From learner to teacher assistant: Community-based service-learning in a dual-language classroom

Lottie Baker

The Challenge
Community-based service-learning (CBSL) experiences require that second language learners use language with sensitivity and flexibility, which is often challenging for intermediate students. How does the scaffolded instruction in dual-language classrooms support the language development of both the young classroom learners and their university partners? How can universities and schools collaborate to create CBSL opportunities?

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The growth of Latinx populations in the United States has resulted in an increasing number of community-based service-learning (CBSL) opportunities. In particular, the steady growth in Spanish-English dual-language schools and the accompanying staff shortages position elementary classrooms as meaningful settings in which to develop relationships between postsecondary L2 Spanish learners and Spanish-speaking children and adults. This qualitative study investigated a CBSL program in which L2 Spanish learners at an urban university served as weekly teaching assistants at a local dual-language elementary school. Data were collected from 55 reflective blog entries, two focus group sessions, and interviews with four teaching assistants. The L2 Spanish learners reported that the experience supported their language acquisition by (1) providing oral language practice outside of class, (2) facilitating linguistic self-confidence, (3) fostering metacognitive reflection, and (4) transforming motivation and attitudes. Implications are
provided regarding ways that the dual-language classroom setting holds promise for engaging L2 Spanish learners at various levels in CBSL.

KEYWORDS

community-based service-learning, dual-language immersion, Spanish

1 | INTRODUCTION

Authentic communication with target language speakers is a powerful means to accelerate language development but can be difficult to create within the world language (WL) classroom. Study abroad programs that offer interactions with native speakers usually require expensive transcontinental flights and extended time away that render participation difficult for some WL learners. As an alternative, resources that are in close proximity of many university campuses can provide learners with meaningful experiences in which they work with and learn from target language speakers. Community-based service-learning (CBSL) connects institutions of higher education with surrounding neighborhoods to expand opportunities for learners to use the target language while contributing to a community need. CBSL experiences nearly always mean that language students physically move beyond the classroom to work in community organizations, such as adult learning centers (e.g., d’Arlach, Sánchez, & Feuer, 2009), libraries (e.g., Grim, 2010), community health centers (e.g., Martínez & Schwartz, 2012), and afterschool programs (e.g., Llombart-Huesca & Pulido, 2017). Less prevalent in the literature on CBSL in second language (L2) contexts are situations in which students move from the four walls of their university WL classroom to the four walls of an elementary classroom. The growth of dual-language programs in the United States (Boyle, August, Tabaku, Cole, & Simpson-Baird, 2015) opens opportunities for Spanish language learners to participate in CBSL as teacher assistants while improving their language proficiency. This study investigated learners’ perceptions of the impact of a CBSL program in a dual-language school on their language development.

2 | LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 | Sociocultural theory

This study is informed by sociocultural theory, which suggests that interaction is the source of meaning-making. More specifically, Vygotsky (1978) stated that learning occurs during collaborative interactions or under the guidance of “more capable peers” (p. 86). This space, known as the zone of proximal development, represents the distance between learners’ current proficiency and their potential level. Building on Vygotsky’s foundation, Lave and Wenger (1991) introduced the notion of a community of practice in which learners become participants in a shared space. Knowledge is coconstructed, and learners build their language capacity in their communication with others as they become part of the community. Locating the zone of proximal development for language learners
and developing communities of practice is challenging within the confines of a WL program. Appropriately scaffolded classroom materials can sacrifice the authenticity that comes with immersive experiences, but simply placing students in a target language environment does not ensure either linguistic or cultural engagement (e.g., Byram & Feng, 2006; Kinginger, 2010). Framed by these theories, community experiences with Spanish language speakers holds powerful potential to transform language learning, as learners engage meaningfully with speakers while benefitting from the ongoing support of university faculty. These experiences may be particularly important for WL learners in the United States whose learning experiences are limited to high school courses and thus struggle to achieve on measures of listening and reading comprehension that require extensive exposure to the language (Sparks, Luebbers, & Castañeda, 2017).

2.2 | CBSL

Conceptualizations of CBSL, also known as service-learning and community engagement, abound in the literature. Since 2006, the term community engagement has witnessed increased popularity in response to the Carnegie Foundation's inaugural recognition of institutions that promote “collaboration between institutions of higher education and their larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources” (Campus Contact, n.d.). In contrast to community engagement, service-learning is more often framed in the context of specific courses. For instance, Zlotkowski's (1998) definition of community service learning, often used in higher education contexts, connects community service with academic learning: “meaningful community service that is linked to students’ academic experience through related course materials and reflective activities” (p.3). Applied to the context of Spanish world language learning, Hale (1999) defined service-learning as “the union of community service with academic reflection and analysis” (p.9).

Mooney and Edwards (2001) conceptualized the variations of CBSL as a hierarchy of six kinds of experiences, ranging from “out-of-class activities” that simply occur in the community to “service-learning advocacy,” which includes social action, structured reflection, and the application of skills while meeting a real need in the community. The term service-learning is used to describe the fifth option on the hierarchy, one in which students’ experiences in the community “shape their understanding of course content while the course content in turn shapes their understanding of the kinds of social contexts and relations characteristic of their service learning placements” (p.186). For Mooney and Edwards, service-learning experiences involved rendering service in the community, earning curricular credit, applying skills, and engaging in structured reflection.

All conceptualizations of CBSL build on the foundation of experiential education, originally theorized by Dewey (1938) nearly a century ago. In the context of adult learners, Kolb (1984) drew on Dewey to propose his Experiential Learning Model, which included four components: concrete experiences, reflective observations, formation of abstract concepts, and testing of concepts to other contexts. The iterative nature of CBSL encourages students to reflect on concrete experiences in the community through class discussion or journaling, and by returning to the community site over time, students have opportunities to develop and then apply concepts in new situations. Research on CBSL across disciplines has demonstrated overall beneficial student outcomes, including understanding of social issues, personal maturity, and cognitive development (e.g., Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Yorio & Ye, 2012) as well as students’ persistence—that is, their continued enrollment in subsequent discipline-related courses (Bringle, Hatcher, & Muthiah, 2010).
2.3 CBSL in WL contexts

Although CBSL that involves interaction with target language speakers complements established student learning outcomes in most contemporary WL programs (Thompson, 2012), early research into CBSL in WL settings consisted largely of program descriptions (e.g., Hellebrandt & Varona, 1999) rather than rigorous investigations into learning outcomes. In contrast, the past two decades have witnessed a growth in research on WL CBSL, reflecting students’ interests in gaining the practical and professional language skills that are necessary for 21st-century careers (Modern Language Association, 2007) along with an emphasis on using the target language in the community as described in the World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages (National Standards Collaborative Board, 2015). Because creating opportunities for meaningful language use can elude teachers within the confines of the classroom, CBSL emerged as a vehicle for helping students to learn and use professional registers of Spanish with target language speakers. For example, in their self-study of Spanish language students working in local not-for-profit organizations, Abbott and Lear (2010) described how CBSL made the Communities goal area of the Standards “impossible to avoid instead of difficult to implement” (p. 232). Adopting a translingual approach, DuBord and Kimball (2016) documented outcomes beyond conventional measures of language proficiency, such as dialogic communication and problem-solving, pointing to the importance of community and cultural connections alongside linguistic knowledge. Most recently, Palpacuer Lee, Curtis, and Curran (2018) summarized CBSL challenges and opportunities for language learners and confirmed the promise of CBSL as a means of accomplishing students’ and programs’ language learning goals.

In addition to CBSL’s promise as a means of supporting language goals, research on student outcomes has suggested that CBSL contributes to affective factors known to facilitate second language acquisition, such as motivation, attitudes, and linguistic confidence. Morris (2001), for example, found statistically significant growth in learning motivation and attitudes among students who participated in a service-learning program, as measured by pre- and postprogram Likert-type surveys. Likewise, Long (2003) analyzed learners’ written reflections and contributions to class discussions and found that Spanish language learners who participated in service-learning activities evidenced more accepting attitudes toward Spanish speakers and their cultures than their peers who engaged in other out-of-class activities. Pellettieri’s (2011) pre- and postdata showed growth in Spanish language learners’ willingness to communicate after a course-based CBSL experience, and Bettencourt (2015) found that students who participated in various Spanish language community organizations met learning outcomes that were aligned to the ACTFL Community standards regarding their understanding of issues in their Spanish-speaking community. Bloom (2008) similarly focused on the Community standards and found that her first-year Spanish students described intercultural competence gains after reading bilingual books with children in an afterschool program. In Canada, Hummel’s (2013) research with French-speaking students in a TESOL program revealed that CBSL opportunities resulted in increased linguistic self-confidence. More recently, Moreno-López, Ramos-Sellman, Miranda-Aldaco, and Gomis Quinto (2017) measured perceived and actual growth in linguistic knowledge among L2 Spanish learners who participated in several different class models, including a service-learning model. Learners in all groups evidenced similar linguistic gains, but only students in the experiential class models that included interaction with target language speakers reported gains in confidence and motivation. Pascual y Cabo, Prada, and Lowther Pereira (2017) examined heritage learners’ experiences, concluding that CBSL experiences were associated with increased confidence in using Spanish outside the home.

In sum, research into CBSL in WL settings has shown that such experiences are aligned with, and work to support, standards-based student learning goals and outcomes. Specifically, research has
documented the impact of CBSL on learners’ language development and on their attitudes, motivation, and confidence. With the exception of Bloom (2008), however, studies of CBSL in WL contexts have involved advanced-level students in community or school settings outside of regular K–12 classrooms. In contrast, this study examined the perceptions of L2 learners who brought varying levels of Spanish skills to their work as teacher assistants in dual-language elementary school classrooms. The research question guiding this study was

*How do Spanish L2 learners perceive the impact of CBSL in a dual-language school on their language learning?*

While perceptions are not a proxy for growth in knowledge and skills, students’ opinions about if and how experiences impact their learning may contribute to language proficiency gains.

3 | METHODS

3.1 | Context

This study occurred at an urban, private university that offered an undergraduate major in Spanish and Latin American languages, literatures, and cultures. Spanish courses were open to all students, but WL study was only a requirement for students majoring in international affairs. Students enrolled in specific courses based on an online placement exam or on their Advanced Placement scores. Participation in the CBSL experience was open to students in any Spanish course beyond the first two introductory-semester courses for those with no Spanish background. A faculty member from the department coordinated the program, which involved recruiting students, forming partnerships with community sites, and creating reflective opportunities for participants. Participants thus represented Spanish L2 learners at the 1000 level (lower-intermediate), 2000 level (upper-intermediate), and 3000 and 4000 levels (advanced).

Learners had the option to participate in the CBSL program either as supplemental to their Spanish coursework or as part of a three-credit Spanish service-learning literature course. Learners who elected the supplemental option earned extra credit on their final grade if they completed three requirements: (1) documentation of a minimum of 15 hours at the assigned site, (2) completion of two 500-word Spanish language blog entries (pre- and postsemester), and (3) attendance at an in-person event in which they orally reflected on the experience. Options for the in-person event included visiting the faculty coordinator's weekly office hours, attending the university's day-long Cesar Chavez celebration, or participating in the university's service-learning symposium. While the faculty coordinator made corrections to students’ written language and made overall brief comments on each student’s blog entries, credit was awarded for completion of all three program components.

The service-learning course option was limited to 14 students at the advanced level who had participated in the cocurricular CBSL program in the past. The course was offered each semester and typically enrolled the full 14 students, as it did in the semester during which this study was conducted. Because the CBSL activities contributed to the students’ course grade rather than serving as extra credit, the requirements differed from those in the service-learning course; in addition to completing the required CBSL hours, these students read about activists in social change in the Spanish-speaking world and wrote regular reflections on leadership and service based on the readings. One of these written reflections specifically elicited students’ experience in their CBSL setting.

For both the extra-credit and the full-course option, the faculty coordinator partnered L2 Spanish learners with multiple organizations that served the city’s Latinx community. This study focused on L2 Spanish learners who participated as teaching assistants in a local dual-language public charter school,
as part of a partnership that developed from a school administrator's expressed need for an “extra pair of hands” in some classrooms. The resulting program enabled university students to sharpen language skills while assisting in a Spanish language class, thus demonstrating the reciprocity and mutual benefits to community and students that are foundational to CBSL programs.

The dual-language school enrolled approximately 400 students in grades K–5, 99% of whom were classified as economically disadvantaged. At the time of the study, approximately 70% were Hispanic/Latinx, 18% were African American, and 7% were white. Of these students, 41% were classified as English learners. The school adheres to a 50/50 dual-language model, which means that students spend approximately 50% of their day learning in Spanish, taught by native Spanish–speaking teachers, and 50% in English, taught by native English–speaking teachers. Thus each grade level has a native Spanish and a native English teacher who instruct the same group of students in different classrooms, during different parts of the day, and in different content areas. Science and Spanish literacy were taught in Spanish, while math and English literacy were taught in English. Social studies content was integrated into both the Spanish and the English literacy classes. Learning in all classes took place across mixed groups of first language (L1) and L2 learners.

The faculty coordinator assigned each university student a weekly time slot in a Spanish language classroom (e.g., science or Spanish literacy) of approximately 90 minutes’ duration each week for 15 weeks. Three advanced students also agreed to lead an afterschool extracurricular nature club for first and second graders in addition to assisting in a classroom. Efforts were made to place Spanish students who were enrolled in lower-intermediate levels (1000s) with teachers in grades 1–2; students who were enrolled in upper-intermediate (2000s) or advanced (3000s) levels were placed with teachers in grades 3–5, in part because the content in the upper elementary grades requires a more sophisticated use of language than does primary grade content. Depending on the individual classroom teachers’ needs and preferences, L2 Spanish learners were assigned a range of tasks, shown in Table 1.

The researcher was a faculty member at the same university who worked in the graduate school of education. She was thus familiar with the university, the student population, and the community context; however, she did not directly instruct the Spanish learners, nor did she serve as the faculty CBSL coordinator. Prior to designing and conducting the study, she had observed students’ presentations about the program and had discussed with the faculty coordinator about collaborating with dual-language schools in the community.

### 3.2 Participants

Of the 525 Spanish language learners who were eligible for the CBSL program, 61 (12%) participated and elected one of the two learning options (extra credit or course credit) during the semester under consideration; 34 (56%) of these participants were assigned to the dual-language school. These learners performed various tasks, as shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TASKS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accompany small groups of students to activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assist with administrative duties (e.g., distributing materials, compiling papers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engage students in social conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lead extracurricular afterschool club</td>
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<td>Manage student behavior in large groups (e.g., redirecting individual students)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Read Spanish language books with individual students</td>
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<tr>
<td>Support small groups of students on assignments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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**TABLE 1** Tasks that university Spanish learners performed in the dual-language classroom

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students included 15 freshmen, 12 sophomores, five juniors, and two seniors. Twenty-five were female and nine were male. Five were enrolled in lower-intermediate Spanish courses (i.e., 1000s), 21 in upper-intermediate courses (2000s), and eight in the advanced course (3000s). As documented in the year following the study, three had declared Spanish majors and eight had declared Spanish minors. The majority (*n* = 19) majored in international affairs, with the remaining 12 students studying other disciplines. At the time of the study, five of the freshman participants had not yet formally declared a major.

### 3.3 Procedures

Data were collected from three different sources: participants’ blog entries, focus group sessions, and one-on-one interviews. Study procedures were formally approved by the university's institutional review board (IRB) prior to data collection. Demographic data for the participants who were enrolled at each course level are shown for each data source in Table 2.

#### 3.3.1 Written reflections

At the end of the semester, the faculty coordinator shared with the researcher 55 blog entries for the 34 L2 learners who had participated in the dual-language school, eight of whom were enrolled in the advanced service-learning course. All entries were written in Spanish and analyzed as submitted without the faculty coordinator's linguistic corrections. All learners, including those in the service-learning class, were offered a series of prompts (Appendix A) but were free to address topics of personal interest that were related to the program.

Analysis was iterative, following qualitative research procedures (Merriam, 2009). Each entry was uploaded into qualitative data analysis software and read for a holistic understanding. All comments related to learners’ Spanish language use, including descriptions of how they used Spanish in the program, reflections on their Spanish ability, and feelings they felt about using Spanish, were identified. These comments were then annotated with marginal notes indicating emic or emergent themes from participants’ words, and etic or theoretical codes that reflected themes in second language acquisition, such as anxiety, authentic interaction, and perceived competence.

#### 3.3.2 Focus group sessions

Two optional sharing (focus group) sessions were held at the end of the semester as part of a university-wide symposium on service-learning open to the university community. These sessions were each 90 minutes in length and were scheduled in either the morning or the afternoon to accommodate students’

<table>
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<th>TABLE 2</th>
<th>Participant summary by Spanish level</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Spanish Level (Course Number)</strong></td>
<td><strong>Total Participants</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low-Intermediate (1000s)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced-Intermediate (2000s)</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advanced (3000s–4000s)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
schedules. They offered a forum for Spanish language students across all CBSL sites and class levels to reflect on and compare their experiences. Active participation in one of these sessions met the oral sharing requirement in the cocurricular CBSL option, perhaps explaining students’ motivation to attend. The faculty coordinator facilitated the group discussions, which took place in Spanish, and assisted students at the lower-intermediate levels as needed to express themselves in Spanish.

Twenty-five students in total took part in the full session in either the morning or afternoon, 11 of whom had worked in the dual-language school for the semester. Of these 11 students, three were enrolled in lower-intermediate courses (i.e., 1000 level), six in upper-intermediate courses (i.e., 2000 level), and two in the advanced service-learning course (i.e., 3000 level). Faculty and students from other Spanish courses or from other departments also attended parts of each session, resulting in a significant but changing presence of nonparticipant observers. Because the sessions were open to the general university community, the researcher did not record the groups but instead took detailed notes and transcribed students’ words verbatim when possible. The faculty coordinator also summarized students’ contributions to the sessions and provided the researcher with her notes. While students’ concerns and interests largely guided the conversations, the researcher also asked how they felt about the experience and its impact on their language learning. As with the blog entries, qualitative analysis methods were used; participants’ conversations were uploaded into qualitative software and then coded for themes.

3.3.3 | Interviews

In-depth interviews were conducted at the beginning and end of the semester for four of the students. Purposive sampling was used to identify student participants (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Following an informational meeting, the researcher sent a recruitment e-mail to all students who were assigned to the dual-language school. Four students expressed interest and consented to participate in the interviews (all names herein are pseudonyms). Three of the interviewees (Wyatt, Leslie, and Chloe) were freshmen and were enrolled in upper-intermediate Spanish classes; one (Brett) was a junior who had recently transferred from another university and was enrolled in a lower-intermediate class. All four were pursuing international affairs majors. The three freshmen were considering pursuing a Spanish minor as well, and one (Leslie) declared Spanish as her minor the following fall. All students except for Brett described themselves as strong language learners. Table 3 describes the four interview participants.

These students participated in two one-on-one interviews, each lasting 30–60 minutes, and received an honorarium for their time. The researcher developed a semi-structured interview protocol designed to elicit information about students’ language background as well as their motivations for both learning Spanish and participating in the CBSL program, their experiences working in the class, and their thoughts about the experience. Interview topics are listed in Appendix B. The researcher also visited three of the four students at their CBSL sites so as to better understand their experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Spanish Level</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Upper-Intermediate</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyatt</td>
<td>Freshman</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Upper-Intermediate</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brett</td>
<td>Senior</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Lower-Intermediate</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chloe</td>
<td>Sophomore</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Upper-Intermediate</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
triangulate data, and inform the subsequent interviews. Subsequent to each visit, the researcher talked to students about the particular activities and events that occurred. These postobservation interviews were informal and not transcribed, although the researcher took notes during and immediately after each conversation.

3.4 | Analysis

Qualitative methodology (Merriam, 2009) was employed to develop thematic findings. As only one researcher was involved, intercoder reliability or agreement was not necessary. To increase validity, however, a research assistant and the researcher separately read a portion of one interview transcript to develop codes. The researcher and the research assistant discussed differences in codes and agreed on a preliminary list that was used to code the remaining data. As new ideas emerged, the researcher added new codes and refined existing ones. Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparative methods were used to group codes into subthemes and then larger themes. Codes from the blog entries were compared to those from the interviews, and the combined code groups became the source of the themes that are articulated in the findings. Throughout this process, the researcher consulted with her research assistant and another colleague who was not involved in the project to mitigate researcher bias. Further, data analysis was shared with the four interview participants as member-checking to increase trustworthiness.

4 | RESULTS

Learners overwhelmingly mentioned the benefits that accrued from their experiences. Specifically, data indicated that students perceived that CBSL involvement in a dual-language classroom supported their language acquisition in the following ways: (1) providing oral language practice outside of class, (2) facilitating linguistic self-confidence, (3) fostering metacognitive reflection, and (4) transforming motivation and attitudes. However, learners also pointed out that the setting and their position as teacher assistants resulted in missed opportunities for using Spanish.

4.1 | Spanish language oral practice

A common theme across all data sources was the opportunity to use Spanish in authentic settings. Nearly half of the learners \((n = 15, 44\%)\) described how the experience afforded them the opportunity to practice Spanish outside of class. One learner estimated in her blog entry that the experience was roughly equivalent to an additional class session each week. All four students who participated in interviews emphasized the benefit of “simply more time practicing.”

Specifically, learners pointed out the ways in which the experience exposed them to language that they had not encountered in Spanish class. Fourteen learners \((41\%)\) across all Spanish levels referred to learning new vocabulary as part of the experience in their postsemester blog entries. For instance, a learner at the upper-intermediate level wrote that one of his \textit{tareas} [jobs] in the classroom was reading Spanish books one-on-one with students and that he first encountered the word \textit{muñeca de nieve} [snowman] as part of that experience. More than sole exposure to unfamiliar terms, reading Spanish picture books offered university students comprehension scaffolds, including illustrations and a simple written storyline that accompanied and supported the unfamiliar vocabulary and structures.

Language learning also came in the form of academic content terms. Because learners assisted in science classes, their tasks required them to comprehend and use the specialized vocabulary associated
with topics that they had never encountered in their secondary or postsecondary courses. Brett explained that he learned words related to terremotos [earthquakes] and cascadas [waterfalls]:

*I figured out a few classes in that basically they’re talking about land formations, like vocabulary, so I would look it up so I would know it when I’m going to class, like vaguely what they may be talking about . . . so I’d focus on just looking over vocab, trying to figure out, so, I’m not, like, totally embarrassed when I’m there . . . because this was vocab that I simply did not know.*

Brett's need to understand and use language in new contexts, coupled with his responsibilities as a teacher assistant, motivated him to sharpen his content-specific vocabulary knowledge.

In addition to learning general or specialized vocabulary, three of the four interviewees also described how the experience enabled them to learn informal language. Wyatt said, “So I think just like talking to the students and that kinda thing strengthened those, like phrases, like certain phrases are easier to whip out.” Likewise, when talking about students in her classroom, Leslie said, “they had little like repeat-after-me things, like they said manos arriba [hands up] and all the kids would put their hands on their heads . . . yeah, you learn little things like that real quick and remember them.” Leslie and Wyatt also both described how, like the elementary learners, they benefitted from instructional strategies that were designed to make language comprehensible, such as repetition and pairing verbal input with extralinguistic cues. Likewise, an upper-intermediate learner reflected in her initial blog entry that her classroom was ideal for learning. She wrote, “Es muy importante para los estudiantes tener un rutina cada dia. La aula es familiar, y necesitan repetición para aprender [It's very important for the students to have a daily routine. The classroom is familiar and they need repetition to learn].”

**4.2 Linguistic self-confidence**

Related to participants’ increased use of Spanish was their growth in linguistic self-confidence, which has been described as a combination of perceived communicative competence and level of anxiety when using the target language (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei, & Noels, 1998). Linguistic self-confidence emerged as a main topic in the focus group discussions. When asked to share how the experience helped their language learning, all learners, including those who worked in the school setting, agreed that they grew more confident in speaking and listening, especially with native Spanish speakers. One student who was enrolled in the advanced service-learning class admitted that confidence in speaking was his greatest struggle but found that when he went to the school,

*Nunca me ponga nervioso porque ellos [los niños] me entendieron y ellos saben que estaba aprendiendo español. Fue un mentor, pero ellos son mentors para mi. [I never felt nervous because they (the children) understood me and they knew that I was learning Spanish. I was a mentor, but they were mentors for me.]*

A growth in linguistic self-confidence was also revealed through learners’ reflections on their evolving levels of anxiety. Five learners, four of whom were at the lower-intermediate level, wrote in their blog entries that although they began the experience feeling very nervous, they later came to feel much more comfortable using Spanish in the school. One lower-intermediate learner stated,
Al principio me daba un poco de miedo hablar con los niños, porque aunque sólo eran estudiantes de primer grado, muchos hablaban español muy rápidamente. Sin embargo, con tiempo, me sentí más cómoda e interactué más con ellos. [At first, talking with the students scared me a little because although they were only first-grade students, many spoke Spanish very quickly. However, with time, I felt more comfortable and interacted more with them.]

Another learner reflected on how the elementary school classroom setting specifically helped ease the anxiety she had felt during her initial visit about speaking Spanish outside the university classroom:

Cuando llegué a la escuela, estaba nerviosa. No sabía qué esperar cuando fui a la clase. Cuándo llegué a la escuela, olvidé todo mi español. Además, estaba muy nerviosa porque no tenía confianza o seguridad en mi habilidad de hablar español. Es muy diferente hablar español en una clase y hablar español con niños hispanohablantes. Tenía miedo que los niños o la maestra no pudieron entender mi acento terrible o mi vocabulario limitado. La primera hora de la clase, estuve muy nerviosa y hablé un poco, solamente cuando era necesario. [When I arrived at the school, I was nervous. I did not know what to expect when I went to class. When I arrived at the school, I forgot all my Spanish. In addition, I was nervous because I did not have confidence or security in my abilities to speak Spanish. It is very different to speak Spanish in class and speak Spanish with Spanish speakers. I was scared that the children or the teacher wouldn’t be able to understand my terrible accent or my limited vocabulary. The first hour of the class, I was so nervous that I talked just a little, only when necessary.]

Later in the entry, she described how reading a book helped her overcome her anxiety:

Me senté en una de las sillas pequeñas y empecé a leer con un niño. El libro fue sobre Juan y los frijoles mágicos, una historia que yo recordé de cuando era niña. Yo me di cuenta de que la escuela bilingüe no era muy diferente de mi escuela cuando era un joven, y por consiguiente, olvidé de mis miedos de hablar con los niños. Yo estuve sorprendida en mis habilidades para entender el español en los libros y comunicarme en español con los niños sobre sus libros. Olvidé de mis sentimientos iniciales y desarrollé la confianza en mi español. [I sat in one of the small chairs and began to read with a child. The book was about Jack and the Magic Beans, a story that I remembered from when I was a girl. I realized that a bilingual school was not that different from my school when I was young, and therefore, I forgot my fears and talked with the children. I was surprised in my abilities to understand Spanish in the books and communicate in Spanish with the children about the books. I forgot my initial feelings and developed confidence in my Spanish.]

Here, this learner demonstrated how a shared reference (i.e., a common folktale) functioned to connect her to the school experience and how completing a well-scaffolded task helped assuage her anxiety and lack of self-confidence.

Data also suggested that learners attributed their growing confidence in using Spanish to their interaction with children who were also learning Spanish. During the initial interview, Wyatt explained that speaking Spanish with the teachers was challenging but said, “With the kids, it was kinda less
stressful because they’re also learning Spanish, and so it's more relaxed and I feel like I can converse more with them kind of openly.” Working with children supported Brett’s growing linguistic self-confidence in a different way. Relative to the other interviewees, Brett was a weak Spanish student and repeatedly claimed that he “just wasn’t good at languages.” Brett described how he empathized with some of the children in his class who also seemed to struggle using Spanish, sharing for example how he calmed a frustrated student who could not understand the teacher by talking to him individually. Brett said, “I get it. I mean, absolutely, I could understand what he was feeling... there's so much pressure there, but you know, he was just figuring it out and just needs some support.” Brett was able to connect with this student through his own struggles with language learning, recognizing that while learning a language is not easy, progress is possible with support.

4.3 | Metacognitive reflection on language learning

The elementary school setting not only supported language learning and served to relieve anxiety and build linguistic self-confidence, but also appeared to foster university students’ metacognitive reflection on their own learning. Wyatt demonstrated how the experience helped him set personal language learning goals. He explained how assisting students afforded him the opportunity to work on his speaking while multitasking, as he had to clarify instructions for small groups while comprehending the teacher’s directions to the whole class. He said,

\[
\text{When the teachers were kind of giving out instructions for the activities, I’d be trying to watch over the kids, and then it’d become very difficult to make sure they’re paying attention while actually paying attention to what's being said, um, which I never really thought about because with English it’s just like everything’s happening at once... so that was probably the most challenging aspect of working though multitasking and trying to make sure I could do both at the same time.}
\]

In his second interview, Wyatt reflected on his developing skills. He said,

\[
\text{I would say it is somewhat of a work in progress... it's trying to separate what I’m seeing versus what I’m hearing, and it would kind of be like flipping back and forth... like changing channels on the TV, where you’re trying to get the gist of what’s being said while—so then it’s like “All right, I understand this part of the sentence, now I can watch the kids...” just trying to integrate that back-and-forth. I mean 'cause like you can look at something while listening and not pay attention to what you’re looking at, which I was obviously trying to avoid, so my goal is to try to integrate that better where it's much more fluid instead of a jerky process of going back and forth.}
\]

Here, Wyatt demonstrated how the experience in the classroom enabled him to plan and then enact specific learning strategies to improve particular skills (e.g., multitasking in Spanish, understanding language in authentic contexts in spite of distractions, and then transforming that understanding to support and correct students’ approach to a task or activity).

Nearly a third of the blog participants (n = 10, 29%) also commented on language learning more generally. As they reflected on what they believed about effective classroom learning environments, these learners compared either their current or past Spanish learning experiences to the children's experiences. Three stated that they wished they had attended a dual-immersion, bilingual elementary school. Two learners, both at the lower-intermediate level, expressed surprise at the children's Spanish
ability. One of these learners pointed out that although the first-grade students were younger than she was and had fewer years of Spanish language instruction, they spoke with more fluency than she did. Similarly, Brett mentioned in both his interviews that the students were “lucky” to learn an L2 at an early age, lamenting that he did not have that opportunity. At the same time, Brett also demonstrated movement from assuming that all kids learn languages “just like a sponge,” a metaphor he used in his initial interview, to acknowledging in his second interview the real struggles that children faced in learning a language. He described how his struggle learning Spanish became a point of connection with some of the children who did not understand the teacher.

Other participants mentioned particular pedagogical approaches that they noticed in the classroom. Leslie reflected on content-based instruction, contrasting it to her experience learning Spanish in high school for the first time. She explained how her beginning Spanish classes consisted of learning “colors and numbers, and then dialogues and short conversations and things like that,” but was impressed at how the second-grade students learned Spanish through the content. She said,

> They had a fairy tale and poetry unit, and that was something that I wasn’t exposed to before because, like I didn’t read Spanish story books growing up and that’s not something we do in the traditional classrooms. And that was kinda interesting. And makes it so you learn a lot of new vocab and the stories are fun.

Likewise, another learner commented in her blog on the role of conversation. She compared the kinds of conversations she had in the second-grade dual-language class to her experience learning Spanish in school:

> En la mayoría de las clases de español en los Estados Unidos, el énfasis está en el aprendizaje de la gramática y el vocabulario, pero creo que este énfasis es incorrecto ... la conversación es cómo se llega a entender la vida de otra persona y la cultura que todo el vocabulario en el mundo no podía enseñar. [In most of the Spanish classes in the United States, the emphasis is on learning grammar and vocabulary, but I believe this emphasis is incorrect ... conversation is how you understand others’ life and culture ... that all the vocabulary in the world cannot teach.]

Finally, learners also commented on the mix of student language levels in the classroom, observing that some students spoke Spanish in their home while other students were new to the language. Although several blog entries articulated this mix as a challenge for the teacher, one learner commented that this mix meant that “los niños se ayudan unos otros, y trabajan juntos en la clase para comprender las lecciones [the children help each other and work together to understand the lessons].”

### 4.4 Spanish learning motivation and attitudes

The data also suggested that participants’ dual-language school experiences gave them new perspectives on learning Spanish that could potentially support the development of integrative motivation. Participants in 17 different blog entries connected their experiences to the city’s Latínx population. Three of the students mentioned that before this experience they were unaware of the Latínx community outside of the university and were grateful for the opportunity to interact with Spanish speakers in the city. Working at the school enabled the students to see the potential of multilingualism to enact social change. One learner reflected, “Enseñar la inclusión, la aceptación y la colaboración entre todos los niños es la clave si queremos desarrollar un mundo más pacíficamente y justo [Teaching inclusion, acceptance, and
collaboration among all kids is key if we want to make a more peaceful and just world.” Learners evidenced awareness of how using Spanish in the community could promote social justice. An advanced-level learner described how she observed a brecha [gap] between families who speak Spanish as their first language and families who speak English as their first language. She said,

No pienso que la situación mejorá sin americanos quienes entienden y hablan español para ayudar a los inmigrantes y las familias latinoamericanas y por eso mi motivación para usar el español ha cambiado. Quería aprender español para ayudarme cuando viajo a países latinoamericanos; sin embargo, ahora me doy cuenta que también es importante aprender español para mejorar las situaciones de desigualdad en los Estados Unidos. [I don’t think the situation will improve without Americans who understand and speak Spanish to help immigrants and Latin families. Because of this, my motivation to use Spanish has changed. I wanted to learn Spanish to help me when I travel to Latin countries; however, now I realize that it is also important to learn Spanish to improve the inequality in the United States.]

Blog comments about the community Latinx population contributed to a subtheme on social or political issues; 24 (44%) entries evidenced connections between experiences in the dual-language school to larger issues in society, such as education funding, urban housing, and political discourse on immigration. This trend was apparent despite the absence of reflection prompts that specifically required students to address sociopolitical issues. For example, in his final interview, Brett said, “The reason I really chose to do [CBSL program] was also because of the election. I felt that, you know, with what [the current U.S. president] was saying, his actions, you know, trying to build a wall, umm deporting a lot of people, I think it’s, there was something you could actually do, and that’s ultimately why I decided to get involved with a Spanish service.”

4.5 Missed opportunities for Spanish use

While the results suggested that overall students perceived CBSL as helpful to their Spanish language development, data also revealed ways in which the experience elicited English rather than Spanish communication. Learners largely identified themselves as “volunteers” to “help out,” minimizing the learning part of service-learning. Brett reflected how such positioning meant that he prioritized English over Spanish:

It's not critical that I speak Spanish. I mean, it's critical that I speak it, but it's not—in that situation, in that moment, it's not important that I use it. Like, the kids already know what matters in that place, and they’re the priority . . . but when you’re at [dual-language school], well first you’re not the focus; you’re not the student; you are, but you’re not their [dual-language school's] student.

Further, in their blogs seven (21%) of the learners mentioned being asked to perform administrative tasks that did not necessitate communication, such as sharpening pencils, making copies, and cleaning classroom areas. The fact that two of these students were at the lower-intermediate level and five were at the upper-intermediate suggests that task assignment was not a function of course level or language skill.

Learners also attributed their use of English to a discrepancy between their command of Spanish and the language used in the classroom, despite the faculty coordinator's efforts to match advanced
students to upper-elementary grade levels where more complex language was used. Three learners mentioned that the experience did not challenge their Spanish use because they found themselves using English to carry out tasks or communicate with students. Chloe explained that she sought to overcome this by telling the students that she did not know English, which she said worked with only some of the students. Chloe's description exemplifies how the CBSL can foster autonomy, as she made the most of the experience through self-reflection and taking ownership of her actions. On the other hand, one lower-intermediate level student wrote that his class assignment required a use of Spanish that was beyond his current skill level and reflected that he could have learned more if he had been placed in a lower grade. Brett, who was also a lower-intermediate student, expressed a similar concern after his initial visit to his second-grade classroom.

5 | DISCUSSION

Patterns in the data demonstrate the potential of pairing postsecondary, or even secondary, language learners with dual-language teachers and their students as a means of supporting learners’ Spanish language development. In blog entries, interviews, and focus groups, students emphasized that the scaffolding that is ever present in elementary classrooms offered increased opportunities to learn, listen to, and speak Spanish. These results align with other studies on service-learning programs in which participants noted greater levels of confidence in oral language use (e.g., Hummel, 2013). Further, the specific kinds of linguistic skills that learners described (e.g., listening comprehension and vocabulary acquisition) were those that have been shown to be difficult to attain relative to decoding and spelling for L2 Spanish learners who begin language study in middle or high school (Sparks et al., 2017). It may be that the dual-language classroom is fertile ground for postsecondary L2 Spanish learners to improve comprehension while utilizing their strengths in literacy to support elementary children who are still developing readers and writers in both their L1 and L2.

Possibly more than in other community target-language environments, the dual-language focus on promoting language learning offers a nonthreatening setting that encourages student risk-taking and accepts imperfect Spanish use. The classroom thus acts as a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) that invites all students to participate through scaffolded opportunities to use the target language. As teacher assistants, university language learners joined with the young learners in benefitting from this support. Classroom materials and books as well as pedagogical techniques, such as repetition and extralinguistic cues, supported not only the young children but also the teacher assistants in using Spanish. The built-in scaffolds of the dual-language classroom appear important for engaging postsecondary students who have developed relatively little language proficiency and confidence. Given that the tasks involved in CBSL experiences outside the classroom often require advanced proficiency, working as a teacher assistant in a dual-language classroom may open possibilities for students, particularly those at the beginning and intermediate levels.

At the same time, data suggest that not all beginning and intermediate-level postsecondary learners have attained sufficient language proficiency to function confidently as teacher assistants in dual-language immersion classrooms. This does not in any way negate the power of the experience but instead suggests the need for thoughtful preparation that ensures that postsecondary teaching assistants are matched with tasks that elicit their target language use. Consistent with Lear and Abbott’s (2009) recommendations for aligning student and community members’ expectations, faculty might facilitate preprogram conversations with teaching assistants about their roles in the classroom as both language learners and assistants for children. During these discussions, students might consider situations that they could encounter in the classroom. Such discussions are also an
opportunity to provide explicit strategy training about ways for students to work through language barriers without resorting to English, competencies that are generalizable and contribute to proficiency beyond the CBSL setting. To ensure sustained support and shared understanding, teachers from the dual-language school might be involved in this preparation so that they understand university students’ needs and capabilities.

The extent to which university students benefitted from the dual-language classroom depended upon the tasks in which students engaged in the classroom and their opportunities for reflection. First, the kinds of tasks that students were asked to perform in the dual-language classroom appeared to mediate their participation as interlocutors in the classroom community. Across all data sources and all student levels, tasks that elicited the most Spanish seemed to be well scaffolded and goal oriented (e.g., reading a picture book, helping a student with a school assignment). These tasks involved direct communication with children regarding the curriculum. As Brett exemplified, simply managing students’ behavior did not necessitate Spanish language use and in fact seemed at times to encourage English language use.

The data thus suggest that school administrators and staff would benefit from a deeper understanding of the language skills that beginning- and intermediate-level postsecondary L2 learners, in particular, bring to their classrooms. For instance, the L1 literacy that postsecondary Spanish L2 learners possess enables them to decode written language relatively easily and to make cross-linguistic connections (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2006; Koda, 2008), skills that children in dual-language classrooms may not yet possess. However, postsecondary Spanish L2 learners commonly struggle in developing fluency in listening and reading comprehension because their exposure to the target language is often limited to the classroom (Sparks et al., 2017). Dual-language teachers and faculty might work together to understand the language proficiency profiles of participating university students and children in the dual-language classrooms. Tasks could be identified that leverage university students’ strengths as teacher assistants while challenging them to use Spanish in new and meaningful ways.

Second, reflecting on their experiences in the dual-language classroom appeared to contribute to students’ Spanish language learning, a finding that is consistent with seminal literature in the service-learning field (e.g., Zlotkowski, 1998). The data suggest that the school environment in particular heightened learners’ awareness of pedagogy and the learning environment while also stimulating their thinking about sociopolitical issues connected to dual-language education. In some cases, the classroom fueled learner curiosities that begged for discussions, such as the prevalent comment about how learning languages is relatively easy for children compared to adults. A university seminar on language acquisition and dual-language classroom models that accompanies the CBSL experience could provide a forum for students to unpack some of their assumptions and instincts, allowing them to inform observations with research on language teaching and learning. Such a seminar might also address sociopolitical issues related to dual-language schools in general as well as issues that are particular to the community in which students are placed, moving the experience toward the “service-learning advocacy” level on Mooney and Edwards's (2001) hierarchy. As demonstrated in the interview and blog data, the dual-language setting helped some students connect Spanish language use to social justice issues to which they were committed, potentially strengthening their motivation to learn Spanish.

When seeking to apply the results of this study, one must remember that the findings are limited by the sample size, short time span, and bias that is possible when relying on self-reported data. Students may also have felt uncomfortable sharing negative experiences in their blog entries as these were first submitted to their professor, who read them and then passed them on to the researcher. The interview data may be more reliable given that they were conducted by the researcher, who was not affiliated with
the Spanish program, but the number of interviewees was small and all were volunteers. Future research should consider these limitations, involve a greater number of participants, and track data over time so as to shed light on the impact of CBSL in dual-language settings on factors such as learner language proficiency, motivation, and attitudes. Focusing in particular on beginning- and intermediate-level postsecondary learners may be enlightening given the linguistic supports that are inherent in the dual-language setting. In contrast with other CBSL sites, dual-language classrooms appear to make CBSL a highly accessible and meaningful experience for learners who have less-well-developed language proficiency.

6 | CONCLUSION

The increasing popularity of dual-language schools (Boyle et al., 2015) coupled with persistent challenges in hiring qualified teachers (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016) render dual-language schools an ideal setting in which to realize the promise of CBSL, meeting a real community need while providing opportunities for L2 learners to use the target language. This study revealed that postsecondary L2 Spanish learners reported a number of benefits as a result of their participation as teacher assistants in a dual-language classroom. To maximize the potential of CBSL, results suggest the need to align learners' proficiency levels with communication-rich tasks that meaningfully contribute to the dual-language classroom while providing carefully designed opportunities for reflection occurring prior to and during the CBSL experience. Developing such an experience requires thoughtful, ongoing collaboration with university faculty and dual-language teachers.

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APPENDIX A

Suggested Prompts for Reflective Blog Entries

The following were the optional prompts for reflective blog entries.
¿Cómo ha sido tu experiencia? Momentos inspiradores. ¿Alguna situación difícil?
¿Ha cambiado tu motivación para usar español? Si es así, explica cómo.
Impacto que tú has tenido en las personas con quienes has colaborado.
Ideas, preguntas, nuevas oportunidades, etc.

[What has your experience been like? Inspirational moments? A difficult situation? Have you changed your motivation to use Spanish? If so, explain how. What is the impact you have had on the people with whom you collaborated? Ideas, questions, new opportunities, etc.?

APPENDIX B

Guide for Semi-Structured Interviews

The following topics were used to guide semi-structured interviews with the focal participants.

Demographic Information (e.g., age; year in school; major field of study).

Spanish Language Background & Motivation (e.g., history of formal and/or informal Spanish study; experience traveling in Spanish-speaking countries; motivation for learning Spanish).

Spanish Language Learning Self-Appraisal (e.g., global appraisal of self as language learner; strengths and challenges; language skills that are relatively easy and difficult to use).

Background in [CBSL program] (e.g., history of involvement; how found out about program; motivation for becoming involved initially).

Experience in [CBSL program] (e.g., description of activities conducted at the school; specific ways used receptive and/or productive Spanish; particularly positive moments; challenging moments for language communication).

Connection to Spanish Learning (may not be applicable for first interview) (e.g., ways program contributed to Spanish language learning in general and particular to class; ideas for how class could better support Spanish learning; changes in goals or motivation to learn Spanish).

Post-Observation Questions (e.g., description of what occurred; opinions about what went well and what was challenging; questions specific to activities observed.)