



LUCÍA OSA-MELERO<sup>1</sup>

Duquesne University - [osamelerol@duq.edu](mailto:osamelerol@duq.edu)

Artículo recibido: 14/11/2016 - aceptado: 14/12/2016

## COMMUNITY-ENGAGEMENT PEDAGOGY THROUGH CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A TOOL TO ENHANCE L1 AND L2 WITHIN CULTURALLY RELEVANT CONTEXTS

### ABSTRACT

This article describes the impact of a children's story time activity implemented in a community-engaged initiative called *Reading to Play Playing to Read*. This project was co-sponsored by the department of Modern Languages and Literatures in a Midwestern University and an after-school program designed for Hispanic children. Its overarching objective is to integrate the community-engagement experience into the college foreign language curriculum. The story time within *Reading to Play Playing to Read* utilized children's literature with a special focus on nutrition, physical activity, and healthy habits as one of the tools to target these four interrelated goals: (1) connect college students with the Spanish-speaking community, (2) encourage college students to practice meaningful Spanish in authentic settings; (3) promote good nutrition, physical activity, and healthy habits within the community; and (4) ignite the love of storytelling among young children and college students. During story time, non-Hispanic college students read several children's books in Spanish to Hispanic children while creating a comfortable environment where children were exposed to literature in their first language (L1). Following college students' comments, gains in vocabulary and reading aloud strategies were achieved. In the same line, most children reported positive feedback about the activity and a strong interest in including story time in their daily lives.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lucía Osa-Melero is an assistant professor at Duquesne University where she co-leads the Spanish program and teaches upper level community engaged classes. She holds an MA in Foreign Language Education, an M.A.T in Teaching Spanish as Second Language from the University of Iowa, and a PhD in Foreign Language Teaching from the Universitat de València. She has co-authored two textbooks for college students of Spanish (*En Acción: Español, comunidad y aprendizaje*, and *En Comunidad: Comunicación y conexión*). Her research interests include cooperative practices in the foreign language classroom; inductive teaching, and language learning through community engagement.



KEYWORDS: Bilingual students, children's literature, Spanish as L1, Spanish as L2, storytelling.

#### RESUMEN

El presente artículo describe el efecto de una actividad de cuentacuentos implementada en un proyecto de cooperación con la comunidad, llamado *Reading to Play Playing to Read*. El proyecto está patrocinado por el departamento de Lenguas Modernas y Literaturas en una universidad en el Medio Oeste de Estados Unidos y un programa de actividades extracurriculares para niños Hispánicos. Su objetivo es integrar la participación en la comunidad en la clase de español como lengua extranjera. La literatura infantil centrada en temas como la nutrición óptima, la actividad física y los hábitos saludables, es una de las herramientas para abordar los siguientes objetivos del programa (1) conectar a los estudiantes universitarios con la comunidad hispana, (2) estimular la práctica del español oral en contextos auténticos, (3) fomentar una nutrición óptima, actividad física y hábitos saludables en la comunidad, y (4) fomentar una apreciación por la actividad del cuentacuentos entre estudiantes universitarios de español y niños de origen hispano. Los estudiantes universitarios leyeron varios libros infantiles en español a los niños, a la vez que creaban un ambiente afable donde se exponía a los niños a literatura infantil en su primera lengua. De acuerdo a los comentarios de los estudiantes universitarios, el programa afianzó la adquisición de vocabulario relacionado con la salud y ayudó a perfeccionar estrategias de lectura en voz alta. De la misma manera, los niños reaccionaron de forma positiva a la actividad y expresaron su deseo de incluir más actividades de cuentacuentos en español en su vida cotidiana.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Estudiantes bilingües, literatura infantil, Español como L1, Español como L2, cuentacuentos.

#### 1. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PEDAGOGY

In an attempt to affirm and celebrate the pluricultural society that the United States is becoming, the US congress joined the American Association on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in launching the year of Discover Languages Program in 2005. This initiative was a continuation of an effort to emphasize the importance of FL education in the United States. Following this initiative, foreign language departments in the country included the term multicultural or pluricultural when referring to students' cultural experiences abroad and/or at home. Concurrently, the number of students participating in study abroad programs and students participating in local immersion or community-engaged experiences, increased noticeably. The community engagement pedagogy is broadly described by Barreneche & Ramos-Flores (2013) as the method that integrates community outreach initiative into academic courses. In the same line, Bringle and Hatcher (2009) described the concept of community engagement while emphasizing the role of self-reflection:



«community engagement pedagogy is a course-based, credit bearing, educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized activity that meets identified community needs, and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility» (p.38).

Community engagement pedagogy is highly used by professors to preparing students for learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Caldwell (2007) points out, «it is the duty of foreign language educators to help students to become globally-engaged citizens and to implement a curriculum that promotes active and functional citizenship» (p.464). This pedagogy ignites experiences that are reciprocal teaching/learning experiences. These could range from participating at community projects to field studies or internships. Regarding the use of Spanish as a second language (L2) in community-engaged experiences, the linguistic and cultural benefits are numerous. Community engagement provides students of Spanish in the United States with opportunities to capitalize, not only on their linguistic and cultural skills, but also on their cognitive, affective, and intuitive personalities. Through community engagement, students of Spanish are empowered to explore their own interests and passions, attempt to contribute to societal concerns, develop leadership skills, and examine their own sense of fairness or social justice while participating in a Spanish-speaking authentic setting.

## 2. COMMUNITY SERVICE VS. SERVICE LEARNING VS. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Researchers in the field of community engagement have agreed that community engagement pedagogy differs from voluntarism in its intentional link to and reinforcement of the academic learning objectives and student reflection on the work. Higher education institutions have been using the terms community service; service learning; academic service, and community engagement interchangeably. Although the terms share many traits, it is vital to highlight the differences. The first term, community service refers to the act of reaching out to assist those in need in the community. In this act, there is a specific, and most of the times, tangible end goal in mind. Often, community service does not require the establishment of a personal relationship between the service providers and those receiving the service. It is usually directed towards specific non-profit organizations or entities within the community with an identified need. When community service is included in the curriculum, it is usually designed to fulfill a service requirement. The service is generally a one or two-time occurrence. Community service has also been described as a mono directional or one-sided relationship in which the focus is on the side that receives the service. The service comes from one end and the other end waits to receive it. Reciprocity is not necessary.

«Community-engagement pedagogy through children's literature: ...»

53

The second term, service-learning, is defined as an experiential approach to education that promotes learning and development by engaging students in a combination of community service and structured reflection (Jacoby, 1996). Although the specific characteristics of service-learning programs vary depending on the program, the overarching pedagogy is one of learning through real experience, reflection and reciprocity (Einfeld & Collins, 2008). It is usually described as a bidirectional action, the service positively impacts both ends in a balanced manner. Reciprocity and full involvement are foundational characteristics of this approach.

The third term, community engagement, is a form of service learning associated with a wider range of learning outcomes, from cognitive outcomes, such as the development of critical thinking and problem solving skills, to civic outcomes such as a greater sense of civic responsibility and grounded ethical values (Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyster & Giles, 1999). The fundamental premise of community engagement is reciprocity. Any model coined as a community engagement model offers a range of benefits for both community partners. Given the unidirectional nature of the definition in the term service, there is a common consensus among educators implementing community-engaged activities, to replace the term service for cooperation, collaboration, or engagement when describing academic programs within the community. These terms do better justice to reflect the type of work that students do with and within the community.

Community engagement refers to the models used by non-profit organizations and individuals to build ongoing and permanent relationships with the purpose of applying a shared vision for the benefit of the whole community. Community engagement powerfully deals with the practice of moving communities toward a desired change, usually from a stalled suspended position to an improved position agreed by both partners. Lastly, community engagement is a pedagogy that has the potential to target students, parents, alumni, faculty, donors, and friends. The program *Reading to Play Playing to Read* in the department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Duquesne University has been given the label of community-engaged program given its nature and characteristics. Due to the breadth and depth, the impact, the integration into language curriculum of the community-engagement experience, and the quality of the community partner relationship, the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has awarded in 2016 the recognition of Globally Engaged Program to *Reading to Play Playing to Read*.

### 3. *READING TO PLAY PLAYING TO READ*: COMMUNITY-ENGAGED PROGRAM IN SPANISH

*Reading to Play Playing to Read* is a community-engaged program between college students of Spanish and young Hispanic children. It is the result of a cooperative agreement between

the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at Duquesne university and the after school program sponsored by the non-profit organization Casa San José in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Casa San José is a community resource center that advocates for and empowers Hispanics by promoting integration and self-sufficiency. The center focuses on respect for all members of Hispanic families in an effort to preserve and celebrate their unique culture while helping them adapt and integrate to life in the Pittsburgh area. The after school program, directed by Casa San José, serves Hispanic children attending the Elementary school in the Beechwood Elementary in the Beechview neighborhood. This neighborhood is known for being the home of many Spanish-speaking families from more than seven different countries. Casa San José has led this after school program and other community programs aiming to help immigrant adults and children, for several years. Students enrolled in the university upper-level Spanish Conversation and Composition II and students in the Spanish for Healthcare Professionals class worked with the Casa San José after school program children two days a week (from 2:50pm - 4:20pm) for 3 consecutive weeks during the month of April in 2015. Students and children were divided into six different groups. The ratio was 2-3 college students to 3-4 children. During the sessions, students and children worked on preparing the theatrical plays for the performance day. Tasks included deciding on a specific theme to perform, script writing, assigning roles and characters, memorizing lines, organizing rehearsal, crafting decorations, practicing the play, among others.

The tangible objective of Reading to Play Playing to Read, was to prepare short theatrical plays in Spanish to be performed at the university in front of family members, college students and professors. The plays sent a clear message to the audience: a healthy life-style and physical activity is vital for a prosperous life. Children, as well as college students were actors, directors and stage planners. The rationale behind this project was based on four premises 1) connect students of Spanish with the Spanish-speaking community in their city; 2) connect the language learning in class with the language in the community; 3) promote a healthy lifestyle and illness prevention within the community; and last but not least 4) further the university's spiritual mission of service to the community and the disadvantaged.

In *Reading to Play Playing to Read* all participants involved, children, students, parents, professors, and program directors, learned from each other and benefited from working cooperatively. Each person involved had as much to contribute as s/he had to learn. Through this interconnected experience, students engaged in powerful and insightful cross-cultural interactions.

#### 4. STORY TIME WITHIN READING TO PLAY PLAYING TO READ

The story time activity within the community-engaged project *Reading to Play Playing to Read* was a way of integrating children's literature within a community-engaged

«Community-engagement pedagogy through children's literature: ...»

55

initiative. Each session of the *Reading to Play Playing to Read* program lasted an hour and thirty minutes with a 15 minute break in the middle or at the end. Depending on children's attention span, attitude, and behavior during a specific day, college students decided when the optimal time to take a break was. Some groups stopped the work in the middle, while other groups preferred the pause at the end, coinciding with the closing activity. The objective of the break was to have students and children disconnecting from the work (the theatrical plays) to involve them in leisure activities. Professors suggested a variety of activities to use during the break, such as going to the outdoor area; play duck duck goose (*pato pato ganso*) in the hallway; play songs in Spanish while dancing, or be involved in a story time activity.

Out of the six groups, two chose the story time activity as the main activity for the break during the three weeks that lasted the program. One group had children sitting in a circle on a colorful rug on one side of the classroom while college students read aloud picture books about topics related to health and nutrition. The second group also sat in a circle around a small table on the other end of the classroom. The location was the same for each group during the three weeks. One of the professors contributed several picture books in Spanish from her home and compiled a list of picture book titles that could be found at the college library. Here is the list:

- *Capitán OTC y los piojos fastidiosos* by [piojosfuera.com](http://piojosfuera.com)
- *Clifford va al doctor* (2002) by Norman Bridwell. Translated by Madelca Domínguez
- *De sopas y sonrisas: comer sanamente* (2012) by Agnes y Salem de Bezenac
- *El diente flojo* de Clifford (2002) by Norman Bridwell. Adapted by Wendy Cheyette Lewison
- *Mariano Manzano: comer sanamente* (2012) by Agnes y Salem de Bezenac
- *Me encanta comer frutas y verduras* (2015) by Shelley Admont. Translated by Laura Bastons
- *Mi lonchera: comer sanamente* (2012) by Agnes y Salem de Bezenac
- *¡Qué cosas dice mi abuela!* (2011) By Ana Galán
- *Un día sin azúcar* (2012) by Diane de Anda

Most of the books in the list were bilingual Spanish and English. The books promoted a healthy life style, optimal nutrition, and strategies for illness prevention.

During the story time activities, children showed enthusiasm when they were read to in their L1 as opposed to their L2, English. Upon conversing with children after the

story time activity, some stated that they had never been read to in Spanish by their parents or caregivers, and they were eager to have story time in their L1. Information about the children's family was confidential and we were recommended not to interview the parents about family routines. Nonetheless, some children generously shared with us that their parents or caregivers almost never read to them in Spanish due to two different factors: 1) challenges encountered when reading aloud a Spanish written text, and 2) insufficient time due to long days and nights at work. Students interpreted from this information that the children most likely did not participate in any story time with family members at home. Ideally, data would have been collected from adults and caregivers about reading practices at home, but we were not granted the permission to survey or interview them. Casa San José informed us that a considerable amount of these adults were undocumented immigrants in United States. With the purpose of protecting families' confidentiality, Casa San José recommended us to avoid collecting data from the children or adults that revealed personal and private information.

## 5. COMMON TRAITS IN SUCCESSFUL CHILDREN'S BOOKS

The following traits in the books used in this program, helped students and children make story time a highly engaged activity:

1. Truthful information. Most of the books in the list present the information truthfully. Children books' authors know that dealing with sensitive subject matters openly and honestly is the most efficient way to reach the audience. Simple, brief, and concise explanations of topics are appreciated by children who crave new information, even when they cannot yet explain why.
2. Novel concepts. Good books broaden children's horizons and help them understand that no matter how small their world is, there are greater things to learn and explore. Children love adventure and they love to learn. Therefore, when the books introduce new concepts, their first reaction will be to pay attention and focus on the novelty.
3. Cadence, repetition, and flow. These three characteristics of the oral language are vital to the success of the reading aloud activity. When a book is read aloud, it ought to offer conversational and comfortable sounds to keep young readers engaged and involved.
4. Character identification. Children books should have characters with which children identify. Due to this effective technique, most children's books use young human beings as the focal point of their stories. If the book does not use children as main characters, it often uses animals or human-like creatures with child-like personalities to capture and maintain the audience's attention.

«Community-engagement pedagogy through children's literature: ...»

57

5. A moment in time. The books should have their own, unique time frames so children stay engaged and on track during the story. Most great books have finite time spans from cover to cover with the purpose of not overwhelming young readers.
6. Easy is not always the best. While there is something to be said about redundancy during early childhood learning, even the simplest concepts can be developed and built upon. There should be always a chance to add new concepts to the learning process to challenge children and make them reflect. The best books usually bring a multitude of concepts to the circle and reach children at different developmental stages.

## 6. STORY TIME (*EL CUENTACUENTOS*)

### **Conversations with children**

As mentioned previously, children and college students worked together during six sessions (twice a week for three weeks) to prepare the final performance hosted by the university. The two professors directing the program also attended the sessions with the students. One professor observed the story time activities and took diligent notes about the story time dynamics. At the end of the last story time activity, the professor conversed with the children following a previously prepared list of questions. Children were able to hold the books in case they needed to refresh their memory. The professor also offered drawing paper and crayons for those children who had difficulties answering and preferred to draw during the conversation. Young children are most apt to think logically in situations that contain materials, behaviors, and motivations that are familiar and meaningful to them. Before conversations were initiated, the professor reminded children about the content of the books and the message delivered. The conversations flowed with no major interruptions. Towards the end of the oral exchange, the professor fed back to the children the understanding that she had gained and asked them if it was correct or if they wished to add something else. To conclude the conversations, the professor complimented the children for having contributed with so much enthusiasm to the program.

As mentioned above, the same two groups implemented the story time activity during the 15-minute break during the duration of the RPPR program, a total of 6 sessions within 3 weeks. Within these two groups there were a total of eleven children, two females and 9 males. Ages ranged from 5 to 8 years old. They came from different Latin-American countries, such as Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala and Puerto Rico. All children had age-appropriate language skills, had no disabilities or psychiatric

diagnosis, except one. This particular student, student number 5, refused to use oral language to communicate. Instead, he would nod his head or move it sideways. Even though, his answers did not contribute much to the dialogue, they were still recorded. The conversations took place in the same classroom where the story time activity was held. Most children genuinely made an effort to respond accurately. At the end of the last session, in an informal conversational format, the professor asked the children the following questions:

1. ¿Qué piensas acerca de pasar el descanso participando en el cuentacuentos?  
¿Te gusta? ¿Puedes explicar por qué?
2. ¿Qué es lo que más te gustó de esta actividad?
3. ¿Qué es lo que menos te gustó?
4. ¿Te gustaría participar en actividades del cuentacuentos en tu casa por la noche, o los fines de semana, en la biblioteca, o durante el horario regular de la escuela? ¿Por qué?

Occasionally, questions needed to be manipulated by the professor in order to draw relevant and accurate information from the children. Nonetheless, with the purpose of avoiding an influence on the children's responses, the professor remained as close as possible to the original questions. The answers have been transcribed as faithfully as possible. Due to confidential concerns, the children's names have been substituted by initials.

#### **Group. 4 (Los gérmenes, esos enemigos diminutos)**

##### **1. M (6 years old).**

- Q1: Me gustan los libros de Clifford.  
Q2: Me gusta que nos podemos tirar en la alfombra y descansar de las obritas.  
Q3: Son largos.  
Q4: Sí. Mi mamá quiere que yo lea más en español, pero los fines de semana quiero jugar.

##### **2. B (7 years old).**

- Q1: Me gustan los libros más que repetir las líneas para la obrita.  
Q2: Las historias que nos cuentan ellos [*College students*] me gustan mucho. Me gustan los cuentos en español.  
Q3: En la alfombra a veces me molestan los otros chicos  
Q4: Sí. Voy a la biblioteca, pero nos leen en inglés.

«Community-engagement pedagogy through children's literature: ...»

59

**3. N (6 years old).**

Q1: Me divierto.

Q2: Me encanta cuando nos lee Heidi.

Q3: Cuando hay palabras que no entiendo y me pierdo.

Q4: Sí, mucho.

**4. D (7 years old).**

Q1: Prefiero salir al patio, pero como llueve nos quedamos leyendo.

Q2: Me gustan las caras y gestos que hacen los amigos [*College students*].

Q3: Cuando son largos.

Q4: Está bien [*not very convincing face*], pero prefiero jugar al fútbol.**5. G (5 years old).**

Q1: Nods his head.

Q2: Todo.

Q3: Nods his head.

Q4: Sí.

**Group. 6 (¡A hacer ejercicio y comer sano!)****6. E (7 years old).**

Q1: Me gusta mucho.

Q2: Me gustan los libros porque nos ayudan a comer mejor. Me gustan mucho los dibujos y los colores. También me gusta leer con los amigos de Duquesne y les ayudo a pronunciar palabras si ellos no pueden.

Q3: Algunos chicos molestaban mientras los amigos leían en voz alta

Q4: Sí, Sí, quiero que mi mamá saque libros en español de la biblioteca y nos lea en casa, pero ella siempre tiene mucho trabajo.

**7. AR (7 years old).**Q1: Bueno, pero prefiero que salgamos afuera o juguemos a pato pato, ganso, aunque el libro de *Un día sin azúcar* me gustó mucho.

Q2: Estar en la alfombra y ayudar a los amigos a representar el libro.

Q3: A veces es muy largo.

Q4: Sí, mi mama ya me lee en casa, pero no es tan divertido.

**8. AE (7 years old).**

Q1: Sí, me gusta aprender a hacer ejercicios y estar fuerte.

Q2: Descansar en la alfombra.

Q3: Cuando no me dejan ayudar a los amigos de Duquesne en la lectura.

Q4: Sí, me gustaría que mi maestra nos leyera en español durante el día.

**9. R (7 years old).**

Q1: Me parece divertido.

Q2: Me gusta ver los dibujos y los colores en las páginas de los libros.

Q3: Nada.

Q4: Me gusta ir a la biblioteca, allí hay muchas computadoras y juego en la computadora todo el tiempo que quiero.

**10. AC (7 years old).**

Q1: A veces sí, pero otras me aburría.

Q2: Todo, no sé..

Q3: A veces eran largos.

Q4: Sí. En mi casa no hacemos cuentacuentos por las noches, pero vemos televisión en español.

**11. AJ (6 years old).**

Q1: Sí, me gusta mucho leer. Yo leo muy bien en inglés y quiero aprender a leer mejor en español.

Q2: Me gusta cuando nos dicen que actuemos los mensajes del libro y que adivinemos qué va a pasar.

Q3: Cuando los cuentos hablan de comida, prefiero los de deportes.

Q4: Yo sí voy a la biblioteca, pero siempre leo en inglés y cuando voy no hay cuentacuentos.

**7. INTERVIEWS WITH COLLEGE STUDENTS**

After concluding each *Reading to Play Playing to Read* session, all participating undergraduate students and the professor took the train back to campus. The group walked together to the train stop, rode the train for 20 minutes, and then walked back to school. Requiring the students to take the train was a conscious effort of the professors

«Community-engagement pedagogy through children's literature: ...»

61

and the community-engagement office to demonstrate and level the existing differences in transportation habits between children and college students. Most of the children would use the train with parents or caregivers to travel downtown, where the university is located. Thus, students also took the train to travel to the children's school. During the commute time, students and professors sat together to reflect and share ideas and concerns about the sessions. The professor used this time to ask the four students in the two groups that implemented the story time during the break, some questions about the activity and to listen to their feedback and/or concerns. Much like the conversations with the children, the professor prepared a list of questions for the students that prompted relevant information about the experience. The questions focused on the experience of directing a story time in their L2 (Spanish) to young native speakers of Spanish.

Grammar and vocabulary in the responses has been corrected to clarify content. To avoid reiteration, some statements that did not contribute new information have been omitted.

1. ¿Qué piensas acerca de pasar los 15 minutos del descanso leyendo libros a los niños?
2. ¿Qué es lo que más te gustó de liderar la actividad del cuentacuentos?
3. ¿Y lo que menos te gustó?
4. ¿Encuentras una relación entre la actividad del cuentacuentos y la concienciación de hábitos saludables?
5. Pensando en el español como objeto de aprendizaje. ¿Puedes decirme algo que crees que has aprendido o mejorado?
6. ¿Encuentras un impacto entre el cuentacuentos y la participación en y para la comunidad?

#### **Group. 4 (Los gérmenes, esos enemigos diminutos)**

##### **1. Austin**

Q1: Lo pasé súper bien aunque los problemas de disciplina a veces interrumpían la tarea. Pienso que es una actividad educativa muy buena porque muchos niños no leen en sus casas.

Q2: Lo que más me gustó fue reírme con los niños cuando tratábamos de representar los movimientos de los personajes de los libros. Me gustaba cuando los niños ponían atención y se interesaban.

Q3: Decirles que se callen y presten atención cada minuto.

Q4: Sí, al igual que las obritas.

Q.5: [*opening the book*] He aprendido palabras de vocabulario nuevas que no sabía como, por ejemplo, diente flojo: *loose tooth*, trabado: *trapped*; huerta: *vegetable garden*, etc...

Creo que he mejorado mi pronunciación porque tuve que leer en voz alta mientras mantenía el libro al revés, así que me preparé en casa la lectura. Practiqué bastante mi pronunciación y salió bien.

Q.6: Leer libros puede ser relajante para algunos niños y muy divertido. También creo que ellos aprendieron bien los mensajes de los libros. Estamos enseñando buenos valores a los niños.

## 2. Heidi

Q1: Lo pasé muy bien. Me gusta leer en voz alta y que los niños me escuchen.

Q2: Lo que más me gustó fue ver a los niños felices. Están tan lindos cuando están sentados y nos ponen atención [*laughing*]

Q3: Cuando no muestran interés o cuando se cansan de estar sentados en la alfombra.

Q4: Sí. Creo que los libros eran divertidos y muy informativos.

Q.5: He leído mucho en voz alta. Creo que he aprendido a leer en español con más confianza.

Q.6: Yo sé que algunos niños quieren que les leamos más, pero no sé si en sus casas están expuestos a la lectura. N. me dijo que le encantaría que su mamá tuviera esos libros tan lindos y pudiera leer por las noches. Leer a los niños de la comunidad es bueno para la comunidad y para las familias porque les ayudamos a descubrir el amor por los libros y les enseñamos buenas lecciones para la vida.

## Group. 6 (¡A hacer ejercicio y comer sano!)

### 3. Kaytlin

Q1: Yo también lo pasé muy bien. Al principio fue un poco desorganizado, pero poco a poco los niños se fueron acomodando.

Q2: Me encantan los libros, los dibujos son preciosos y el tema de los libros es muy interesante. También me parecía muy lindo cuando los niños nos ayudaban a pronunciar bien las palabras y a gesticular el contenido.

Q3: Cuando no escuchan. 15 minutos puede ser mucho tiempo para niños tan chiquitos.

Q4: Sí, el mensaje de los libros estaba muy relacionado a las obras de teatro.

«Community-engagement pedagogy through children's literature: ...»

63

Q.5: [*opening the book*] He aprendido que la mayonesa tiene mucho azúcar y que el cátsup [laughs] también. He aprendido muchas palabras nuevas. Las que recuerdo ahora es avena: *oatmeal* y pasas: *raisins*. Me encantaría leer más en español y pronunciar bien las palabras. También quiero aprender a ser una buena cuentacuentos.

Q.6: Yo quiero participar en más actividades en la comunidad Hispana. ¿Podemos ir a la biblioteca de su barrio y organizar un cuentacuentos en español? Amo a estos niños y creo que pueden beneficiarse mucho de la lectura en su lengua.

#### 4. Jasmine

Q1: Me encantó esta actividad. Me hizo sentir que tenía mucha responsabilidad.

Q2: Me gusta ver a los niños sentados en un círculo escuchando y aprendiendo sobre la buena nutrición.

Q3: Cuando no muestran interés y se molestan entre ellos.

Q4: Sí claro, todos los libros tenían un mensaje para cuidar la salud y prevenir las enfermedades.

Q.5: Ummm, [*takes a minute*] ahora he olvidado, pero tengo una tarjeta con una lista larga de palabras nuevas que tuve que aprender. También, leer te ayuda a conocer más palabras. Son libros para niños, entonces creo que todos los entendíamos muy bien y te sientes bien cuando puedes leer y comprender todo.

Q.6: Los libros de niños son una fuente de ideas y de lengua muy buena. No pensaba que leer libros fuera una actividad para la comunidad, pero ayudan a formar a los niños. Me encanta que nuestra biblioteca tenga una sección dedicada a libros en español. Voy a buscar algunos y empezar a leer.

## 8. DISCUSSION

A preliminary analysis of the responses from children and college students overwhelmingly demonstrated that community-engagement and story time can be an effective combination for both partners. The underlying goals for the story time activity were to 1) connect college students with the Spanish-speaking community, (2) encourage college students to practice meaningful Spanish in authentic settings; (3) promote good nutrition, physical activity, and healthy habits within the community; and (4) ignite the love of storytelling among young children and college students. According to students' responses, the activity clearly surpassed its initial goals.

Regarding goal 1, the connection between college students and children was not only reinforced during the story time sessions, but it also grew by including children's literature in the kids' own language. In reference to goal 2, most students involved reported to have practiced pronunciation and reading aloud skills at home to familiarize with new words and the art of storytelling. Additionally, students practiced cadence, intonation, and gesticulation to place emphasis on the lines with significant content. As one student (*Kaitlyn*) states, gesticulation and physical movement were also a key component for the success of the activity. From the observations in situ, it can be affirmed that students' drastic changes in intonation and exaggerated gesticulation positively increased children's attention. For the most part, children appeared more engaged and absorbed in the story when the storyteller raised their voice and utilized physical movement to emphasize moments of important plot developments. Children also seemed empowered when helping college students with their pronunciation and meaning of less common words, such as *canela*, *maní*, *piojo*, and *mostaza*.

In reference to the understanding and awareness of a healthy life-style indicated in goal 3, we can confirm that the content of every book used during story time was aligned with the program topics. The list of titles prepared by the professor was made up of all picture books within the university library whose subject focuses on healthy habits and illness prevention. Following the general guidelines for effective children's books (bookshoppe.com), characters in all books were adults and children, or popular animals with human traits, such as the well-known big red dog Clifford. The selected picture books also included the topic of adventure and exploration of new settings and concepts, such as *la huerta* (the vegetable garden); *la diabetes en niños* (the diabetes disease in children); *la insulina* (insulin); *la caries* (cavities), among others. The importance of eating vegetables, fruits, and food items free of sugar was one of the most popular topics in the sessions. Books related to doctor and dentist wellness checkups were used to a lesser extent. Several children also provided feedback about the positive effect of the colorful pages and the well-illustrated characters. The selected literature strongly introduced new concepts to children and helped broaden their horizons.

Finally, the story time activity in the program *Reading to Play Playing to Read* exposed Spanish speaking children to literature in the language of their families, and more importantly, it motivated children to share the joy of story time with their parents and caregivers. In general, the story time in Spanish had a positive impact in children whose L1 is Spanish although they spend most of the day immersed in an English-speaking context. Similarly, according to college student's perceptions, the story time activity enhanced their reading aloud skills and pronunciation, improved their vocabulary, and ignited the love for storytelling. Through the evolution of the story time, the professor witnessed how the college students gradually moved beyond the

edginess and nervousness of the first session to a comfortable interactive and engaging place where children and students connected through literature. The four students involved in this project had nothing but praise for the program despite the challenges in children's behavior. Once the behavior challenges were addressed, students and children were able to fully concentrate on the story. Authentic conversational Spanish was also practiced during the story time sessions. The informal interaction that occurred when college students disciplined children or addressed behavioral concerns, allowed for authentic conversational Spanish in a culturally relevant context. Another gain of this program relates to the book collection in the college library. Since this program started, the university library has ordered a remarkable number of children books in Spanish or bilingual, English and Spanish, in order to support this project for the coming years.

As far as limitations, as in most language studies, this study acknowledges a few points that could be enhanced, including the small number of participants, the informal interviews as a tool to collect data, the absence of an objective language assessment for college students, and the lack of experience of the college students leading a story time activity. Nonetheless, an experimental study like this offered many benefits in the sense that provided enough information to proceed in conducting more in-depth research in the area of L1 and/or L2 in a community-engaged setting.

## 9. CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction, one of the key goals of children's literature is to provide a foundation, or support to an existing one, that allows children and storytellers to create a culture in which reading and learning is nurtured and enjoyed. Through the program *Reading to Play Playing to Read*, four college students born and raised in the Midwest or East of the United States, and eleven children from different Latin-American countries came together to explore the value of story time in the L1 for the children and L2 for college language learners. The gains of this project were many. Children were exposed to the benefits of reading literature that related to the plays they were working on with their college peers. Through these books, children not only got familiarized with healthy habits, but they were also exposed to new ideas related to health and illness prevention. Simultaneously, children were introduced to an organized story time in their own language, which for most of them was their first experience with such an activity. One of the most significant accomplishments is that most children hoped for more story time in their L1 at school or at home. Given this new interest, an exchange about story time in Spanish was initiated with Pittsburgh Public Libraries. Nowadays, Pittsburgh Public Libraries has reserved one Saturday a month for story time in Spanish in one of

the Pittsburgh central libraries. College students and professor take turns leading the sessions. An average of 15 children attend each story time session at the public library.

Story time on college students was also an influential activity. In regards to language learning for the college students, this project enhanced their reading aloud skills and increased health and nutrition-related vocabulary. Students participating in the story time activity gained more oral practice reading aloud when compared to other students in the Reading to Play Playing to Read program. This study supports the findings reported in Pantaleo's (2002) and Rosado-Amaro-Jiménez & Kieffer's (2015) studies. Both of these studies focused on the language and cultural benefits of children's literature for children and storytellers. The story time activity underscored the cherished and valuable relationship that the Spanish-speaking community and college students of Spanish have developed.

## REFERENCES

- Amaro-Jiménez C., & Semingson, P. (2011). «Tapping into the funds of knowledge of culturally and linguistically diverse students and families». *NABE News*, 5-8.
- Astin, A.W., & Sax, L.J. (1998). How undergraduates are affected by service participation. *Journal of College Student Development*, 39(3), 251-263.
- Barreneche, G. I. (2013). «Integrated or Isolated Experiences? Considering the Role of Service-Learning in the Spanish Language Curriculum.» *Hispania*, 96(2), 215-228.
- Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A. (2009) «Innovative practices in service-learning and curricular engagement» *New Directions for Higher Education*, 147, 37-46.
- Burnette, Ashley (2015, July 15) Great children's books and what they have in common. e OC Blog. Retrieved from <http://ocbookshoppe.com/blog/great-childrens-books/>
- Caldwell, W. (2007). Taking Spanish outside the box: A model for integrating service learning into foreign language study. *Foreign Language Annals*, 40(3), 463-471.
- Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) of Arizona (2016). Interviewing children. Retrieved from <http://www.azcourts.gov/casa/Training/Training-Courses/Interviewing-Children>
- Enfield, A. & Collins, D. (2008). The relationship between service-learning, social justice, multicultural competence, and civic engagement. *Journal of College Student Engagement*, 49(2), 95-109.
- Eyler, J. & Giles, D. E. (1999). *Where's the learning in service-learning?* San Francisco, CA: Wiley.
- Galda, L., & Cullinan, B. E. (2003). Literature for literacy: What research says about the benefits of using trade books in the classroom. In J. Flood, J. Jensen, D. Lapp, & J. Squire (Eds), *Handbook of Research on Teaching the English Language Arts 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.*, 640-648). New York: Macmillan Publishing Company.

- Griffith, A. (n.d). Literature for Action: Introducing Service-learning through books. <http://www.ncagt.org/sites/default/files/files/Service%20Learning.pdf>
- Jacoby, B. (1996) *Service-Learning in higher education: Concepts and practices*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- McKeown, M.G., Beck, I.L., & Blake, R. G. K. (2009). Rethinking comprehension instruction: Comparing strategies and content instructional approaches. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 44(3), 218-253.
- Pantaleo, S. (2002) Children's literature across the curriculum: An Ontario Survey. *Canadian Journal of Education* 27(2&3), 211-230.
- Rosado, L., Amaro-Jiménez, C., & Kieffer, I. (2015). Stories to our children: A program aimed at developing authentic and culturally relevant literature for Laitna/o children. *School Community Journal*, 25(1), 73-91.
- Saracho, O., (2007). Hispanic families as facilitators of their children's literacy development. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, 6, 103-117.
- Burnette, Ashley (2015, July 15) Great children's books and what they have in common. The OC Blog. Retrieved from <http://ocbookshoppe.com/blog/great-childrens-books/>