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2018

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### Recommended Citation

Vázquez, Karina Elizabeth and Martha Wright. "Making Visible the Invisible: Social Justice and Inclusion through the Collaboration of Museums and Spanish Community-Based Learning Projects." In *Dimensions 2018*. Decatur GA: Southern Conference on Language Teaching, 2018.

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# Making Visible the Invisible: Social Justice and Inclusion through the Collaboration of Museums and Spanish Community-Based Learning Projects

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## **Abstract**

*Concerns about inclusion and social responsibility as conduit for social justice on university campuses offer a platform for interdisciplinary initiatives. Here we focus on one such initiative, which seeks to build community between University of Richmond students and local Latino and Hispanic populations using the University of Richmond Museum collection. Collaborations between museums and Spanish classes, including a community-based learning component (Spanish Community-Based Learning and Museums - SCBLM), provide outreach to the local community and might prompt dialogues about extant social injustices (however overt or subliminal). In these experiential learning projects, the museum serves as a communal resource to embody ACTFL's Five C's of language teaching (communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, communities). The SCBLM engagements, typically Spanish museum tours, encourage social awareness, connections, and social justice by way of empathetic inclusion. This paper explains the vision (objectives) of this practice (community-based learning) and the outcomes (implications) with university students; for support, we use research from museum studies, language teaching, and critical pedagogy. As a new endeavor in academic and museum scholarship, this paper provides a model for interdisciplinary teaching and research. Finally, we state the necessity for student-community inclusive projects within universities, as they allow for a more socially aware, empathetic, and connected community.*

**Key words:** *experiential learning, museum pedagogy, Spanish teaching, situated cognition, embodied knowledge*

## **Background**

In recent years, universities have sought to reinforce the connections between learning and civic engagement as a central path both for students' citizenship and for institutions' public standing visibility. This has been accompanied by an increasing demand for research on how experiential learning impacts student performance and the community at large, as well as on scholarship about community-based research.

There has been increasing interest in offering educators, practitioners, scholars, and students inspirational models of participatory research to create beneficial community change (Beckman & Long, 2016). This interest has led to invigorating theoretical discussions on community-engaged teaching and scholarship. Concepts such as *embodiment* and *situated cognition* that have been developed in the field of neuroscience and critically discussed by feminist materialism, as well as intersectional theories (Pitts-Taylor, 2016), are of particular interest to understand better how students learn, and how experiential learning constitutes a unique opportunity.

This essay explains how community-based learning projects between Spanish classes and museums (Spanish Community Based Learning and Museums - SCBLM) provide the foundation for research on situated cognition, embodiment, and learning. We will show how situated cognition and embodiment promote learning dynamics that engage students in critically assimilating content in Spanish, while developing cultural awareness through interaction with diverse communities. At the college level, collaborations between language classes and museums have been common to enhance content classes taught in the target language (Sederberg, 2013). While language class collaborations with museums are not new, community-based learning projects in Spanish with campus and/or local museums are a new and innovative practice. This study focuses on the collaboration between a Spanish class with CBL component and the University of Richmond Museums at the University of Richmond, Virginia (UR) during the 2016-2017 academic year. SCBLM is regularly funded by the UR School of Arts and Sciences, and the Spanish Community-Based Learning Program at the Department of Latin American, Latino & Iberian Studies. This study received IRB approval.

The main purpose of this article is to demonstrate that SCBLM is a useful pedagogical approach to promote embodied knowledge as a central dimension in individuals' learning. The philosophical research question underlying this essay, is *How do we learn?* Here, embodiment is seen as the opportunity that having a body, and experiencing life in and through that body, offers individuals to access the world through action. As Pitts-Taylor (2016) has pointed out: "...embodiment locates us in a space and place, while allowing us to extend ourselves [...] embodiment gives us phenomenological access to our worlds and provides opportunities for action, while allowing us to modify those worlds and opportunities" (p. 43). Therefore, meaning and knowledge in the learning process result from making relational and associative perceptions rather than being the exclusive product of the passive reception of information. From this perspective, knowledge is not considered a corpus of content that students learned or received from professors, but a process of understanding that is created with and through the senses. It is important to note here that this pedagogical practice has been proposed five decades ago by Freire (1999) in his seminal work, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The author affirms that explaining does not necessarily entail unveiling and understanding complex social and cultural situations. In order to achieve that comprehension, Freire points out the importance of opening up dialogues by which people can visualize their own actions, intervene in the situations from a dialogical perspective, and as a result, engage in changing them.

## Approaches

Being able to act directly on situations and confront unknown responses as new possible meanings for fixed ideas and perceptions has been the key pedagogical tool proposed by Boal (2008). The body as a whole cognitive unit is seen as central in the course of learning, as this is a process of constant assessment of the context and content, of intervention, and of critical awareness. In terms of the theater, Boal refers to the notion of *dianoia* as a relation between the character's and the spectator's thoughts that follows that of empathy and creates a moment of enlightenment, which is attained when spectators stop being passive observers and are free to act and become actors capable of changing situations. Therefore, the body is not only a cognitive unit, but also the *terrain* where understanding and knowledge takes place as a type of rewiring of meanings. As Serres (2011) has pointed out:

...there is nothing in the understanding [...] which has not first been in the senses: nihil est in intellectu quid non prius fuerit in sensu. Yet, at the end of the path that begun with sensation, sapience gives way to sagacity; I mean by this that, better than leading to that knowledge which is canonized by science, this path leads, in fact, to a refined sense of taste, bestows an exquisite sense of smell and a velvety sense of touch, forms a discerning sense of sight for nuance, cultivates a musical sense of hearing or subtle linguistics... (p. 68).

In this sense, content is produced and processed through *situated cognition*, a particular route to cognitive accomplishment where mind depends on the body, as "a fluid assemblage of the brain, body, and world" (Pitts-Taylor, 2016, p. 51). As such, students develop awareness of self and the other because of the cognitive presence of their bodies interacting with diverse communities.

The two main components of the project studied in this article were from a Spanish in the Community class (LAIS301) and the University of Richmond Museums (URM). The project itself consisted of having the Spanish students collaborate with the museum staff in creating and conducting Spanish guided tours of some of the museum collections for a wide range of audiences. The Department of Latin American, Latino & Iberian Studies at the University of Richmond offers the opportunity for students to take a course that combines specific content related to the Latin American immigrant experience and the Hispanic and Latino communities, language instruction at intermediate level, a class CBL project, and conversation practice and cultural awareness through individual volunteer work or *community engagement* (CE). With this course, students can earn credit towards their minor/major/double major, and can be eligible for upper level seminars. During this course students learn about the distinctions between the terms Hispanic and Latino through the diverse ways they are used and referred to in course materials, the manner in which they are appropriated by different generations, and their relationship with the media, social media, and political discourses. After considering distinctions such as those offered by Dávila (2001), students reflect on materials covered in the course, as well as on their CE and SCBLM experience. Thus, they become aware of the subjectivity involving the use of the terms as well as of the dissonances between their public use. By the end of the semester, students pay attention to how their

interlocutors prefer to identify regarding these terms and their implications (if they manifest this need), and learn how to ask what is the best term to be used in each. LAIS 301, Spanish in the Community, is already part of the catalog offerings, and no special curriculum approval was needed for the collaboration project with the University of Richmond Museums.

The course's content required students to become familiar with the Hispanic and Latino demography in the U.S. and to reflect critically on the concepts of *identity* and *community*. Students problematized notions of language policy, race, and ethnicity in the scope of other concepts such as social integration, cultural assimilation, inclusion, cultural hegemony, social inequality, class, gender, and linguistic policies in the US. Furthermore, they identified, described, and interpreted social phenomena directly and indirectly related to the presence and representation of Hispanic and Latino communities across the US, recognizing relevant historical events and facts about the relation between Latin American countries and the United States. Therefore, the word *community* is problematized by discussions that aim to expose the role of stereotypes in fear rhetoric. These discussions take place at the same time that students begin to work with the community (as part of their community engagement [CE] component) and explore their own feelings and perceptions. Thus, students' learning process conducts them to elaborate critical reflections based on their own assessment of the experiences and of their own responses to them. Students access notions such as *identity* and *otherness* by seeing themselves and others interacting (negotiating meaning) and having to assess situations critically. Rather than the direct or exclusive result of classroom discussions or home assignments, the signification and understanding of concepts and categories is the product of students' application of them to explain and interpret communicative experiences in which they have played an important role as members of the community.

The SCBLM combined the course content and classwork with community needs, and aimed to merge the classroom with public space through the creation of cultural capital. With this purpose, groups of students worked with the museum to design, prepare, and offer free and open to the public Spanish guided tours. Each one of the course's components involved the goal areas (communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, communities) established by the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (2015). Through readings, students used content and their SCBLM engagement to judiciously identify and "compare" cultural differences. "Connections" and "communication" were reinforced through group discussions, individual presentations about community engagement (CE), written reports, and class activities such as forum theater. Following Boal's (2008) model and pedagogy, in this last activity groups of students had to create and interpret mini-performances of concepts and/or conflictive situations at the end of each unit; after discussing them, groups had to think and perform actions to change the situation. The end-of-semester symposium and the final essay led them to articulate the 5 C's through prompts that honed their critical thinking skills to offer informed interpretations. Through the SCBLM project, students achieved cultural awareness by performing the Spanish guided tours using the 5 C's that they practiced in class. This essay is supported by observations from the professor and the museum staff during the tours and by students' symposium presentations and their final critical essays.

As the second component, the museum offers an opportunity for students to reflect on the world in a manner that stimulates exploration, and to consider alternative ways of seeing, feeling, and understanding. Museums provide a locus for students and community to create narratives and knowledge discourses that incorporate diversity and inclusion as central aspects. As such, it is imperative to use a public space to create a way of connecting students and community. For museums, this collaboration with the Spanish class changes space traditionally conceived from an authoritative and Eurocentric perspective, to one that includes minority voices and other constituencies. For instance, in the 2016-2017 academic year, two Spanish in the Community classes performed five Spanish guided tours for 125 visitors, two story times for 45 attendees, and two *Museo Ambulante* visits in three Spanish classrooms at two different elementary schools for 47 students. Typically, the Spanish professor and the museum staff discuss the tours that can be offered for the semester upon checking the number of students registered in the course. Once the tours' offering has been determined, the dates are promoted in the community among school district teachers, other UR classes, and community organizations and institutions. Interested visitors book the tour in advance. When students start to prepare the tour design, they already know the audience they will be addressing. This has been helpful to secure audiences for the tours, to customize some of them, and to allow students to design tours that fit the audience. This also has proven to reduce students' anxiety as they get ready to facilitate activities completely in Spanish.

Spanish speakers with different skill levels (second language learners from beginning to advanced levels, as well as native and heritage speakers) and from different backgrounds (elementary, high school, and college students, families, and teachers) attended the tours and story times. Students designed each event. The students selected the museum content based on the audience's age and skill level and worked with staff to create activities according to their proficiency in Spanish. In this way, SCBLM connected the museum, the curricula, and the community, congregating university Spanish-language students, the community at large, faculty, and museum staff. Students had access to a transformational learning experience that placed them as active agents of social change within their communities, by creating, together with institutions and community members, meaningful cultural resources that translated into cultural capital. But how can SCBLM enrich the learner-centered pedagogy, and how might these experiences be part of joint efforts to contest social exclusion, inequality, and lack of justice?

### **Framework**

In her exploration of the application of interactive and experiential learning models based on museum pedagogy, Sederberg (2013) acknowledges Kramsch's (2012) view of the aesthetic dimension of learning, which indicates that learners acquire language using all their senses. Sederberg focuses on how learners engage their senses and intellect in studying a museum's objects; she claims this engagement is useful in content-based courses involving interdisciplinary access to, and work with, primary sources such as museums (Sederberg, 2013, p. 76). Affect and senses (as central in the cognitive process in which the body/brain is involved) have been receiving increasing attention in the last years, particularly in feminist mate-

rialism perspectives (Pitts-Taylor 2016), rhetoric studies (Johnson 1989; Stenberg 2002; Konblach 2012), museum studies (Chang 2006), and studies on the senses and perception (Classen, 2007). On the other hand, in the area of cultural studies and the study of material cultures, affects and emotions have played an important role in the analysis of visual and verbal rhetoric and their impact in the configuration of collective representations and subjectivities.

Affect and emotions have been noted as key dimensions in the creation of knowledge and comprehension, as they are part of the learning process. In the case of SCLBM, the possibility for physically connecting objects with audiences provides students an encounter with visuals and verbal discourses. This requires of them an immediate communicative response or negotiation of meaning that goes beyond content; thus, they form accuracy awareness and learn how to understand or decode gestures. The enlightenment notion of knowledge and understanding as direct result of intellect recently has been placed under consideration by turning back to phenomenology (Serres, 2011) and revising the place of the senses in the process of learning and comprehension, as well as in the emotional appraisal of context. According to Serres, the body has a cognitive presence that is affirmed through the gestural metamorphosis that occurs in our encounter with objects, images, etc.:

There is nothing in knowledge which has not been first in the entire body [...] The origin of knowledge resides in the body, not only intersubjective but also objective knowledge. We don't know anyone or anything until the body takes on its form, its appearance, its movement, its *habitus*, until the body joins in a dance with its demeanor. Thus, the corporal schema is acquired and exposed, is stored in a quick and forgetful memory, is improved and refined... (p. 68).

In this sense, this project between the Spanish class and the museum promotes students' interpretations and understanding in Spanish as a new *rewiring* of meaning through the experience.

Essentially, we learn with our bodies. Touch as a part of active learning invites teachers to rethink the spectrum and nature of the CBL projects, particularly their reach and significance for students and community members as they become aware of everyone's material and living conditions and circumstances (Maerker, 2015). But also, touch as a cognitive dimension poses a pedagogical challenge to teachers: What do we do with the information transmitted by the body by means of emotions and corporal states as it relates to course content and student experienced-based learning? When the students offer a Spanish-guided tour as part of the class requirement, they engage in physical activities, while communicating with others in Spanish, and display content incorporating intellectual and emotional appraisal of the environment. As such, this project promotes a student-situated cognition that:

...overturns classical ideas of cognition as general and universal, abstract, and symbolic. Instead, meaning emerges from the interaction from the minded body with its environment. Rather than abstracting what is common in all cognition, situated cognition is best suited to examine 'the epistemic significance of particular routes of cognitive accomplishment. . .' (Pitts-Taylor, 2016, p. 43).



In this sense, experiential learning, with its reliance on the body and the senses as the emplacement for action and change, represents a cognitive accomplishment in which students, community members, faculty and staff engage in a critical awareness as Freire (1999) and Boal (2008) have proposed. By becoming actors in a communicative situation that requires an assessment and emotional appraisal of context and content, and of the others, all participants appropriate the situation through the negotiation of meaning (a kind of rewiring) from their own perspective, past experience, and particular route or path, and move toward a learning experience in which knowledge is the result of this dynamic, rather than the affirmation of certain abstract categories.

This collaboration between the classroom and the museum allows both the students and the community to reflect openly and converse in ways that can deconstruct stereotypes and general assumptions. Students gain fresh personal knowledge through this shared learning experience. In the last years, some museums have adapted engagement practices to cultivate embodied knowledge in their institutions. The *educational turn* in museum curatorship has promoted a new type of *inclusive museum* that:

...seeks to recover the museum's social role as a purveyor of shared, collective meanings [...] forging 'open representations' that acknowledge the diversity of the interpretative community thus interpolated. Inclusive museums, in short, aim to offer a new, contemporary stage for negotiating a performing cultural citizenship [...] departing from a vertical 'broadcasting model' of communication and moving toward a horizontal 'peer-to-peer' structure, in which visitors morph into 'users' invited to 'complete' the meanings of the object-technology interphase through their own emotional and experience-based responses... (Anderman & Arnold-de-Simine, 2012, p. 1).

This educational shift in museums' curatorial rhetoric allows a revision of protocols of collections and displays that respond to pedagogical purposes as well as to cultural agendas about representation, specifically, inclusion and diversity. For example, as a result of the interactive Spanish guided tours, the audience shifts from being a passive receiver and observer to an active one. By moving through and touching the exhibition spaces, as well as dialogically participating in the creation of narratives, audiences are able to claim ownership of cultural resources usually unavailable in Spanish or in a bilingual format. Therefore, the museum's social role as public space moves from the passive model of reproducing knowledge (exhibit as rigid structure of a top-down hierarchical curatorial dynamic) to an active model of production (exhibit as an interaction, a bridge that builds community by sharing language, culture, and positive experiences in a safe space) stimulating the sharing of perceptions and the creation of knowledge. The SCBLM projects combine and expand in a meaningful active manner the notion of the 5 C's that Spanish language and culture professors aim to accomplish, both in the traditional classroom, and in the public space through CBL projects.

In this sense, museums are a unique location for enacting the five C's, fostering interaction through sensory experiences. Museums serve as repositories of *culture*, foster *community* relationships with programming, create *connections* between con-



tent and viewer, provide *comparisons* of similarities and differences among objects in the collection, and finally, allow for *communication* among people about their perceptions and views. For all audiences, being able to see and to talk about the representation of their community's culture at the museum helps affirm a shared sense of identity, generate self-esteem, and promotes curiosity, tolerance and understanding within the wider community (Sandell, 1998). As an ideal space to enact the 5C's, museums can be an excellent medium to promote inclusion through encounter and dialogue. According to Maleuvre (2012), the idea of inclusion has "tagged museums since the day of their invention," and as a product "of the nation-state, the museum was born under the mandate of being interesting, and relevant to the citizenry" (p. 113). But this mandate might also reinforce pervasive ideals of universality that promote-cultural homogeneity; practiced as such, inclusion means coercion and turns into exclusion.

Since the 1990s there has been a dedicated focus in museum studies on understanding, employing, and representing diversity and inclusion. Chang (2006) wrote that museums are meant to acknowledge and respect race, ethnicity, gender, status, occupation, and educational diversity in order to reflect the pluralism of their visitors. Currently, in the 2010s, museums are exploring further the benefits of cultural and social partnerships within the community to best meet the needs of the public. New museum studies research is focused on "opening the gates" to multiple perspectives and replacing a single authoritative voice with a representation of many diverse perspectives (Black, 2010, p. 5). As open spaces, museums can play a role in how society reacts to new and different concepts and ideas. Having the public engage with more Latino and Hispanic art, providing more print information in Spanish, making multilingual guides available, and offering culturally enriched programs fosters our multilingual and multi-heritage society. The effort to promote multilingual guided tours at university museums implies taking a public and an institutional stand for diversity and intellectual curiosity as key elements towards inclusion.

By providing settings that allow to carefully and substantively identify differences, and then celebrate them, museums can provide opportunities for a better-informed citizenry with more tolerant social attitudes and improved social interactions (Early, 1995). Museums foster innovation and diverse points of views that can root out issues such as racism, sexism, class bias, and homophobia. SCBLM projects draw a path for community members to appropriate spaces where they can express themselves, and for students to explore their own voices in a social and cultural context where languages coexist and they can engage in a fearless, creative dialogue. But what does *diversity* mean in societies where rapid demographic changes are paired up with a divisive and socio-politically charged rhetoric?

Through these Spanish guided tours, the divisive role of preconceived stereotypes is critically and consciously combatted. In this active learning experience, the SCBLM becomes a place for diversity to be a bonding cultural component of identity, rather than a divisive force. Dialogue promotes the questioning of *absolute* truth, of already accepted hegemonic representations of culture and identities. In a safe space for sensorial, affective, and cognitive exposure, SCBLM introduces the notion that the co-existence of languages is an aspect of citizenship. This is an opportunity for students to see themselves as active members of a broader community, where

they transcend the classroom space and the regular academic calendar to impact their own, and others' lives. Furthermore, the tours become a place for students to have immersive Spanish conversations in a traditionally perceived non-immersive monolingual environment.

Because this project uses a campus museum, students are able to be creative with programming, go into the community, and reach diverse audiences (Stone, 1993). Building experiences for university students to engage with the local Latino/Hispanic community is incredibly valuable in the current political climate of xenophobia and exclusion. Museum directors such as Xu (2016), with the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, and Vogel (2016), Tenement Museum NYC, both wrote addresses to their employees and members that expressed their institution's cultural empathy and acceptance of diversity—emphasizing the need to welcome all new-comers, and reinforcing that exposure and knowledge are empowering tools in countering the fear of the unfamiliar and different. Cullinan (2017) discussed how fostering change in social mindsets can start with the arts and cultural organizations that nurture creativity and imagination, reminding us of our shared human potential. Latino/Hispanic communities, whether Spanish speaking or not, are an integral part of the history of the US, and the American economic, social, and cultural fabric. The recent offensive and divisive rhetoric might erode the confidence and sense of safety of the most vulnerable members of the Latino/Hispanic communities (for example children, elderly, undocumented immigrants, etc.).

With this partnership, university students and community members alike are able to empower themselves with positive shared experiences in open, public spaces. By transforming the students into active curators and guides, and empowering the community to claim ownership to *appropriate* the collections through discussion, information and activities, this teaching/learning experience translates into civic engagement and social justice as their perspectives and voices positively evolve throughout the entire process (as noted in written reports, feedback from focus groups, presentations, symposium, and final essays). The contribution of the SCBLM is precisely that of providing a locus where common voices do not silence individual backgrounds, memories, identities, and experiences, and where inclusion does not promote just assimilation, but a dialogue towards an integration based on diversity.

## Context

US Census Data (2017) shows the metropolitan area of Richmond, Virginia currently has a population of 1.3 million people, accounting for 15% of the state's population. While the Hispanic/Latino population accounts for the third largest (and rapidly increasing) group, Spanish is the leading non-English language spoken in the area. In recent years, the most common country of origin for non-naturalized citizens has been El Salvador. Latino and Hispanic communities are concentrated in three local counties surrounding the city of Richmond. The University of Richmond is situated in one of these three neighboring counties, Henrico County, with easy access south of the river to the other two counties, reinforcing the benefit of the university's Spanish CBL program.

Spanish is quickly becoming an accepted second national language in the United States, despite recent divisive rhetoric (Burgen, 2015; Planas, 2016). Being able to

speak one's native language, one's inherited language, and/or to express (in English and Spanish) one's cultural heritage or learned second language is a source of social progress. Cultural opportunities in Spanish for students and community members are a source of community comfort and promote connections between the academic and public spaces. Sharing language across different cultures builds links between students and visitors (Black, 2010). Because Hispanic/Latino populations are underrepresented in museum programming, this partnership (SCBLM) is especially beneficial to the community at large (Chang, 2006). The SCBLM collaboration also produced *Museo Ambulante*, which takes pieces from the permanent educational collection of URM out to local community meeting spaces. There, local families and community members can listen to university students deliver information and offer activities similar to those of a gallery visit that activate group shared experiences and learning. It is beneficial for cultural institutions to go out and actively explore the local communities, while speaking in the local voice, and to reach below the surface to attract new audiences of all generations and develop a real understanding (Black, 2010).

### **Experience**

The University of Richmond Museums (URM) offer an average of 90 tours per year to public, school, and university groups and classes (specifically K–12/home-school/academic groups). All options include discussion-based tours, activities, and some hands-on opportunities. Regardless of group size, duration or activity, all visits are free. For groups visiting the natural science gallery, there are natural specimens from six continents of the world ranging from fossils, seashells, minerals, rocks, and cultural ephemera, including Mesoamerican culinary and ritual objects, silverware, glassware, Rockingham pottery, East and South Asian social and ritual pieces, and Oceanic sculpture. Under the guidance of a staff member, visitors are encouraged to handle natural and cultural objects and to engage with the collection through activities such as drawing, Play-Dough creations, scavenger hunts, and crossword puzzles, which support different learning styles.

With this system in place, university Spanish students have a strong framework to design creative approaches for their museum tours in Spanish. At the beginning of the semester, students in the Spanish in the Community class break into four groups and meet with the URM staff member to walk through the gallery, see the exhibits, and peruse the educational collection (for hands-on use). In tandem, the URM staff member and Spanish class professor help the groups find topics both relevant to a wide audience and fascinating for students to research. Students then write 20 to 30 minute scripts in Spanish with many interactive questions and two or three topic-related activities. Usually, tours include a pre-tour (warm-up), with the purpose of introducing vocabulary, exploring objects, and familiarizing the audience with the exhibit space (scavenger hunts, drawing, etc.). During the tour, a specific activity will keep the audience's attention while prompting questions and interaction (such as taking a mini-quiz or matching objects with words). After the tour, one last wrap-up activity will integrate content or objects in an entertaining way (e.g., ball-toss competition with questions and prizes, rock identification with prizes, sculptures with playdough), while a follow-up activity (e.g., crosswords, charts, and fill-in the blanks) will allow the audience to revisit their experience either at home or back in their classroom.

Upon their arrival, the visitors are divided into small groups and walked through each station entirely in Spanish (accommodating those who may need extra assistance with the language). During the tours, educational pointers are actively discussed; visitors and university students engage in conversations about the exhibits, and also share personal stories or interpretations related to them. To make the tour a true dialogic experience, student guides prepare a set of questions, which enable them to present information while motivating the audience to participate. In this way, by incorporating the audience's responses into the content to be presented, students create an inclusive learning experience. It is significant to note that during these visits there is a constant negotiation of meaning that empowers them to speak, respond to, and understand body language—recognizing that physical body language varies across cultures. They literally were in charge of the situation, having to listen and respond to the audience's needs. At the end of every visit, the full group gathers for a quick debrief. To the visitors' surprise, the university students offer prizes and treats for those who answered questions and completed the activities. Tour topics have included mineralogy, rock cycle, world religions, fine arts, and international culinary traditions.

*Museo Ambulante* (mentioned above) allows the university students to take objects from the museum's educational collection out into the public sphere. The students still write unique scripts and create educationally engaging activities for the group, but the tour is delivered in a communal space such as a school, senior center, community center or church. The benefit of *Museo Ambulante* is reaching a broader audience unable to attend the museum because of lack of time or transportation, or due to personal constraints. Additionally, this activity creates positive and accepting relationships between community members, university students, and URM. Ideally, audience members participating in the *Museo Ambulante* will feel encouraged to and comfortable enough to visit the campus and URM.

The classroom is where students engage in topic discussions and facilitate critical interpretations, and the SCBLM becomes the place to apply such critical thinking tools while using their physical bodies to create experienced-based responses. Also, SCBLM becomes the opportunity for them to create a knowledge that results from their embodied access to the environment and the situated cognitions created at the museum by the direct interaction with a diverse audience. More clearly, as the students prepare for their tours, they conduct research, write scripts, and design activities. Incidentally, when the tour begins, students evolve from relying on the support of the scripts to natural improvised dialogue and relaxed gestures with the audience. This change suggests that a rewiring might be taking place, that is to say a dismantling of already accepted stereotypes about the other. By creating a shared experience where people are exposed to, and interact with, objects, spaces, and peers, students' embodied knowledge becomes embodied agency transforming them into active members of the community.

To date, there have been diverse groups who have signed up for these tours, including K–12 classes (both English and Spanish speakers), homeschooled children, fellow university students, families, and senior citizens. As noted above, programs that reach out to broad audiences are ideal to foster a strong community with shared interests, bridging cultures and disparate ages. The community's reaction was

positive and manifested in various ways: returning attendance, requesting Spanish classes for the elderly, sending cards and letters of gratitude, and expressing genuine interest in the topics covered. School teachers also wrote emails expressing that they would like to return next year and voiced desires for increased offerings.

### **Observations, Reflections and Discussion**

University students' feedback reflects the significance and necessity of this type of CBL projects. In the final papers and symposium reflections, students reported having witnessed a sense of fear and concern within the Latino and Hispanic population under the current socio-political climate; students owned a sense of stewardship toward tolerance and saw themselves as active members of change. Students observed a cultural pressure for social "whitening" and recognized the weight of the social gaze and how it emotionally affects the community. For example, one participant noted that "*nuestras acciones, o nuestra falta de acción, han tenido un gran efecto.*" [our actions, or our lack of actions had an impact.] Students cogitated on their community engagement (CE), classroom discussions, and the SCBLM projects to understand how commercial advertising promotes extant stereotypes, noticing that:

*[la] comercialización negativa de la comunidad hispana es gran parte responsable de su discriminación y exclusión . . . [the commercial portrayal of the Hispanic community has a big role in their discrimination and exclusion] [and] la discriminación se alimenta de la retórica del miedo [discrimination is fed by fear rhetoric].*

In their reflections, students recognized that learning Spanish and sharing experiences with-community members is not just for their own benefit, but for the benefit of the local community as well, particularly for immigrants. They gained awareness that speaking Spanish with local Hispanic/Latino communities cultivates a connection of openness and acceptance, as students recognized, that starts with the community itself: "*La comunicación no debe ser la responsabilidad completamente de los inmigrantes.*" [Communication should not be a responsibility only for immigrants.] After the CBL experience they noted that "*el bilingüismo era el corazón al centro de la conexión.*" [bilingualism is at the heart of the connection.] Interestingly, they flipped their initial perception that Spanish speakers must imperiously learn how to speak English to be part of the community, and focused on bilingualism and learning Spanish as a part of the community members' "becoming," a process in which they also see themselves as active participants.

The above-mentioned awareness among university students has bolstered this project as profoundly relevant and invaluable. Students perceived that with social participation:

*muchos estereotipos comenzarán a desaparecer. Para la integración completa, es tan [sic] importante para los hablantes de inglés aprender español.* [many stereotypes will start to disappear. For a real integration to take place, it is very important for English speaking people to learn Spanish.]

They started to understand bilingualism as a tool to help break stereotypes, to decode personal stories, perceptions, and identities:

*Consecuencias positivas del bilingüismo . . . lleva a una distribución más justa de los recursos . . . tiene [el bilingüismo] la capacidad de codificar o decodificar formas de ser. Desarrollar esa sensibilidad ayudará a romper el ciclo de la desigualdad social.* [Positive aspects of bilingualism . . . it promotes a fairer distribution of resources . . . it has the capability for coding and decoding attitudes. To develop that sensitivity will help to break-up the cycle of social inequality.]

Based on the observations made by museum staff and the professor, the feedback from CBL, students' class discussions, reflections of their individual volunteer work (CE), and the final essay, it is evident that this partnership has promoted a critical change in perspective in both the students and the community.

Students achieved a better exploration and understanding of the community, as well as an improvement of their communication in Spanish by working their linguistic, sociocultural, discursive, and observational skills. As a student noted:

*El primer grupo de estudiantes [visitando el museo] eran hablantes nativos de español, por lo que hubo cierta presión no sólo para hablar español, sino para hablar con claridad. . . . [Estos] proyectos abrieron mis ojos a la realidad de los problemas que hablamos en clase, y la realidad de la injusticia social que está sucediendo en nuestro país desde hace décadas. La minoría mayoritaria ha sido abusada y explotada.* [The first group of students [museum visitors] were native speakers of Spanish, therefore, there was some pressure for speaking Spanish but also for doing it clearly. . . . [These] projects opened my eyes to the reality of the problems we discussed in class, and the reality of the social injustice that have occurred in our country for decades. The bigger minority has been abused and exploited.]

Yet interacting with the audience through a planned activity such as a guided tour offered students something more than the possibility to become more confident in their communicative skills. It provided them with a suitable time for connecting abstract concepts and ideas discussed in class to their own sensorial experience of the context. Therefore, their interpretations on a specific matter arose from a practice that involved critical engagement rather than exclusively from reading and discussing in the classroom:

*[Mi compañero y yo] pudimos interactuar directamente y conectar nuestras discusiones de las lecturas en la clase. . . . Los estudiantes [secundarios que visitaron el museo] fueron muy interesados en el museo y les gustaron las rocas y minerales fluorescentes (sic). Sin embargo, hubo muchos momentos cuando hablé con un estudiante sobre un tema que no tenía relación con el museo. . . . Este proyecto me permitió reflexionar sobre nuestras lecturas y discusiones y ahora tengo una conexión entre el salón de clases y la experiencia en el mundo real.* [One of the benefits of this project has been that my classmate (the other tour guide) and I could interact directly with the visitors and connect those conversations to our class readings. [...]. However, there were moments in which I talked to the students who visited the museum about other things not related to the tour. [...] I have a better connection between the classroom and the experience in the real world.]



The community engagement components of the course added to Student Learning Outcomes expectations of sociocultural awareness, civic and community agency, and critical and independent interpretation of social phenomena and events. Many students observed that language is the key to social inclusion and to end stereotypes and discrimination against immigrants. After this experience, students noted the role that learning Spanish plays in a society permeated by a negative, violent, and divisive rhetoric, and how learning Spanish does not only promote inclusion, but is also a social and civic responsibility:

*La necesidad de acciones inclusivas en contra de una clima negativa (sic)... es necesario a trabajar para mejorar relaciones y especialmente ahora. Es esencial que el cambio empieza con nosotros americanos... En mi opinión, el instrumento para resolver este problema es el aprendizaje de español para aquellos que no [lo] hablan. [There is a need of inclusive actions to contest the negative social climate.... It is essential that the change starts within the American society.... In my opinion, the way to solve this problem is learning Spanish by those who do not speak the language.]*

For college students, the SCBLM experiences are opportunities to reflect from a new dialogic perspective, providing deeper observations of the community, regarding such issues as the restrictive access of Latino students to school benefits and the lack of resources for teachers. In fact, the tours in Spanish are an opportunity of real inclusion with mutual learning. In an insightful manner, they observed that it is essential that the change starts among America's unequal employment structure, and that speaking Spanish "*es una buena idea con ventajas en muchos lugares, pero es una 'responsabilidad' de la gente también.*" [Speaking Spanish can offer many advantages, but it is also people's responsibility.] Through action, the museum tours enabled students to develop new perspectives on complex phenomena such as social integration and inclusion, cultural diversity and processes of acculturation, and placed them in a position to confront social contradictions. They were able to navigate their own changing perceptions, and to accept the intellectual and affective challenge of becoming active members of their community.

SCBLM demonstrates being beneficial for many reasons. First, it improves and refines university student language skills by having them write unique scripts and deliver them to the community. Second, the program bridges the Latino and Hispanic community with university students and fosters shared and positive experiences. Third, this program encourages university students to participate with URM, exposing them to an encyclopedic collection. Fourth, it promotes future visits from broader audiences to campus and URM. The museum-based engagements attempted to increase participation between Spanish speakers and the university students. By doing so, the students felt as though they were acting as cultural ambassadors, deconstructing stereotypes, and creating positive and beneficial connections between disparate community members. And as one said:

*Diferencias de lengua no deberían causar sentimientos de exclusión; por el contrario, deberían incitar a conocer otras culturas y personas. [Language differences should not be the cause for exclusion, on the contrary, they should promote the curiosity for other people and cultures.]*



By integrating faculty, museum staff, students, teachers, and community members, this project gives the opportunity for a wider social dialogue that contests the master narratives or hegemonic national representations of the Hispanic/Latino community. With SCBLM projects, students actively produce knowledge *with* the community, and create social and cultural capital through inclusion that ameliorates the negative and divisive impact of political contexts that promote and reinforce stereotypes, discrimination, social polarization, and violence. To create relevant and meaningful experiences for both students and community, it is important to recognize and celebrate the cultural differences between audiences.

## Conclusion

SCBLM introduces an educational experiential shift into Spanish language teaching that extends beyond standard volunteer work within the community. The result translates into civic engagement and social justice as students' perspectives and voices positively evolve during the experience (as noted in feedback form focus groups, critical essays, presentations, and the end of semester symposium). Through the SCBLM projects, class discussions, and symposium, students actively embody the exploration of *community* by physically interacting and actively co-constructing meaning with the community members in a common space. It is an opportunity for an interpretive practice that involves the participation of the community, and leadership by university students. Students and community have the opportunity to appropriate and produce narratives that provide "new lenses" to read identity, and to understand diversity and social inclusion as a civic responsibility. In this regard, SCBLM produces social and cultural capital, while fostering curiosity and validation for diversity.

This project's contribution has been to reveal how experiential learning through student-created and interpreted content-based social interactions develops content acquisition, cultural sensitivity and social responsibility. For the community at large, SCBLM creates scenarios for a dialogue that is in itself an act of inclusion. However, this inclusion is not established according the curatorial rhetoric, hierarchies and agendas, but rather is the result of an educational shift in the museum pedagogy, in collaboration with Spanish classes with a CBL approach, that focuses on experience-based knowledge. As it has been shown in the analysis of the observations of the Spanish Guided Tours and the students' symposium and reflection essays, the collaboration between museums and CBL Spanish courses promotes critical thinking in students about the realities of Hispanic/Latino population in the US, and the US society at large. The partnership encourages awareness and discussion about human and civil rights. Students found in the museum tour an attempt to welcome Spanish speakers, an example of cultural citizenship, and the role of social change.

Via active learning, students independently arrive at the conclusion that cultural and linguistic bilingualism in Spanish is a necessary step for citizenship as part of a society with rights and democracy. Speaking Spanish and English within the community allows for a vibrant experience, creating open representations where diversity is seen as a constitutive and enriching aspect of identity and inclusion. This project has demonstrated that experiential learning creates a shifting teaching and learning framework that allows for teachers and researchers to contribute to social change, students to broaden their education, the community to have access to resources, and the museums to redefine their public role. At the end, it is all about experience!

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Dr. Paula Garrett-Rucks and Dr. Stacey Johnson, editors of *Dimensions* and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions. Thanks also to Prof. Claudia García for her thoughtful reading. Everyone's feedback strengthened our manuscript considerably. We would also like to thank the Department of Latin American, Latino and Iberian Studies of University of Richmond for their continued support and the University of Richmond Museums. Overall, we would like to thank the local K12 and community teachers for their willingness to explore collaborations with the University of Richmond, and owe gratitude for all the hard work and creativity expressed by the University of Richmond students.

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