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This article analyzes the findings of a pilot project conducted in 2008–2009 as a partnership between University Studies, Portland State University's interdisciplinary general education program, and the University's Russian Flagship Language Partner Program. The project proposes a new approach of integrating non-English speakers' language skills, culture, and life experiences into classroom activities of general education courses. By engaging the students as facilitators in the exploration of their own cultures and languages, the project offers a model of enriching collaborative student teaching and learning that could be applied to various interdisciplinary courses.

> A geographer doesn't go out to describe cities, rivers, mountains, seas, oceans, and deserts. A geographer is too important to go wandering about. He never leaves his study. But he receives explorers there. He questions them, and he writes down what they remember (Saint-Exupéry, 2000, 44-45).

Introduction

Saint-Exupéry's observation in the quote above captures several aspects of the internationalization of general education. First, it suggests broader epistemological questions about learning and the creation of new knowledge by way of gathering empirical data, inquiry, and reflection in both oral and written forms. Second, the French author's observation highlights social interaction and collaboration as a significant form of intercultural learning, and the geographer's cozy study alludes to the safe learning space provided by the classroom, where intellectual exchange occurs. Although the quote specifically refers to physical travel, an imaginary interpretive step suggests the possibility of blending the mobile explorer with the sedentary geographer—the contemporary inquirer—a college student equipped with civic values, critical thinking, and technology to learn about the world, society, and the self.

The project proposes a new approach that increases student learning, commitment, and intercultural awareness by incorporating non-English speakers' language skills, culture, and life experiences into classroom activities of general education courses.

This article analyzes the findings of a pilot project conducted in 2008–2009 as a partnership between the University Studies, Portland State University's interdisciplinary general education program, and the University's Russian Flagship Language Partner Program. The project proposes a new approach that increases student learning, commitment, and intercultural awareness by incorporating non-English speakers' language skills, culture, and life experiences into classroom activities of general education courses. The project also offers a model for enriching collaborative student teaching and learning by engaging heritage language students as facilitators in the exploration of their own cultures and languages. Its significance resides in the idea of internationalization of curriculum from within -- by the integration of student language skills and cultural elements into non-language courses -- an approach that could be applied or adapted to various interdisciplinary courses.

Traditionally, internationalization of higher education boils down to six elements: foreign language, study abroad, an international student body, faculty travel abroad, internationalization of the curriculum, and international campus events. Recent research tends to acknowledge the benefits not only of such institutional changes but also of developing attitudes, skills, and competencies. In designing course outcomes and syllabi for this pilot project, my views were broadly informed by the model for internationalization of undergraduate education suggested by Cornwell and Stoddard (1999), which consists of four interrelated goals: "1. Understanding diverse cultures and understanding cultures as diverse; 2. developing intercultural skills; 3. understanding global processes; and 4. preparing for citizenship, both local and global" (p. 21). The project integrates all those components but emphasizes exposure to diverse cultures and appreciation of cultural interconnectivity on a microlevel in the classroom. Those elements are framed within the general theory of social construction of knowledge and use of active learning strategies (Bonwell & Eison, 1991).

The Collaborative Partnership Between University Studies and Russian Flagship Language Partner Program

University Studies, founded in 1994, comprises a four-year interdisciplinary, integrated curriculum (www.pdx.edu/unst; White, 1994; Rennie-Hill & Toth, 1999). This article focuses on its Freshman Inquiry component, a yearlong sequence of three quarter terms (each 11weeks long). Freshman Inquiry provides students with learning experience based on four goals: inquiry and critical thinking, communication, diversity of human experience, and ethics and social responsibility (Toth, 1999). These courses prepare students to develop strong writing and research skills, and transferable knowledge essential for academic success and lifelong learning. The complexity of freshman inquiry courses involves team-based teaching across broad disciplinary contexts. The courses are discussion oriented, employing extensive use of multimedia in the classroom. Classes usually have 36 students. Each faculty member is paired with an upper division student, who leads three mentor inquiry sessions of 12 students each. The small session size creates a collaborative environment where students get hands-on experience in developing skills in research, communication, and computer technologies. The main session's pedagogy is also interactive and combines various teaching methods, such as lectures, group projects, debates, and community-based learning projects, thus encouraging intellectual growth and promoting civic learning.

As noted, the partner to the pilot project was the Russian Flagship Language Partner Program at Portland State University. The concept of Flagship Language Programs is relatively new; the Flagship Programs are part of the National Security Education Program in the US Department of Defense and emerged in 2000 as "a national effort to change the way Americans learn languages"(www.thelanguageflagship.org/). The Russian Flagship Language Program, which began at Portland State University in 2008, is a four-year undergraduate program leading to a Certificate of Advanced Proficiency in Russian with a major in any discipline. Students take classes that have been identified as Russian Flagship partner classes (www.fll.pdx.edu); each class is accompanied by a two-credit mirror course conducted in Russian by a native speaker teaching assistant, who coordinates lesson plans with a Russian-language instructor. Mirror courses are intended to complement and enrich the material taught in the main class by introducing readings and perspectives that are "uniquely

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Russian" (Freels, 2008). For example, while the Freshman Inquiry course explored the theme of nonviolent resistance and students read Gandhi, the Russian mirror class discussed Tolstoy. While the Russian class provided students with specific cultural practices, the freshman course put the intercultural interactions within a broader framework.

The collaboration took various forms: first were discussions and planning of course objectives and specific organization of course content, and the exchange of syllabi, assignments, lesson plans, and journals. Second, a linguist who did entry interviews with Russian Flagship students attended freshman sessions (when students presented in class). Third, all project participants organized a panel at the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and Eastern European Languages (ATSEEL) in 2008. Some evidence of the effective collaborative efforts can be gleaned from the heritage students' portfolio reflections. One student put it this way:

> I feel like my Russian course was very connected to my Freshmen Inquiry. We have discussed some of the same topics, such as Utopia, Gandhi, or Solzhenitsyn. The Russian course was a little behind, but it still was a lot of help for freshmen inquiry especially since some of the readings were very hard and discussions in Russian helped me to understand the concepts of those ideas a lot better. It helped me a lot on the final as well.

The Project's Activities and Goals

"Power & Imagination," a yearlong Freshman Inquiry course, explores issues of institutional power, imperialism, globalization, social justice, and empowerment. It engages students with inquiry-based concepts and questions and multidisciplinary content, and encourages them to learn by teaching each other and by creating a participatory learning community. The course began with five Russian heritage-speaking students out of 32 students; throughout the year, six other students acknowledged that they did not speak English at home; thus, about one third of the class were various heritage language speakers, a category that benefited most from the project.

In anticipation of potential changes in the classroom dynamics, I adopted the following strategies for achieving greater transparency: First, the whole class was informed about the pilot project and its goals. Second, I incorporated, in each term's syllabi, readings (in English) about Russian culture as case studies. Third, Russian heritage students gave short presentations about the readings in class (in English), which they prepared in their mirror class by finding extra sources in Russian. Thus, there was an intentional process of double translation – literally, from Russian originals and metaphorically, through rearticulating values from one culture into another. And fourth, various group projects, conducted by both heritage and non-heritage students (together and separately) contributed to class awareness of cultural diversity. The strategy of highlighting Russian heritage speakers' visibility in the classroom was motivated by three pedagogical goals: attracting student attention to the international and intercultural focus of the course, introducing the concept of collaborative student teaching and learning, and setting up expectations for social and intercultural interactions among all students.

Each term included a built-in set of activities and readings exposing students to cultures other than their own. For example, in the fall, one assignment required small group presentations about a Third World country (Appendix A), intended as a 'bridge" to winter term, with a focus on globalization and a "commodity chain" research paper. The assignment not only introduced basic research skills but also emphasized internationalization as the course objective. Another group project, related to the 2008 US presidential election, was assigned as poster presentations (Appendix B). The Russian Flagship students reported on Russian media coverage of the US elections. The Russian TA helped by locating appropriate materials in Russian; the presentations in my class were in English, and

later on in Russian in the mirror class. Whereas the Third World country group projects involved a mix of students, the poster project engaged the heritage students as "explorers." In both cases, written student reflections revealed an appreciation of the collaborative construction of knowledge. For example, one student wrote that "we had many Russian flagship students that were working on many of the same things we were, but yet, also incorporating the similarities and differences of their Russian lifestyle and knowledge to ours here in the [S]tates."

In addition, throughout the year, the Russian heritage students became "facilitators in class" (Hong, 2008) and did individual presentations about the readings on Russia. They were encouraged not just to summarize the readings but to share stories gained from their families as well. Thus, they not only exposed the class to unfamiliar historical events and cultural phenomena, but also engaged the other students on an emotional and personal level. A non-heritage student expressed the success of this strategy: "There are several things I learned from them that I thought very interesting. The first of which was their perspective of the Russian Revolution and how they remember certain things and events in Russia."

Another assignment that exposed students to diverse cultures was a large group presentation (the entire mentor session of 12 students) called "Curate a Cuisine Project" (Appendix C). The project elaborated on Kluckhohn's concept of "cultural map" (as cited in Chen, 1990, 255-256), which refers to the awareness of cultural values and social practices in intercultural interactions that impact everyday behavior. It comes as no surprise that Russian cuisine was chosen by the students. In addition to the preparation of excellent Russian food, which we savored in class, the assignment required ethnographic and historic research about the intergenerational transmission of cultural rituals. This turned out to be the most engaging assignment, as students' portfolios revealed. The project stimulated other non-native speaking students to delve into their own multiple identities, as the following comment suggests: "I also learned many customs that they have and they have also broadened my perspective of that country. I did find many [Russian] customs similar to those in Poland, which is where I am from. They have a free education system as well as health care system, just like Poland, which is what I miss most about my home country." This comment not only captures an appreciation of one's own culture, but also an understanding of the interconnectedness of various cultural and social practices. The student also looked into issues of social justice, such as access to education and healthcare. It seems that the tangibility of the project also heightened students' awareness of the connections between emigration and the transmission of national cultural values.

I also employed another engaging in-class activity, called "The Art of Protest" (Appendix D), which also transferred the teaching function to students themselves. It fostered their understanding of contemporary international art as an expression of civic engagement by addressing issues of global inequity, war, and the environment. The assignment was contextually related to course readings and provided students with the vocabulary to address significant political issues. For example, a non-heritage student reflected on oppression: "During this time there was a lot of censorship in the USSR and anyone who fought against this censorship was punished. This is what happened to Nobel Prize for Literature winner Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn." Another student made a similar comment: "It showed how ideology of a nation can often be intertwined with science. It also demonstrated how such practices can hamper the progress of science." A third student reflected on his own prejudices as social constructs: "Throughout my life, hearing terms like 'Communism' and 'Marxism,' I never knew exactly what they were or what they meant, except for the idea that was painted into my head that they were 'bad'."

All these activities were intended to create classroom social situations as intercultural interactions by following three major pedagogical principles: gradual building of a safe classroom environment, transferring teaching to students, and increased openness of the assignments. For example, there were two structured, small group presentations in fall, big semi-structured groups in winter, and free individual presentations in spring. This model of various collaborative practices

engaged students in meaningful dialogue with one another and created a more explicitly intercultural class dynamic. Strategies of scaffolding collaborative research and teaching skills in exploring cultural practices (familiar to some students) have a broader generalizability beyond courses taught in general education programs and could be applied to courses in various disciplines.

Student Portfolios as a Method of Assessing Student Experience and Learning

The assessment of student learning plays a central role in the University Studies program. Multiple assessment instruments are used; among them, student portfolios have been prioritized as a form of both student learning and program assessment. The portfolio exists in two forms--hard copy and e-portfolio--and is organized around the four goals, that is, students reflect on the meaning of each goal and their progress towards achieving it, using two sample assignments to illustrate their progress. Thus, portfolios are a method of nurturing active learners who reflect on their own learning process. E-portfolios, which are another way of incorporating multimedia in education, also provide transferable documentation for student learning. Labissiere and Reynolds (2004) go a step further and argue persuasively that a website's hyperlinking stimulates metacognitive skills that allow "deeper engagement with content on multiple levels."

In this pilot project, I used both hard copy and e-portfolios as a method for assessing first, the process of growing student awareness of diverse cultures and international competencies, and second, the development of intercultural attitudes and the cultivation of civic values. I applied the strategy of assigning different types of reflections to both Russian heritage and non-heritage students. In the fall, the former included one assignment from the Russian mirror class under one of the University Studies goals in order to assess the way they perceive the "cultural mirroring" between the two classes and to make them aware of these connections. For the winter portfolio, all the students reflected upon one assignment that synthesized the four goals. Most used the Cuisine project, which also featured Chinese and Vietnamese cuisines (in both groups there were students who self-identified as belonging to those cultures). At the end of spring term, the students wrote a five-page essay reflecting on their one-year learning experience. The non-heritage students summarized three things that they learned about Russian culture through course readings, discussions, and student contributions. The Russian Flagship students synthesized three types of connections between the parent and the mirror classes in terms of ideas, readings, and assignments.

Simultaneously using segmented types of reflective questions reveals more about student learning and has high potential and applicability to other courses as well. All the students were well aware of being active participants in the project, and the reflections demonstrated widening and layering of freshman student cultural perceptions and attitudes. For example, two students emphasized the direct exposure in class to Russian language as a stimulus to studying foreign languages. Others engaged in socioeconomic comparisons between the US and Russian cultures: "One thing I learned from the reading and also the experiences of the Flagship students was the culture in Russia is not far off from the culture of America. The country is largely made up of the working class. As there are influential people in America, there are also people of great influence in Russia." A Russian heritage student made connections about Gandhi's impact on Martin Luther King and Lev Tolstoy's influence on Gandhi. Some students seemed to expand their horizons within their own culture and their interconnectedness to others:

> I understand this particular goal [diversity of human experiences] as being familiar with other cultures, and being open to get to know other cultures. In my Freshmen Inquiry class I have some foreign classmates, and I am open to get to know some information about their background. Actually, I am a foreigner and I can see how each culture is different from one

another. I think it is important to know or be familiar with other cultures because there is a lot more than just your own little world and when you go out there you will meet many different people with different values and somehow you need to accommodate with them.

The intercultural dialogue that engaged both heritage and non-heritage groups contributed to expanding student awareness of interconnectedness of local, national, and global issues as well as their own role in these processes.

In a pilot project, there are expected as well as unforeseen challenges to be faced. One of them was related to the ethical issues of singling out Russian Flagship students in the classroom. In order to minimize their anxiety, I designed the previously mentioned two different small group assignments in the fall term. In the country project, everyone was in the same situation of being a geographer, while the election poster activity positioned the Flagship students as Russian cultural ambassadors. A second related issue was the Russian heritage students' English proficiency, which varied, and impacted (initially) their level of participation in the classroom. A third challenge was the selection of readings about Russian culture appropriate for freshmen. Last, the Russian heritage students are not a homogenous group—one should bear in mind that the estimated number of Russian speakers in the Portland metropolitan area is around 80,000 (Freels, 2008). They come from diverse religious, educational, social, and ethnic backgrounds.

Conclusion: Effectiveness and Practical Applications

The pilot project was a highly encouraging model for both broadening and deepening internationalization of the general education curriculum. Establishing collaboration between a language department and a general education program has high potential, not just for student learning but also for expanding faculty's pedagogical approaches to teaching. The Russian heritage students acknowledged that both classes offered them multiple cultural perspectives. Their class contributions and the positive reactions of other students encouraged them to appreciate their own cultural heritage as part of their multiple identities. Moreover, their presentations in class did change the class dynamics in a constructive way. As one student puts it: "While the university studies goals have certainly helped in refining me as a student, I believe it's also important to note and understand that students can learn from one another as well." The intercultural dialogue that engaged both heritage and non-heritage groups contributed to expanding student awareness of interconnectedness of local, national, and global issues as well as their own role in these processes. For example, a Russian heritage student's comment on the election assignment revealed an augmented awareness of one's civic responsibility: "I haven't been watching [presidential] debates or anything. But lately I started to get more interested. From our in-class assignment I learned a lot."

A significant outcome was the opening up of the remaining students who do not speak English at home. Usually, these students remain silent about their cultural background; however, the highly participatory atmosphere that the project created allowed six other students to share their experiences, which was noticed and appreciated by all students. A student comment confirmed this high level of engagement: "They [the Russian Flagship students] have personally experienced it, and since they were all in the same age range, they knew what would be interesting to us." Therefore, positioning heritage students as cultural facilitators personalizes interactions and benefits all students. All class activities used for enhancing internationalization of the general education curriculum had one common feature: They privileged collaboration above competition and often incorporated both information collection and reflective practices, and thus combined the kinetic observations of the explorer with the cognitive reflections of the geographer.

The consistent use of the portfolio is a way to engage students in reflecting not only on their learning but also on their role as participants in the process of actively constructing knowledge. The portfolios also serve as a window into student perspectives. They reveal an awareness of cultural diversity (including within one's culture) and cultural connectivity (including "cultural mirroring"). A related theme is the acknowledgement of one's multiple identities. Another closely related issue is openness to other cultures. Yet another significant theme that stands out is an appreciation of student collaboration—both as research and teaching—and the benefits of learning from peers. Last, but not least, is the awareness of being socially responsible both in the classroom and beyond. Basically, students' comments revolve around understanding the self, interactions with others, and an appreciation of civic and human values.

The strategies of student engagement used in this pilot project are relevant not only to other general education and Flagship Language Programs but also have much broader applicability. Such partnerships are opening new venues for pedagogical innovations that build pride in student cultural and linguistic identities. The model of scaffolding various types of individual and group projects (and reflective practices) engages students in a meaningful dialogue with one another, pertinent to the way they experience the rapidly globalizing world, and encourages them to explore their worlds, their cultures, and their place within them in a collaborative manner. In sum, tapping into the multicultural, multilingual, and multiethnic richness that our students bring into the classroom and providing a broader international framework opens new possibilities for enhanced student engagement.

Notes

[1] The term originates from a foreign language-teaching milieu and gradually gains broader use. I am following G. Valdes' definition of heritage language student: "a student who is raised in a home where a non-English language is spoken, who speaks or merely understands the heritage language, and who is to some degree bilingual in English and the heritage language" (as cited in Reid and Kagan, 1999)

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