

## Service-Learning in French

Thanks to the work of Vice-President Bob Peckham, the AATF has initiated a conversation about the differences between advocacy and promotion (see the article in the January *National Bulletin*, 31.3, page 47). Service-Learning may well fall somewhere between the two.

More than promoting French, Service-Learning provides opportunities for French teachers to have their students (1) work with local business people; (2) make French part of a "school to work curriculum;" (3) prepare future teachers; or (4) work with local school districts and colleges/universities in innovative ways. Modifying student learner outcomes so that students serve the local community as they perfect their language skills makes sense in light of the challenges of declining enrollments and negative attitudes.

The American Association for Higher Education has produced a series of monographs on service-learning and academic disciplinary areas. The 13<sup>th</sup> in the series is devoted to service-learning in Spanish. A volume on service-learning in French does not exist.

The purpose of this article is to inspire French teachers around the country to submit to me their stories of service-learning projects so that we may publish a guide to service-learning in French (similar to the FLES\* reports). In this article I will provide a brief overview of service-learning and describe two examples. The rest is up to you!

As I have previously stated "An exemplary service-learning project retains a balance between service and learning" (7). While collecting donations for victims of Hurricane Katrina, for example, is a worthwhile activity in and of itself, if students of French do not learn anything or practice their emerging skills as they carry out this pursuit, it does not qualify as a service-learning endeavor. The goal is for the service to "strengthen students' abilities **to become active learners** [emphasis added] as well as responsible citizens" (Hellebrandt vi). The two-week summer camp for 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> graders (described in a previous volume of the *National Bulletin*) is such a project.

Undergraduates from my university who were French minors taught French to local children aged 9 to 11 between 8:30 a.m. and 12:30 p.m. daily for two weeks. They satisfied the requirements of an advanced French class by teaching their discipline to younger learners. At the same time they fulfilled a recurring community need; parents of young children need worthwhile activities for their offspring during the summer vacation. The project had a positive impact on the individual students, the pro-

gram, the institution, and the community.

Polansky has described a tutoring project for community outreach in which undergraduate students work four to six hours per week during a 15-week semester in nearby public schools at elementary, middle, and high school levels. As Polansky states when describing the benefits of the program to undergraduates,

"Through participation in the community beyond their campus, they have interacted with age groups other than their own. They have found that language is useful beyond their own language classroom experiences and that their linguistic competence has enabled them to contribute beneficially to the lives of others." (372)

An important component of the service-learning project is the reflection paper. Following the service activity the students must formally evaluate the impact both on their learning and on the community. Only then is the true goal of service-learning reached. Typically students find helping others rewarding and note improvement in their own language learning skills (see Polansky 371-72 and Thomas 9).

If you have experience of directing such activities with your students, please let me know. Full credit will be given to teachers whose project descriptions are included in the proposed monograph. In particular, I am seeking descriptions of activities that will provide a model to teachers who are interested in promoting civic responsibility, academic rigor, and structured and evaluated experiences. Please contact me by e-mail at [Pthomas868@cs.com].

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### Works Cited

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- Thomas, Jacqueline. "Keeping the Service in Service-Learning." *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, Spring 2005, 7-10.