Name(s) of Applicant(s): Lucía Osa-Melero and Carmen Alicia Martínez

School/Department: McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts/Modern Languages and Literatures

__X__ By checking here, you affirm that applicants have taught at Duquesne one year or more, and that one member of the team is full-time faculty.

List the courses where the innovation occurred

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course # &amp; Title</th>
<th># of Students</th>
<th>Semester/Year Taught</th>
<th>Instructor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MLSP 302W-CE Composition &amp; Conversation II</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>Lucía Osa-Melero</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLSP 462W Spanish American Theater of The Avant-Garde</td>
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<td>Spring 2015</td>
<td>Vanessa Marie Fernández</td>
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<tr>
<td>MLSP 302W-CE Composition &amp; Conversation II</td>
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<td>Spring 2016</td>
<td>Lucía Osa-Melero</td>
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<td>MLSP 280-CE Spanish for the Healthcare Professionals</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Spring 2016</td>
<td>Carmen Alicia Martínez</td>
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Where pertinent, give credit to other contributors and list their roles (e.g., library, ed tech, media personnel, graduate assistants, statisticians)

Non-profit organization Casa San José in Pittsburgh
Non-profit organization Latino Family Center in Pittsburgh (community partner for Spring 2017)
Beechwood Elementary Public School
Brendan Kepple, Office of Classroom Technologies

Title of Project:
Reading to Play Playing to Read: A Community-Engagement tool to revitalize studies of Spanish

Abstract
Confronted with three challenges: 1) declining enrollments in Spanish courses 2) disconnect between students of Spanish and the growing, yet invisible Spanish-speaking community in Pittsburgh, and 3) cancellation of the Healthcare students' study abroad program to Nicaragua due to Zika virus, the community-engagement program Reading to Play Playing to Read 2016, combined the learning goals of two Spanish upper-level courses, Spanish for Healthcare Professionals and Conversation and Composition II. Students from both courses developed a 3-week program on health and nutrition for Hispanic children, ages 5-8. While this collaborative effort benefited both students and community in many ways, special attention was paid to shaping students' practice of Spanish skills. This project aimed to 1) connect the language in the classroom with the community, 2) encourage students of Spanish to be involved within the Hispanic community, and 3) further University's mission of service. Students learned to effectively maintain successful oral interactions with native speakers of Spanish.

Applicant Signature(s) _________________________________ Date __________

_____________________________________________ Date __________

Department Chair's Name ________________________________

Department Chair's Signature _____________________________ Date __________

Dean's Name __________________________________________

Dean’s Signature ________________________________________ Date __________
1. The Innovation

*Reading to Play Playing to Read* is the first community-engagement project implemented in the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures (MLL) that combines the learning objectives of two different language courses with the university mission of serving the community. This program has been implemented during two semesters, Spring 2015 and Spring 2016. In Spring 2015, the program focused on Mexican literature and history. In Spring 2016 the program centered on healthy habits, nutrition and illness prevention. Students from both courses develop a three-week program with thirteen Spanish-speaking immigrant children (5-8 years-old) attending the bilingual after-school program at Beechwood Elementary directed by Casa San José Pittsburgh. Casa San José is a community resource center that advocates for and empowers Hispanics by promoting integration and self-sufficiency. The center preserves and celebrates their unique culture, while helping them adapt to life in the Pittsburgh area. The after school program serves Hispanic children attending Beachwood Elementary in the Beechview neighborhood, the home of many Spanish-speaking families from seven countries. During the length of the program, students and children develop scripts in Spanish to perform plays at Duquesne. Working with Beechwood Elementary pupils exposes Duquesne students to authentic Spanish language, enhances their communicative competence, and helps them understand the relationship between course content and community needs in Pittsburgh, while underscoring Duquesne’s mission of service. Additionally, the project provides children with a safe space that bridges their culture of origin with their present community. Participation is required for Duquesne students to complete assignments worth 25% of the final grade in MLSP 302W. For MLSP 280, students had the option to either participate in the program, or write a research paper. Both options are worth 20% of the final grade. (syllabi in appendix B).

2. Purpose & innovativeness

There is a growing number of students in the United States whose families speak a language other than English or whose backgrounds are culturally diverse. The majority of households in the US in which English is not spoken are Spanish-speaking (28.1 million) (Díaz-Rico, 2012). Spanish-speaking families are the fastest growing, driven largely by births rather than immigration (Gaouette, 2006). These newborns
are legal citizens who will likely stay in the country. Nearly half of the Latinos live in a central city within a metropolitan area (46.4%) (Díaz-Rico, 2012). Thus, it can be stated that approximately 20% of the US children speak a language other than English at home, being Spanish the most common language (Konhert, 2010). In the face of this landscape, the responsibilities of US educators have become increasingly complex. The core of the teaching profession remains monolingual, including a foreign language as central component in student education is a challenging task. Yet, we cannot forget that "language learning is a complex process that forms the foundation for academic achievement" (Díaz-Rico, 2012, p. 1).

The overarching reason supporting this program is to strengthen Duquesne’s curriculum in Spanish language to better serve students. We hoped the program would help increase the number of majors and minors in Spanish. By accomplishing this goal, we would also attempt to bridge the fields of Hispanic literature and linguistics in MLL and also establish high quality community-engaged courses. This program focuses not only on helping Duquesne students to improve their linguistic skills and provide them an opportunity to have a hands-on experience with the Hispanic community of Pittsburgh, but to give Beechwood elementary children the experience of being treated as if their language and culture is a valuable resource, rather than become the product of acculturation. Focusing more on bilingual models that treat the minority language not only as a right, but as a resource, would more effectively encourage academic success of language-minority students (Hutchinson, 2012).

The focus of the program varies from year to year. In 2016, the bridge between the two Spanish courses connected conversational Spanish and Spanish for specific purposes, such as for Healthcare professionals. Reading to Play Playing to Read is the first attempt to develop a community-engaged program that brings the department of MLL and the Hispanic community together. It is directed by professors in the same department with expertise in different areas within the field of language education.

3. Context and scope

Students involved in Reading to Play Playing to Read 2015 were 16 majors or minors in Spanish. They all enrolled in the upper level course MLSP 302W Spanish Conversation and Composition II with Dr. Lucía Osa-Melero or in MLSP 462W, Spanish American Theatre of the Avant-Garde with Dr. Vanessa
Fernández. In 2016, the courses participating were MLSP 302W Spanish Conversation or Composition II and MLSP 280 Spanish for the Healthcare Professionals with Carmen Alicia Martínez. A total of 30 students participated in the program in 2016. The Spanish oral proficiency level of most students were classified as intermediate-mid/ high according to the categories described in the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) guidelines. The total of Spanish-speaking children in the project both semesters was 13. Two Duquesne professors and a Casa San José School Program coordinator co-led the Reading to Play Playing to Read each semester.

4. Learning goals

a. Students will engage in Spanish interactions in a more authentic and relevant manner by working with children from Mexico and Central America.

b. Students will apply summarizing and Spanish writing skills to compose thematically connected scripts to be performed at the end of the 3-week program; as well as to complete lesson plans and journal entries.

c. Students will connect with the Spanish-speaking community by taking what they learned in the classroom, cooperatively with group mates making it accessible for the community.

To ensure commitment to the program, parents and caregivers of participating children and students sign a form in which they commit time and effort to the task. Participants are required to speak Spanish at all times. English is not permitted. Consequently, students must use oral and written Spanish skills to achieve the program goals.

5. Teaching/learning methods

In order to achieve the program goals of this community-engaged initiative, professors created a set of guidelines to be followed by students and community partner. Reading to Play Playing to Read takes place each spring semester. The program takes place two days a week from 2:50pm -4:20pm for three consecutive weeks during the month of April. During spring 2015, Duquesne students in MLSP 302Wand
MLSP 462W worked together to teach relevant historical and cultural events to Spanish speaking children. Fragments of literary pieces were transformed to simpler child friendly scripts for the Hispanic children to perform with Duquesne students. Students enrolled in MLSP 462W contributed their knowledge of Spanish American theatre, history and performance learned in class along with their advanced linguistic ability. Students in MLSP 302W further developed their language and summarizing skills by writing scripts in Spanish for the elementary school children.

Before the program initiated, Casa San José representatives, Tracy Medrano in 2015 and Jeimy Sánchez-Ruiz in 2016, visited our classrooms to give a presentation about Casa San José’s mission, particularly the after school program. The presentation in Spanish taught students about the children, their interests and the potential challenges. Students were also invited to speak with the representatives to clarify any doubts and concerns. These presentations prepared Duquesne students for the first meeting with the children. A week before Reading to Play Playing to Read commenced, students and professors travelled to Beechwood Elementary to meet the children for the first time. During this visit, students chatted with the children about daily routines and pastimes, read books in Spanish, played games, sang songs, and so forth. Following this visit, students had a better idea of children’s age, cognitive level, personalities, and speaking abilities. With this information in mind Duquesne students arranged meetings outside of class to decide on a theme for the plays and to develop a script. Duquesne students took the train every week to meet the children. Requiring students to take the train is a conscious effort of the professors 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 to travel downtown, where Duquesne is located. Thus, students also took the train to travel to the children’s school.

Students and children were grouped into six different teams. The ratio was 2-3 college students to 3-4 children. Students in the groups chose a topic related to historical events studied in MLSP 462, wrote scripts, planned lessons, and worked with children for 3 consecutive weeks. During the sessions students and children mainly worked on preparing the theatrical plays for the performance day at Duquesne. Tasks included, agreeing on a theme to perform, script writing, assigning roles and characters, memorizing and modifying lines, organizing rehearsals, creating props, practicing the play, among others. Beechwood
children accomplished the following: 1) Exposure of their first language (L1) literary and historical material not included in the Pittsburgh Public Schools curriculum, 2) Learning in detail of a specific historical event, 3) Development of strong friendships with non-Hispanic Duquesne students. 4) Experienced the value of their cultural identity and the Spanish language. The project culminated with the elementary school children and Duquesne students plays performance at Duquesne in front of an audience that consisted of family members, friends, professors, and students of Spanish not involved in the project. During the spring 2016 semester, the courses involved in the project varied, therefore the theme of the program also varied. Due to the fact that Dr. Vanessa Fernández was on leave, and MLSP 462W was not offered, Dr. Lucía Osa-Melero invited students in Carmen Alicia Martínez’s course, MLSP 280 Spanish for the Healthcare Professionals, to participate in the project. Dr. Lucía Osa-Melero and Carmen Alicia Martínez collaboratively decided that the focus would be health, nutrition and illness prevention. A second motivator for this collaboration was the fact that the program UPNS 499 Nursing and Healthcare in Nicaragua, to which Spanish for Healthcare Professionals class was involved, was cancelled due to the Zika virus outbreak. Hence, Reading to Play Playing to Read became an exceptional opportunity for Duquesne students to participate and apply principles of health promotion and illness prevention to Spanish-speaking children in their own community.

Following the same guidelines and timetable created for the previous semester, students in spring 2016 prepared short theatrical plays in Spanish to be performed. The plays sent a clear message to the audience: a conscious life-style and physical activity are vital for a prosperous and healthy life. Children, as well as college students, were actors, directors and stage planners. All participants involved learned from each other and benefited from working together in a supportive manner. Each person had as much to contribute as she/he had to learn. Through this interconnected experience, students engaged in powerful and insightful cross-cultural interactions.

6. Innovation's contribution to student learning

1. Students will engage in Spanish interactions in a more authentic and relevant manner by working with children from Mexico and Central America.
Direct evidence: 1. To directly assess student interactions in Spanish, professors worked with the students during the sessions to ensure that all groups used Spanish to communicate at all times. Professors also confirmed that all students contributed substantially to the conversations. At this point, we would like to highlight that due to our students’ high level of motivation to improve their proficiency, the quality of the interactions between students and children surpassed our expectations. Additionally, students received informal feedback from children about vocabulary, colloquialisms and/or pronunciation nuances, which helped students reflect on their oral Spanish skills. All participating students were capable of fully contributing to conversations with children and family members at the end of the program. Spending time together, working towards the same goal, and sharing the same ideals, helped students and children to feel comfortable with each other, which encouraged numerous language exchanges. Students also prepared a final oral presentation for their classmates in Spanish. This presentation was a personal verbal description of the experience in Reading to Play Playing to Read. It focused on describing the experience through their own eyes as central participants of the project; as college students; and as community members.

Indirect evidence: 1. Students wrote three short (150 words) journal entries and one long (450-500 words) reflective essay. Both assignments prompted students to answer questions about their thoughts on their language improvement, personal growth, and future career plans. To measure improvement in students’ oral skills, the final reflections in the spring 2015 semester were qualitatively analyzed. First, a colleague from the School of Education, Dr. Sandra Quiñones, with expertise in qualitative research, and Dr. Lucía Osa-Melero read each final reflection multiple times to identify 9 salient and recurrent themes. The recurrent themes were the following: *Importance of patience; interaction with children; importance of discipline; complex play content; learning history; manipulation of language; satisfaction with personal connections; increased awareness of Spanish-speaking community; and future participation in the community*. Second, we re-read each final reflection paying extra attention to the responses to question 15. Approximately, 95% of the students confirmed to have used their Spanish oral and written skills in a not only authentic, but also meaningful context, which they believed it led to constant language interactions and it perfected their Spanish verbal abilities. Interaction/ conversation/chat with children was the most salient theme in the student reflections.
2. Students will apply Spanish summarizing and writing skills to compose thematically connected scripts to be performed at the end of the program; as well as to complete lesson plans, and weekly journal entries.

   Direct evidence: To directly measure writing skills, students turned in weekly lesson plans, final scripts, and weekly journal entries to the professors. Two different rubrics (Appendix E) were used to assess lesson plans and scripts. The rubric not only focused on the components involved in writing skills, but also on content. Additionally, three brief written journal entries were turned in after each session in the project. Journal entries were graded on a completion/non-completion criterion, given that the final reflection included a compilation of the weekly entries. Final reflection was graded according to detailed rubric (Appendix E).

   Indirect evidence: Following the performance day at Duquesne, parents, caregivers, students, children, and Casa San José representatives have requested the continuation of the program. Through informal conversations and several emails, community partner and parents have firmly supported this program and have generously offered additional resources and assistance for spring 2017.

3. Students will connect with the Spanish-speaking community by taking what they learned in the classroom, cooperatively with group mates making it accessible for the community.

   Direct evidence: To measure perceptions, students wrote three journal entries and one long reflective essay where they were prompted to ponder their learning gains about Spanish language improvement, personal growth, and future career plans. The long essays qualitative analysis in 2015 confirmed that students connected with the community at a deeper level than expected. The theme increased awareness of the Spanish-speaking community and the theme willingness to participate in the community confirmed that this project had a positive effect on students’ relationship with the Hispanic community. Additionally, in the final oral presentation students explained the process by which they connected the content learned in class with the written scripts for the plays.

   Indirect Evidence: In Spring 2015, students completed 4 Likert scale surveys (13 questions each) focused on: Language; Culture; and Personal feelings. The four surveys (Appendix E) were completed prior to first session and immediately following each session. A specific section in the surveys prompted students to think about their Spanish language growth and their personal feelings towards the Spanish-
speaking community. The Likert scale questionnaires demonstrated that students believed that their Spanish oral skills were practiced and enhanced. The results to the following question:

1 nada (nothing) 2 un poco (a little bit) 3 bastante (enough) 4 mucho (a lot) 5 muchísimo (incredibly)

To question ¿Te sentiste cómodo interactuando en español con los niños? (Did you feel comfortable interacting with the children in Spanish?)

Students’ response: After 1st session: 5 un poco/ 8 bastante/ 1 mucho; After 3rd session: 4 mucho/ 12 muchísimo.

To question ¿Piensas que esta experiencia en particular puede tener algo de influencia en decisiones en cuanto a tu futuro? (Do you believe this experience might influence your decisions regarding your future plans?) Students' response: After 1st session: 8 un poco/ 6 bastante; After 3rd session: 3 un poco/ 10 bastante/ 1 mucho.

7. Conclusion

With the implementation of Reading to Play Playing to Read at the upper level courses in the Spanish curriculum, we incorporated the community-engagement pedagogy and its beneficial outcomes to foundational courses for students majoring and minoring in Spanish. Our approach of combining this influential pedagogy with the language and culture courses is highly innovative in our department and in the fields of foreign language literature and linguistics. We assessed the impact of our teaching innovations qualitatively, by the analysis of reflective essays and participants’ observations; and quantitatively, by assessing Likert scale surveys. Professors involved in the program have reported a considerable increase of the SES results, as well as highly positive comments in the comments section. ACTFL has recently awarded the recognition of Globally Engaged Program to Reading to Play Playing to Read. The segment Essential Pittsburgh in the Pittsburgh NPR news radio station featured our program last spring. The reporter interviewed children, students, professors and community partners (see appendix B). We hope that the program has raised awareness about the global world in which we live. 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).
References


