with the motivation, self-confidence, and social connections to continue their language learning beyond college boundaries and throughout their lives.*

The students not only recall the course, but also especially remember the families they visited, even if they do not always recollect their names, and even if they do not recall much from the other more standard classroom activities, such as journals, discussions, and readings. In many cases, even years later, both the students and community members continue to identify with the others' extended families to which they imagined they belonged. Although the program design was based on the notion that strong interpersonal relationships would abet the learning of Spanish, help overcome cultural and socioeconomic differences, and provide the basis for a subtle kind of service or reciprocity, it was not anticipated that students would "adopt" the *promotoras'* children and that the students and *promotoras'* families would develop such strong enduring bonds. While they may not have regular interactions, the two groups continue to be an important part of each other's conceptual and psychological landscapes.

Previous formative and summative course evaluations showed outcomes and impacts while students were in the program. What the author did not know is how persistent those outcomes and impacts could be. This study indicates that they did persist more strongly than imagined. What appears to be the basis of these potent memories is that the program made possible, encouraged, and indeed engendered long-term relationship building. It seems that one of the reasons for that persistence of impacts was our fostering a space in which language was

used as the medium to develop relationships and where the emotions and memories experienced provided the meaning and motivation for language use.

*B. hypothesis 2: combining cognitive and affective learning produces results that are remembered over time.*

The CBSP course design recognized the importance of affective factors in language learning, which extends to learning in general. Neuroscientists have questioned the dichotomization of affect and cognition, showing instead that they are distinguishable but inseparable, like the cognitive neural process itself (Schumann 1994); that emotions have important functions for learning and should inform teaching (Zang and Lu 2009); and that motivation and emotion have a role in controlling attention, learning, and retrieval of memories (Bower 1992).

The relationship between affect and cognition is extremely complex and not the direct subject of this article. But hypothetically, the persistence of impacts we found could be due to the interaction of cognitive and emotional factors related to a learning context that fostered positive emotions, strong motivation, self esteem, empathy, and personal significance, and allowed, as students noted, the creation of powerful memories. Responses to the survey's narrative queries suggest that the students' relationships with the *promotoras* constituted a type of surrogate family that helped them cope with the new, often disorienting context of college. One would have thought that the great socioeconomic and cultural divide between the two groups would have added to the students' sense of deracination, but apparently the opposite occurred—after the initial discomfort subsided, most students found a “home away from home” in the *promotoras'* households. The depth and meaningfulness of this relationship were rather unexpected.

*C. hypothesis 3: long-lasting learning occurs when students are engaged in constructing their own learning experiences.*

Students had many competing influences inside and outside the educational institution. So, it is very important that this group of former students who responded to the survey recognize that the CBSP had a meaningful long-term positive impact on them and that many of the educational outcomes endured. However, a counter-intuitive result of the survey was that 80% of the students who responded and participated in the CBSP in its beginning year, 2000, remember the names of their *promotoras*. No other program year's participants indicate this level of memory; in fact, the next highest rate is 75%, and that is for the 2008 group, just a few months before the survey. This proportion hovers between 35% and 50% for most of the intervening years, with increases only coming in more recent times, 57% and 67% in 2006 and 2007 respectively. Also, 100% of the 2000 class students indicate that the program strongly impacted their valuing of language learning, sense of social fairness, development of self awareness, and empathy for people of other cultures; that rate is much higher than any other class year. Again the impact of the program on these students' political and civic action is less (80%), but that is still higher by far than any later class group.

The explanation for this result seems to be that earlier students were more involved in the actual creation, development, and operation of the CBSP itself while later students simply participated in what was an already established program. If this analysis is indeed true, it appears that, even for community-based courses that involve students in a variety of “hands-on real-world” experiences that go beyond traditional classroom pedagogy, students benefit much more from active participation in structuring their own learning and in the creation of the course itself.

That level of participation involves them more deeply in the conceptual foundation of the course and more clearly aligns their interests with the program's values and purpose.

As a practitioner, one can wonder if this last point brings into question the possibility of ever fully institutionalizing a pedagogical design that is, in itself, a process. Since this course is centered on developing relationships and crossing socio-cultural boundaries, its structure is, by its nature, a living part of the content and constantly interrogating itself. As the CBSP became more "regularized" much of that initial energy was lost. As indicated above, the students still feel emotionally and intellectually engaged. They also feel that they can question the course and change it if they want to. But, the energy applied is different from the first two initial years when the course was being developed from scratch. Thus, as a practitioner, it could be hypothesized that the course design resists regularization, or institutionalization, an important topic for future research.

*D. hypothesis 4: a memorable immersive intercultural learning experience that crosses socio-economic boundaries would have long-lasting impacts on the students' sense of social justice and political activism.*

An interesting result of the survey is that only half the students indicate that the CBSP had a major impact on their actual political participation and engagement in formal civic activities after graduation, although male students rate this factor higher than females (60% to 48% at the 4 and 5 level). However, about 75% feel that it had a major impact on other aspects of their sense of social responsibility. The lower result on that item is most likely because the course itself did not involve students in any direct formal political or civic actions, although some were later employed in non-profit social service agencies.

This result seems to get to the heart of the issue about whether the CBSP is really "service-learning" or not. It is true that the course is not set up for the students to directly provide service or to work for specific community agencies that provide identifiable social services in a particular neighborhood. In that kind of approach, students' linking of classroom academic subjects to community realities is directed and "mediated" by the agencies. Accordingly, although students do learn about the intricacies of social issues from their interactions with community members, it is presumed that the community members benefit more from the relationship because of the services rendered to them. The CBSP has a community-building approach that relies on the development of long-term interpersonal and reciprocal relationships and connects different information networks. The service quality is not so directly observed as in other courses. But, for nine years the program has provided services in a very subtle, not patently evident, but far-reaching manner by bringing information and skills to the families and helping them connect to other networks. There is a more balanced relationship of power with the *promotoras* and their families, who can participate on their own terms and give and take whatever and however they choose. The issue of whether the course should encourage students to take on a more explicit service role became important in a later episode related to the *promotoras'* children's desire to go to college, discussed in the next section.

## **VI. Lessons learned.**

As a practitioner, it is of course gratifying to learn that, even nine years later, former students indicate that the CBSP was a significant experience for them. This confirms the general trends taking place in the current disciplinary dialogue and self-examination about curricular changes

needed to meet students' need for language and culture competency in the 21st century, as reflected, for example, in the *Pedagogical Forum's* focused topic in the March 2010 journal *Hispania* (Doyle; Fechter; Jorge; Oxford; Neussel; Sánchez-López; Wilbur and Monk 2010); in the Modern Language Association's *Report to the Teagle Foundation* (2007); and in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages' *Standards for Foreign Language Education* (ACTFL Special Project, 1999). The last underlined the connection between students and communities of native speakers at home and abroad as an integral part of their conceptual proposal. All of which encourages continued experimentation with and further development of the course.

In this light, two major issues from this survey stand out. One has to do with encouragement of formal political activism and whether more explicit service learning activities should be included in the CBSP, both of which could easily be done. The author, in fact, teaches another course which places students in a school in the nearby community of Azusa in order to help improve the literacy skills of English-learning kindergartners and their Spanish-speaking families. However, incorporating such a project in the CBSP would radically change the dynamics of the course. This issue came up again recently with respect to the *promotoras'* children (Jorge 2010, unpublished manuscript). Many of the children had grown up with the college students' visits to their homes over ten years and were greatly influenced by them in many ways, particularly in developing a desire to go on to college themselves. A few current students were upset when they learned that one of the children had applied to Pitzer, but was not accepted. They were concerned that over the years the students had collectively raised expectations for the children without helping to prepare them adequately for college work. They wanted to make this effort an explicit part of the CBSP curriculum. But, after lengthy discussions, they came to agree that such an overt service component would alter the equilibrium of power and change the nature of the relationships between them and the families. For all the reasons stated earlier this was considered a price too high to pay.

The other issue having to do with the students' not mentioning the campus components of the course as significant for them is disturbing but difficult to interpret. On the one hand, it may simply reflect a flaw in the survey, which did not ask explicitly about the classroom aspects of the course because the survey was more focused on the community-based field activities. On the other hand, it may simply mean that over time this important intellectual aspect of the course fades in importance compared to the emotional attachment to the families. Previous formative assessments while the course was in progress indicated that the students saw the classroom component as inherently connected to the field component. The readings, journals, and class meetings are meant to encourage students to reflect on their community activities. Reflection is an integral part of the teaching/learning process; it allows us to create knowledge, to develop meaning, to give depth to an experience, and to connect our thinking to broader bodies of knowledge. During the course, students have reflected on a whole range of issues, for example, socio-economic and political issues related to immigration, bilingualism, education, cultural diasporas, intercultural communication and values, elections, and social justice; as well as personal issues related to overcoming obstacles, parenting, the nature of happiness, love, and life. While the course is in progress, all the indications are that the students feel it is extremely useful to process and reflect on their experiences, and also make interdisciplinary connections with other areas of their studies. The assessments, in fact, revealed that the reflections were critical for achieving the learning outcomes of the course. Thus, it is a surprise to learn that, although the outcomes seem to persist over time, the reflective component is not considered so significant in

their achievement. This outcome, indeed, requires more investigation about the nature of reflection and how it works. It is perhaps possible that the process of reflection today is forgotten years later when the resulting ideas, attitudes, and behaviors are so integrated into personality that they are no longer noticeable except upon further reflection.

In sum, it does seem that the potent, lasting impressions that the surveyed students have about their CBSP experiences points to the importance and viability of this course design and its pedagogic basis. Students' engagement and questioning has kept the program alive, fluid and adaptive to the context, creating opportunities for constant reflection about what they are doing and why. For the students who are called upon to direct and structure their own education and determine their values, this provides a sense of ownership and empowerment, and a long-lasting appreciation for the power of a second language and attendant cultural learning.

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