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Designing and Integrating a Community-Based Learning Dimension into a Traditional Proficiency-Based High School Curriculum

ELIZABETH LEE ROBY

1. Introduction

When considering the goals of language instruction, few would debate the importance of promoting a lifelong interest in learning language and culture in authentic contexts through engagement in multilingual communities. *The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (2015) state that, to meet the Communities goal, students should be able to “communicate and interact with cultural competence in order to participate in multilingual communities at home and around the world” (9). Nonetheless, instructors often struggle to integrate authentic community engagement into the traditional classroom-based curriculum. The first years of language learning frequently include simulations and role-playing scenarios that duplicate situations in which students may find themselves when abroad. These assignments ask students to react as if they were in Russia; however, most students never make it to Russia.

There are multiple obstacles to integrating the Communities Standards consistently in the early years of language study, the most obvious of which is the perceived difficulty. The most frequently discussed examples of community engagement demand the adoption of a Russian-speaking community as a major structural principle in designing an entire course curriculum (school-to-school ePals or Skype connections, sustained community-service connections, etc.), which may seem too great a commitment or too difficult to arrange. In addition to being difficult to implement, community engagement may involve experiences (such as unmediated class or individual visits to cultural events, museums, or spontaneously invited guests) that feel tangential to the course’s goals due to their lack of integration into the course curriculum.

Another difficulty that instructors face is the need to adequately prepare students linguistically for these experiences. Instructors want to

avoid the scenario where students with Novice and Intermediate Low levels of oral proficiency¹ have an interaction with a native speaker or attend an event conducted in Russian only to conclude that they did not understand anything and feel that overall the experience was a waste of time. Some instructors likely will decide that this sort of interaction is best left until later in the curriculum, arguing that the language skills need to be developed first to support interaction with native speakers. While it may seem logical to delay the inclusion of community interaction until students can communicate meaningfully with greater comfort, a number of studies suggest that language proficiency is not the sole critical factor determining the quality and quantity of interaction when students are put in linguistically and culturally immersive settings. Baker-Smemoe et al.'s 2014 study of variables affecting foreign language (L2) proficiency gains during study abroad found that the strongest predictors of L2 gains were intercultural sensitivity and social network variables, both of which were influenced by the participants' pre-program understanding of the host culture and consequent comfort in seeking engagement with members of the host culture. Dewey et al. (2014) noted that a learner's openness to new experiences was a predictor of L2 use but also that program requirements could push less extroverted students to use the target language. Cadd (2012) and Lindseth and Brown (2014) noted significant gains in interaction with native speakers abroad only after implementing specific tasks into the study-abroad curriculum that required students to engage meaningfully with the host culture. All of these studies point to the fundamental importance of developing strong cultural competency skills alongside linguistic proficiency to ensure that students have the comfort and desire to seek interaction with native speakers. Cadd (2012) and Lindseth and Brown (2014) highlighted the fact that without the structure of required tasks to complete while abroad, many students, when placed in the immersive setting, do not automatically engage in meaningful interaction with the host culture. As a consequence, they frequently do not develop the social networks with the local population that would best support their linguistic and

¹ Here and elsewhere in the article, proficiency levels are defined according to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines (2012). The following abbreviations for proficiency-level designations will be used: Novice-Mid (NM), Novice-High (NH), Intermediate-Low (IL), Intermediate-Mid (IM), and Intermediate-High (IH).

cultural growth. Some structured tasks that require interaction provoke students to engage and often assist in setting up these social networks.

This research by Cadd (2012) and Lindseth and Brown (2014) emphasizes the critical role that educators play in assisting students in their process of immersion. The research parallels what I had witnessed over the past fourteen years in leading my own students of IL/IM oral proficiency abroad on short-term (eighteen-day) immersion programs in Russia that include tutorials and homestays. I have repeatedly witnessed students' engagement in the target language and culture be halted by their lack of knowledge of how best to interact with native speakers given their Intermediate-level language proficiency. In an attempt to address this issue, my co-leader and I hold three conferences with each student. The first takes place three days into the trip, when we discuss the transition and respond to individual student goals; the second takes place halfway through the trip and focuses on the students' level of engagement and progress towards their goals; and the final one takes place at the end to debrief the entire experience. During the first conference, students often express discontent with their language skills, admitting that they disengage from interaction after a simple conversation about their background, interests, and daily events. They often conclude, "I don't know how to say anything else." The conferences help students overcome frustration and better take advantage of their immersion environment. However, waiting to address these issues until the students are already abroad also relegates the first week of a short in-country experience to transition issues rather than to optimal engagement. As a result, I came to understand the absolute necessity of addressing extra-linguistic factors in an experiential way prior to the trip.

Watching my students struggle with the transition into their homestay in St. Petersburg, despite their adequate language skills and pre-trip orientation on how to engage in a homestay experience, made me realize the importance of addressing the Communities goal area of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (2015) more consistently and effectively throughout my curriculum prior to taking students to Russia. In addition, I felt growing discomfort about lauding the necessity of global engagement through expensive international travel while ignoring the rich local opportunities for Russian language

use and cultural learning in our home city of Baltimore. These two realizations prompted me to design a community-learning project and integrate it into the traditional school curriculum each semester at each level of instruction.

The design of this community-learning dimension was initially based on three guiding principles. The projects should

- (1) develop self-awareness and strategies for learning in immersive environments;
- (2) raise general cultural competency skills; and
- (3) align with existing curricular goals for each level, so as to address overall course objectives for the development of language proficiency at a given level.

What I did not know at the planning stage was that the outcomes of the community-learning dimension would be far greater than envisioned in my initial goals. Not only do the projects align with proficiency targets at each instructional level, but the projects also contribute significantly to increased proficiency gains. In completing the required project components, not only do students develop greater general cultural competency skills and strategies for learning in immersive environments, but they also engage every essential Life and Career Skill defined by the P21 “Framework for 21st Century Learning” (P21 Partnership for 21st Century Skills 2007) and develop many of the “habits of mind” that Costa and Kallick (2008) deem necessary for a successful life in today’s world.

The driving force behind both P21 and Costa and Kallick’s sixteen essential habits of mind is the conviction that for today’s students to be successful citizens and workers in a twenty-first century globalized world, they must acquire more than specific content knowledge and content-specific skill sets. They must develop the thinking abilities and the social and emotional competencies that will allow them to thrive in an ever-changing, diverse, multi-dimensional world. While P21 identifies five sets of attributes and abilities to be developed (Flexibility and Adaptability, Initiative and Self-Direction, Social and Cross-Cultural Skills, Productivity and Accountability, Leadership and Accountability), Costa and Kallick advocate for cultivating dispositions that support students to “behave intelligently.” Behaving intelligently involves aligning desired outcomes with one’s approaches to a task: persisting rather than giving up when

confronted with a challenge, thinking flexibly, generating many possible solutions, listening, and allowing one's point of view to be challenged when considering a complicated problem and confronted by multiple perspectives or new circumstances (Costa and Kallick 2008, 15–42). While there is significant overlap between the life and career skills of P21 and Costa and Kallick's habits of mind, the latter are not rigidly defined skills but rather are dispositions that serve people well when confronted with problems (15). Habits of mind determine "how students behave when they DON'T KNOW an answer" (16). While the P21 and Costa and Kallick's work address the need from two different angles, the central premise is the same: educators need to promote in students the learning approaches and behavioral habits that will lead to success. This conclusion is very similar to that of Cadd (2012), Lindseth and Brown (2014), and to my own conclusion in this study, as we have reflected on non-linguistic learning obstacles for students abroad and attempted to implement structures to improve student engagement.

In this article, I will provide a general framework for addressing the Communities goal area of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (2015) by integrating student-driven community-learning projects for each semester of a four-year high school Russian program. These projects complement a traditional language curriculum in a way that furthers proficiency development, fosters self-awareness and strategies for learning in immersive environments, raises general cultural competency skills, and builds essential twenty-first-century life and career skills and habits of mind. The article will describe project components and a process for working with students on these projects at three different proficiency levels, provide guidelines for assessment and recommendations for student support at the various proficiency levels and at various points in the project, offer a selected list of project topics and three sample projects as examples, summarize students' reaction to the community-learning project, and share the instructor's reflections on the project outcomes.

2. Selecting a task for a community-learning project

The large Russian-speaking population in Baltimore provides students with opportunities to learn through community observation and interaction, thereby developing a deeper connection with and understanding of the

Russian population in the United States and strengthening language and cultural competency skills. To these ends, students are required to select, propose, execute, document, describe, and reflect on one community-learning experience per semester.

Students are asked to choose a project site and are provided with a short list of possible places in order to facilitate the selection. They are given time in class to research other Russian events and community organizations in the Baltimore area on the Internet and to collaboratively create a list of ideas and options from which they can individually choose. Selecting a site for a community-learning experience in Baltimore is not difficult; a quick Internet search will reveal a number of Russian food stores and restaurants, bookstores, churches and synagogues, Saturday schools, and cultural events.

Once students select a site, they usually have little difficulty identifying a topic for investigation, but they consult with me when they do. For Novice-level students, the projects by design are largely exploratory experiences. The tasks that students create at this level are usually observation-based and not dependent on interaction with a specific person. Therefore, a planned task is usually executed easily. For IL-level students, the projects continue to be largely observation-based but include a requirement to engage with a native speaker in a transactional way. As this type of communication can be achieved by interacting with any number of native speakers in a setting, this task is not overly complicated. Students with IM or IH levels of proficiency are required to plan tasks that involve an extended conversation with a Russian speaker. Such reliance on outsiders can pose certain challenges, but in almost all cases, proper advanced planning ensures that adequate interaction is achieved. Often students are able to independently identify members of the community to interact with, such as a Russian-speaking priest or rabbi, a native Russian teacher at the Baltimore International Academy, or a Russian restaurant owner, and to arrange the conversation.

The projects are introduced to students at the beginning of each semester; while students must meet certain deadlines for the submission of project components, they are welcome to begin work on the project and to submit reports early. When the project is introduced, students (and parents by email) receive a general description of the project, guidelines for how to plan it, a detailed description of the three required written

reports, and the assessment criteria and rubric (see Appendix B in the online appendices). The level of detail within these guidelines for students ensures a serious level of engagement with the project at each step of the process.

3. Community-learning project: Design principles

In designing the community-learning project, I followed five principles:

- (1) The community-learning setting would be selected by students.
- (2) The linguistic demands of the graded components of the project for each level would be aligned with the proficiency level of the students.
- (3) The linguistic demands of the graded components of the project for each level would further general course objectives for the development of proficiency for that level.
- (4) The structure of the project would be sufficient to ensure that linguistic and cultural competency goals would be met but flexible enough to encourage students to take ownership of the structure of the experience.
- (5) The structure of the project would be the same for all levels to ease the learning curve and to enhance learning from past experiences with this project.

Much of the challenge in designing the project lay in reconciling principle five with principles two and three. On the one hand, a consistent structure (principle five) facilitates student learning from past experience and feedback. A template assists students in understanding expectations and better anticipating opportunities for learning. Consequently, students approach planning with the wisdom gained from past experience. Learning occurs not only with the completion of and the feedback on a given project, but also in between projects as students plan for their next project by taking stock of the commentary received on their prior work. However, to be appropriate and effective, these projects need to be rooted in the curriculum for a certain proficiency level. They do not need to address topical course content, but they cannot have linguistic production demands that exceed the students' current ability (principle two). To be optimally effective as a language-learning exercise, the project should have linguistic demands that are in line with the skills taught and practiced at the appropriate proficiency level (principle three). A model

for how this may be structured will be discussed in some detail in the “Integration with the classroom curriculum” section (6).

4. Planning for the community-learning project

One principle that remains constant in the community-learning projects, regardless of students’ level, is the basis for assessing them. Before students begin planning, they are told that they will be assessed on the degree to which they maximize both the cultural and the linguistic learning potential of the experience they select. To guide students in diving deeply into the experience, I provide them with a list of questions that address the tasks that they might consider doing before, during, and after the project. The comprehensive nature of these questions ensures a high level of student engagement in planning their chosen activity. The following are the questions provided to the students:

- (1) Before the experience: Did you do any pre-research/reading about the planned event? Did you make a list of tasks to complete during the experience (such as the model given to you by your teacher for the first semester)? Did you look up and list some vocabulary that you might need if your tasks will involve using your Russian language skills? Did you include the list of questions that you plan to ask during the experience? (Required for all Intermediate-level students.
- (2) During the experience: Did you note observations of the space, people, events, etc.? How did you engage in the event? How did you use your language skills? Did you learn new language where possible (from posters, menus, words written on objects, brochures, etc.)? Was there any print material available in Russian for you to take? Did you speak Russian with someone at the event? (IM/IH level students must select an experience that involves significant oral interaction with a native speaker.) Did you complete the tasks that you planned to complete? Did you adapt to the situation as it played out and did you complete other tasks?
- (3) After the experience: Reflect on the experience a bit. What meaning might you attribute to your observations? Was the experience

what you expected? What was your emotional reaction to the experience? Was it easier or harder than you expected? What factors made it that way? How did you handle the difficulties? What successes did you experience? Did you experience personal growth and if so, how? What cultural or cross-cultural conclusions can you draw? What follow-up research did you do to learn more? Did you find more information online on the event you attended?

NM/NH-level students: Did you create and learn a personal vocabulary list of at least twenty words on the topic of your experience?

IL-level students: Did you find information in Russian and make an essential list of new vocabulary to help you better describe the event and your experience in Russian?

IM/IH-level students: Did you have a follow-up conversation with a native Russian speaker regarding the event and your observations? (IM/IH students are required to engage in significant oral interaction with a native speaker at some point during or after the experience.)

5. Assessment structure

The assessment structure remains consistent at all levels. Students at all levels (NM/NH–IM/IH) are required to submit three different written reports that are graded as summative assessments:

- (1) Proposal
- (2) Post-Experience Write-Up
- (3) Reflection on Learning

This assessment structure supports students at all proficiency levels to develop effective strategies for learning in immersive environments and to build cultural competency skills. Putting together a proposal with specific plans for engagement before, during, and after the event requires students to imagine how they could engage in a setting using the language skills that they currently possess and how this engagement could be enhanced by some pre- and post-event learning. This cognitive process alone has proved to be one of the significant benefits of the project, as in the past, students' inability to envision how engagement could occur with limited language skills was one of the greatest obstacles to growth on the immersion trip to St. Petersburg.

As the quality of the experience is often determined by the quality of the planning, students are required to submit the proposal a minimum of two weeks prior to the planned experience in order to allow time for feedback and revision. At this planning stage, students generally select tasks that are appropriate for their proficiency level and anticipate what they could do prior to the experience to best prepare themselves for the experience. When they fail to plan tasks appropriate for their language proficiency level, they are provided guidance and are required to rewrite their proposal.

The guidelines for the post-experience write-up hold students accountable for providing a factual report on how they maximized the potential for linguistic and cultural learning.” As we know, the best-laid plans sometimes come unraveled and sometimes the richest experiences are the ones that occur unexpectedly. It is important that students are able to envision and plan for successful engagement, but it is also essential in immersion environments that students are flexible enough to adjust expectations and goals as events unfold. The guidelines provide room for plans to change during the execution of the project and for students to abandon old goals and to create new ones if the new goals become more relevant. The guidelines simply hold students to a high level of engagement and require that they do not abandon the interaction when presented with obstacles. In this way, the project’s structure serves to engage many of Costa and Kallick’s (2008) habits of mind: students practice “persisting” as they become challenged to create alternative plans rather than giving up when their proposed plan has to be adjusted to real situations, they practice “thinking flexibly” as they conceive of these alternate plans, and they practice “remaining open to continuous learning” as their project goals are based on engagement, inquiry, exploration, and discovery. Reflection and learning should be occurring at all stages of the project (before, during, and after the experience). The focus is on developing ideal strategies for engaging in immersion learning by employing “intelligent behaviors” (to use Costa and Kallick’s term [2008, 15]), rather than on following specific, rigid goals that must be met. Building these habits of mind is an essential practice on the path to employing strategies for optimal learning in immersive settings.

All three sample projects included as online appendices (B, C, and D) illustrate some shifts between the proposed plan and the experience

that occurred. The project of the IL-level student presented in Appendix D significantly diverged from his original plan, as the student embraced greater opportunities to engage with the clerk in the Russian bookstore. This student conveys well the richness of learning that resulted from his increased comfort with interpersonal speaking, as he allowed himself to be led by the conversation and suggestions from the store clerk. In the other two projects included here (Appendices C and E), the students failed to fully execute their plans (the N-level student did not meet with the priest as planned and did not learn the meaning of the Orthodox rituals, and the IM-level student did not complete the planned research on the *медовник* 'honey cake'). In both projects, the students did not replace the missing elements with anything else during the experience, so as part of my feedback, I suggested what might be done after the experience to compensate for the missing parts. In all such cases, I want students to complete a post-event task in order to extend their learning. If students heed my suggestions or choose to fill in the learning gap in another way, they may resubmit their reports for a revised grade. My intent in assessing the projects is not to penalize students for their failure to perfectly execute a plan, but rather to teach them to conceptualize how they might maximize their learning given the situation.

The recognition that not all learning must happen during the experience serves as an important lesson for students throughout this project. Students learn that targeted preparation (particularly in terms of creating potential questions to ask and anticipating topical vocabulary needed) can help them to engage more fully in an upcoming cultural experience. They also learn that they may leave a cultural experience not having understood everything but that post-experience research can be done to fill in some gaps in understanding. Since the rich potential of pre- and post-event learning is laid out explicitly for students in the project guidelines, students are trained to see the experience in these terms, to build these strategies for learning, and to see themselves as the primary agents of their learning. The structure encourages them not to fear that which they do not understand in the moment but to seek greater understanding after the fact. The following quote from an IL-level student whose project was a visit to an Uzbek restaurant illustrates this point:

After we finished eating, I asked the waiter about the preparation of my dish, *plov*. He told us about the traditional Uzbek way of

preparing the dish. I didn't understand a lot of what he said, but after I went home I looked up a recipe and was able to piece together his story. It seems that *plov* is a very traditional Uzbek food, and it is cooked in a very big pot. First they cook the lamb, onions, and the carrots, which were "cut like french fries" (in his words). They add pepper and cumin, and then this is all simmered in water. He then told me that the rice is washed many times to get rid of excess starch, so it is less sticky. Then the rice is cooked in water on a medium (*менло*) heat until the water has evaporated off. The rice is then added to the simmering pot with more water, where it continues to cook altogether. I'm glad that I looked up a recipe when I got home, because his story definitely made more sense with the extra explanation. I could get a fairly good grasp of what he was saying, but there were a lot of words that I didn't know.

While the structure of the proposal and the post-experience write-up serve to support the development of certain habits of mind and effective strategies for learning in immersive environments, the required reflection on learning targets the development of cultural competency skills. In their reports, students reflect on cultural products, practices, or both; draw comparisons with their own native culture; and consider personal issues related to their projects. The depth of reflection on the part of the IL-level student (Appendix D) is outstanding, while the Novice- and IM-level students (Appendices B and D, respectively) could improve in this area. The questions I provided to these students in my feedback were intended to help them develop greater depth in their personal and cultural reflection. If they wished to get a higher grade, they could address the feedback in a revised and resubmitted report (for more information on my revision policy see "Deadlines and Revision Policy" in Appendix B). Again, the goal of the structure is not to assess students on their current strengths and weaknesses or on their initial attempts at learning prior to having received guidance, as much as it is to support students in the process of developing more sophisticated skills of cultural, personal, and metacognitive reflection. The greatest growth often comes through a dialogic process. An advantageous feedback-revision loop motivates students to engage in this dialogic process.

6. Integration with the classroom curriculum

While project components and assessment structure remain constant regardless of the proficiency level of the student, the content of the proposal, in terms of the type of tasks that students set for themselves, must be aligned with a student's proficiency level. That is to say, tasks appropriate for a Novice-level student are insufficient for an Intermediate-level student, and tasks appropriate for an IM- or IH-level student are too difficult for an IL- or Novice-level student. Projects should not demand that students produce Russian above their current proficiency level because this can cause frustration and a sense of defeat. Similarly, for students to feel a sense of accomplishment and growth, the linguistic demands of the experience (as they have conceived it) and of the reports should further the course objectives at their instructional level. Students should be practicing in a new context the types of linguistic constructions that they are learning or have learned in class. For this to happen, there needs to be a level of coordination between the community-learning projects and the standard classroom curriculum.

The first step in aligning such projects with classroom curriculum is an honest acknowledgement of what students at various instructional levels in your own program are capable of producing. Instructors must take stock of what their students are able to do in the language and adapt their expectations and assessments accordingly. With the assessment structure presented here, students must be of at least IL-level proficiency in order to have the skills to write the proposal and post-experience write-up in Russian, even on a very basic level. That is, they must be capable of creating with the language and of producing basic future- and past-tense narration. At a minimum, students must possess basic knowledge of the case system, so as to be able to create original (albeit simple) sentences, as well as have familiarity with verbal aspect in order to communicate future plans and recount past events. Until these linguistic features have been covered in the traditional classroom-based curriculum, expecting students to produce texts that require them is not appropriate.

Students in my program complete the reports in Russian only starting in the second semester of grade ten (IL/IM). Grade nine (NM/NH) and first-semester grade ten students (NH/IL) submit reports in English. My decision to have lower-proficiency students complete the reports in

English, instead of using a level-appropriate assessment tool in Russian, is informed by the principle that not all necessary learning is linguistic; requiring students to reflect in writing on their plans, immersion learning strategies, affective responses, and habits of mind grows students' ability to learn in immersive settings.

My last section (Assessment Structure) demonstrates how the three written reports (proposal, post-experience write-up, and reflection on learning) support students of all proficiency levels in developing effective strategies for learning in immersive environments and building cultural competency skills. As a result of the reports' structure, important strategy and skill-building occurs parallel to language proficiency development. Furthermore, while Novice students are unable to create the written reports in Russian, they do use their language skills during the task itself. Foreign-language educators should fight the inclination to prioritize expressive language production and should remember instead that input must precede output and that interpretive communication is one of the three communicative modes. Novice-level students are required to learn language from this experience by using their interpretive (both listening and reading) skills as well as general skills of observation to gather both linguistic and cultural information from an authentic setting. NH-level students are required to create tasks where they can use their interpersonal speaking skills to communicate in Russian in transactional situations and basic question-and-answer formats—the same skills practiced in the traditional classroom curriculum at this level of instruction.

The goals of my grade eleven classroom curriculum include developing the ability to describe in detail and building facility with past- and future-tense narration. Students work toward building IM-level proficiency. In grade twelve, this focus is expanded. Students are pushed to develop advanced discourse functions by being challenged to explain, describe, and share emotional reactions, opinions, and reflections on events, people, actions, and culture in great detail. Another goal is to develop increased fluency in narrating in all time frames while using more connected, extended discourse (see Appendix A for more information on curricular goals at each level of instruction). The demands of the community-learning project in terms of presentational communication (both writing and speaking) are therefore aligned with my curricular goals

at both grades eleven and twelve, and that alignment is demonstrated in my project description demands:

- (1) Grade nine (NM/NH) and first semester grade ten (NH/IL) students write all reports in English.
- (2) Second semester grade ten students (IL/IM) write the proposal and post-experience write-up in Russian using strings of simple sentences (paying attention to tense and aspectual choice, verb form, and case usage and endings). The reflection is written in English.
- (3) Grades eleven and twelve students (IM/IH) write all three reports in Russian. In writing the reflection on learning, students should integrate expressions from the handout "How to express opinions and emotions." Grade twelve students use connected discourse and focus on integrating detailed description with narration in the appropriate time frame.
- (4) All students with Intermediate-level oral proficiency (second semester grade ten and higher) have a final oral assessment in Russian in which they describe (without notes) their experience and their reactions while showing pictures and responding to spontaneous questions. The final oral assessment is conducted after students have received feedback on all of their written reports.
- (5) Students with Novice-level oral proficiency (grade nine and first semester grade ten) submit a personalized list of new vocabulary learned, on which they are assessed.

The inclusion of the final presentational and interpersonal speaking assessment for Intermediate-level students ensures not only that students demonstrate that they can produce reports in the language, but also that they actually acquire the language of the reports. Since the addition of this assessment component two years ago, the linguistic outcomes of this project have been much greater.

7. Working with students of various proficiency levels

Students engaged in the community-learning project at different proficiency levels present a variety of needs. The sections below provide helpful strategies for working with students across various proficiency levels.

7.1. Working with Novice-level students

Upon introducing the community-learning project to Novice-level learners, I questioned whether it is an appropriate choice that most of the work submitted to me will be in English. After considering the option of designing some Novice-level tasks in Russian for students to complete, I decided not to impose that structure, as in doing so, student choice of experience and student initiative in designing tasks would need to be sacrificed. Now, having seen the result of the project as designed, I can attest to the significant learner outcomes from this project even at the Novice level.

In introducing the community-learning project to Novice-level students, I compare the structure of the project to the structure that students find in their textbook *Russian Stage One: Live from Russia!* (Lekić, Davidson, and Gor 2008) when working with reading texts or video activities. The pre-reading/pre-viewing tasks in their textbook provide students with contextual information to assist with initial orientation, the reading/viewing activities provide scaffolding for understanding the text/viewing experience, and the post-reading/post-viewing activities provide practice with language to master. The required proposal in the community-learning project services a function similar to pre-reading/pre-viewing exercises and the reading/viewing structure. Students propose and complete pre-experience reading, research the topic or theme, or conduct other preparation meant to enhance their experience. In creating tasks realistic for their proficiency level to be completed during the experience, students are asked to anticipate and learn language that would assist them during their experience. At the Novice level, I encourage students to focus on the power of observation during the experience (impressions formed from what they see and hear) and to record information of interest to them, focusing on what they can understand or could understand after some post-experience research. After the experience, students decide what language they encountered they want to master and what cultural content they want to explore in more detail. Students then engage in post-experience learning activities, which help them to draw deeper conclusions from their learning and to master the core vocabulary that they have identified. These post-experience learning tasks reinforce their learning in much the same way as the post-reading and post-viewing activities in their textbook do. Some Novice-level students elect to speak

Russian during the experience, but that is not a requirement during the fall semester. Not requiring students to speak Russian during the experience allows students to approach the project eagerly and without anxiety. During the spring semester, a small language production component is added, as students are required to ask three simple questions in Russian during the experience, which at that point they do without anxiety.

The focus for all Novice-level students is on observation; listening; gathering of information before, during, and after the event; and learner reflection. Student reports are astounding in level of reflection, power of observation, and strength of listening skills. During this project, students fulfill the second Standard in the Communities goal area (*World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* [2015]) because they “set goals and reflect on their progress in using language for enjoyment, enrichment, and advancement.”

Students who began doing the projects at the Novice level are now significantly less anxious when conducting Intermediate-level projects than were their predecessors who did not have this experience at the Novice level. Experience at the Novice level makes these students more comfortable in the authentic multilingual contexts and more adept at utilizing a greater variety of communicative strategies and means of negotiating meaning.

7.2. Working with IL-level students

IL-level students demand the most support throughout this project, both in the creation of appropriate tasks that align with their proficiency level and in the completion of the reports in Russian with an acceptable level of language control. While this project can be done largely outside of class with Novice-level and IM/IH-level students, it is wise to devote some class periods to working with IL-level students. My experience has shown that assisting students in the creation of tasks during the proposal stage is essential in helping them to understand their own current proficiency level in the language and realistic expectations for communicative goals. Focusing on having them create concrete questions that they can pose during their experience is helpful to the goal-setting process, as is assisting IL-level students in understanding that their interaction will involve not only speaking but also listening and observation. These students still struggle with basic Russian syntax and do not have control of aspectual

choice as they are just learning to narrate in the past and in the future. In addition, their vocabulary is fairly limited and does not typically include words expected in a report.

IL-level students benefit from in-class writing, because they can ask questions while composing and can focus on the new vocabulary items. Working in class also limits the temptation to turn to Google Translate when students feel challenged by a writing assignment. Students are aided by opportunities to receive feedback and revise their writing. At the same time, IL-level students may write their learning reflection in English because they do not possess the language skills to express detailed emotional reactions and nuanced reflections in Russian. Allowing IL-level students to write the reflection on learning in English also provides an outlet for them to exercise and demonstrate their higher-order thinking skills.

Another practice that has provided significant support to my IL-level students has been the completion of a teacher-structured community-learning project during the preceding semester in the place of a student-structured one. The fall semester of grade ten (NH/IL) is an awkward time in students' language development in my program. Students have not yet learned verbal aspect and so are unable to write a proposal or a post-experience report in Russian, but they have significantly advanced from grade nine in terms of their interpersonal speaking ability. They are able to create a significant variety of questions and use their language skills much more comfortably in transactional situations. All students are at least on the cusp of IL-level proficiency if not already there, and yet they usually experience difficulty in conceptualizing appropriate language tasks that demonstrate their growth beyond the Novice level. Given these challenges, I determined that students would benefit from a model project targeted to their level. Students at this point have just covered a unit devoted to food, during which they learned how to function in a restaurant (discussing a menu, asking about menu items, asking for a recommendation, ordering food, asking for the check, etc.). Capitalizing on this learning, my teacher-structured project involves a visit to a Russian restaurant. Students are given two tasks to complete before the visit, six to complete while at the restaurant, and three to complete after the visit; these assignments show how the students can use language at their current proficiency (see Appendix F). After students are introduced to

verbal aspect later in the year, we return to this project to collaboratively write in Russian a sample proposal and a post-experience write-up for the restaurant visit. The students enjoy merging their realities into a single report, and this common experience provides us with a context to practice formulating future and past tense narration. Students then have these texts to use as models the next semester when they engage in their own student-structured community-learning project. Providing students with such model texts has been instrumental in supporting students to write with greater language accuracy at the IL level.

7.3. Working with IM- and IH-level students

The in-class practice at the writing stage provided to IL students ensures a level of language control that is needed for students moving forward. These same students at higher instructional levels demonstrate comfort in creating accurate past and future tense narrations in the context of their projects because they have done it a year earlier with support. Writing the reflection still challenges students at the IM/IH level, and to guide them, they are provided with a list of useful expressions and constructions.

During the fall semester of grade eleven, IM-level students have the option to either complete a teacher-designed community-learning project (Appendix G) that coincides thematically with a unit they have recently finished in their textbook (a visit to a Russian store) or design their own project. If they create their own project, students use the teacher-designed project as a model. Much as the teacher-structured restaurant visit project functioned a year earlier, this more advanced example provides students with the vision necessary to understand how to create level-appropriate tasks. IM/IH-level students should be encouraged to do pre-experience reading on their proposed project in order to establish the vocabulary base necessary to support comprehension and communication during their experience.

Occasionally, IM/IH students struggle to propose a topic that will adequately challenge them linguistically or culturally. The demand to engage in significant oral interaction with a native speaker at some point during or after the experience" requires IM/IH-level students to go beyond proposing a mere visit to a Russian restaurant or a Russian store with planned tasks that require no more than transactional language use. The experience must include an extended conversation with a

native speaker. One student, for example, proposed a visit to a Russian bookstore to purchase a Russian film. Included in her tasks was soliciting the advice of the store clerk regarding a suggested film for purchase and relaying the details of the clerk's recommendation. That alone was not a sufficient task, but the student enhanced the task by proposing a follow-up discussion of the film with the clerk. What followed was an interesting conversation on the differences in their perspectives on the film, complicated by the fact that the clerk was sick and absent from work on the original day planned for the discussion and the student had to call the clerk to reschedule. When students suggest a setting-based project, they often need to be reminded to construct open-ended HOW? and WHY? questions and to seek opinions from people in order to increase the likelihood of an extended conversation. Many IM/IH-level students choose an interview with a Russian émigré because a planned interview ensures that they will have an extended conversation. In this case, however, students sometimes submit only the most basic biographical questions for the interview. It is helpful to remind students of the need to engage in backward planning and to anticipate the guidelines for the reflection on learning. Encouraging students to tie their simpler questions to a few significant cultural questions has also proven successful in helping them to strive toward greater cultural and cross-cultural learning.

8. General advice on implementing community-based projects

Providing students with adequate and timely feedback and allowing time for revision (see section 5 Assessment Structure) is important to ensure the development of both language and cultural competency skills. The feedback-revision process must provide adequate time and structure for student revisions as well as motivate students to revise. In the four years that I have worked with students on these projects, my process of providing feedback has changed more than any other component of the project. The grading rubric (provided in Appendix B and included in the sample projects listed in Appendices C, D, and E) has not changed over the years, but my method of providing feedback on language control has gone through three iterations. Originally, I circled mistakes without giving any indication as to the type of mistake. Students could revise for a higher grade on language control if they could correct their mistakes and provide an explanation. This method was not successful with the weaker

students because it was too difficult for them to weigh all of the possible options and provide the correct form and explanation for their mistake. The second approach involved indicating the category of the mistake (i.e., subject/verb agreement, wrong aspect, needs genitive case, etc.) and asking students to correct the form. This approach initially seemed more effective because it yielded more accurate student corrections by a greater number of students. However, student writing did not appear to be improving through this method, as students would continue to repeat the same mistakes. My most recent approach to providing feedback has involved full correction of student work (grammatical, syntactical, and semantic mistakes) and asking students to comment on the discrepancies they see between their original text and my corrected text. As students type their reports in a shared Google Docs file, it is easy for me to manipulate their original document and provide a side-by-side corrected version. Students then use the comment function in Google Docs to explain the mistakes they can identify. At the end of their report, they make a list of their most prevalent patterns of error. After these steps are completed, students receive a final grade for language control. Students like this method and seem to be learning more through the process, as evidenced by fewer occurrences of the same types of mistakes in subsequent reports. This method also has the benefit of providing students with a model from which to study for their final presentational and interpersonal speaking assessment (the fifteen-minute presentation to me with follow-up questions).

In addition, I provide feedback on project content and students' reflections with the help of Google Drive, which has also revolutionized this part of feedback. I require students to comment on my comments, essentially engaging them in dialogue about their learning. As these documents with all corrections and feedback remain in shared community-learning Google folders that the students use over the course of four years, students have in essence an archive or portfolio of their community-learning work. Each new project begins with a review of projects and comments from past semesters. Students enjoy seeing their language growth and rereading their own comments and mine. They are able to re-reflect on their learning—both struggles and accomplishments—and take that all into consideration when planning their next community-learning experience.

While students benefit from my feedback over the course of the project both in terms of language production and project content, they do not benefit from peer feedback during the course of the project and do not formally share their final products with their classmates. This is a rich opportunity lost. Occasionally, when a student has done a particularly interesting project, especially one with unique circumstances that render it “unrepeatable,” that student is offered the opportunity to present to the class and often elects to do so. I do not do this more often or provide room for peer collaboration throughout the process, not because I do not recognize its merits, but because I fear that students will begin repeating past projects rather than engaging authentically in a project of their own design. However, students often informally share anecdotes about their experiences and their emotional reactions, and when we engage in a teacher-designed community-learning project, the entire class participates in a post-experience reflection.

9. Sample projects

In the online appendices, readers can find three unedited, first-draft sample projects, one per proficiency level, Novice, IL, and IM/IH (Appendices C, D, and E), in addition to the two teacher-structured community-learning project plans (Appendices F and G). A short list of additional student project topics follows in Appendix H.

10. Student feedback

Students’ feedback on community-learning projects has been overwhelmingly positive. Based on spontaneously shared comments and the content of their submitted reflections on learning, students tend to be most enthusiastic when

- (1) they have been able to make a personal connection through extensive conversation with a Russian speaker;
- (2) they have learned something that they consider significant about Russian culture from the experience;
- (3) they have understood a long story told to them by a Russian speaker;
- (4) they recognize that their language competency exceeds their expectations;
- (5) they have been successful in using their language to communicate

something of personal importance to them (like dietary restrictions or allergies in a restaurant).

Their enthusiasm is connected with a sense of accomplishment and meaningful connection. While many students are truly inspired by the projects and even more students at least recognize their significant value, the affective response to the community-learning project can vary widely, even between two students of equal proficiency level. The two following reflections provide a good example. Both students were members of the same Russian class, were approaching IM-level proficiency, and were even coincidentally at the same Russian restaurant at the same time and had the same server (though they were sitting on different sides of the restaurant).

Student A:

It was an incredibly interesting and eye-opening experience to go to the Silk Road Bistro and attempt to converse entirely in Russian with the staff there. . . . When we asked her [the server] where she was from, she ran with the question, giving us far more information than we had expected to understand, and giving us a look into her life, both as an individual and as a fellow Russian student who had also learned Russian in high school (she grew up in Moldova and only ever really knew the Cyrillic alphabet as a child), who had switched into Russian from a language quite different in sound and alphabet (her first language was Romanian), and who had struggled with the grammar and syntax until she finally reached fluency (she moved to Russia for a while as an adult). It was beyond interesting to hear her story, and I for one was amazed at how much of it I could understand, with her speaking at a normal pace and not trying particularly hard to make sure we were following. It was also touching when, after filling us in on her journey to mastery of the Russian language, she asked us where we were in school, how long we had been taking Russian, and how we were enjoying it. I did my best to respond that I had been taking Russian for three years. . . .

. . . It was a touching moment when the owner stopped by our table, with another young man, presumably a waiter, and both of them commended us in Russian for taking the time to learn a new language, and for coming to their restaurant to practice it. They told us that really the only way to learn the language is

through practice and immersion, so they were happy to speak to us in Russian and to help us if necessary, because they were just glad we were speaking as best we could. After that, I entirely stopped worrying about the mistakes I was making in trying to express myself and just enjoyed talking to them.

. . . All told, the experience was a huge success. The food was incredibly good (I thoroughly enjoyed my PLOV and one of my mother's SAMAS) and the wait staff were beyond positive, helpful, and encouraging. I fully intend to return to the Silk Road Bistro again, and hopefully more times as my language skills increase and I'm able to understand more, at higher speeds, and respond with greater ease, eloquence, vocabulary, and fewer anglicisms.

Student B:

It is always frightening to be thrust into new situations or stressful situations that have not been experienced in a while. I've found that this is a common occurrence while learning a foreign language, the most recent being the community-learning project our class was assigned. In this project, we had to complete a variety of tasks at a Russian restaurant. This required planning, as written through a thoughtful proposal. I had to fit this lunch into my busy weekend, placing it between a basketball game and more homework. . . .

. . . I was faced with one of the most confusing moments at that point, when our waitress asked me in Russian whether my mom wanted a regular or diet coke. I could not pick out the word for regular, which I knew, or the word for diet, which I didn't, so I looked helpless until the waitress helped me out. That left me both embarrassed and defeated, so I remained quiet for a while. . . .

. . . Now approached the most difficult part of this assignment: asking three questions. First, I asked if she was from Uzbekistan. In easily the most confusing portion of this experience, she explained to me how she grew up in Moldova and learned Russian in school and college, telling me not to worry and that my Russian was good and I could learn a lot with hard work. . . .

. . . I was overwhelmed the whole time I was talking to her, praying for a much smaller, and hopefully, slower response from her. . . .

In the above two responses, personality type is the factor that shapes the affective reaction of the students. The anxiety felt by Student B is palpable, interfered with completing the project in a way that satisfied the student, and kept him from developing the habits of mind (willingness to take risks, openness to continuous learning/learning in the moment, resilience, persistence, flexibility, patience with oneself) that support actual success in completing such a task as well as the perception of success. After reading Student B's reflection on learning, I met with him in person to discuss how his anxiety affected his enjoyment of the task and how it prompted his negative thinking. The student is now aware of how this negative thinking negatively impacts his perception of reality and his impressions of his own abilities. Indeed, from the information that Student B shared about his server, it is clear that he understood significantly more than what he gave himself credit for. I was able to point this out to him in a follow-up conversation. Together we were able to identify his perfectionist tendencies as the underlying source of his anxiety and were therefore able to identify strategies for reducing his anxiety in an immersive setting. He is now eager to practice these strategies in his next community-learning project.

Perfectionist tendencies, more than any other personality trait, proved to be the greatest obstacle to optimal engagement in the community-learning projects. "Perfectionists" were less able to be flexible in the moment and less able to connect and communicate, often missing opportunities to engage. Often students noticed the drawbacks of perfectionism themselves and conveyed this realization in their reflections on learning, as seen in the following quotes from three students:

- (1) I am disappointed because I feel that I did the amount of speaking mandatory for the project, but not any more. This was a combination of me wanting to be perfect and my waiter not being there very often. Next time, I would try to speak more because that was the part that really helped me grow
- (2) If I were to repeat this experience, I would want to prepare in a different way. Before I went I was drilling myself with the restaurant dialogues and wanting to perfect them. When I got to the restaurant I found that they weren't that important because I wasn't there to have pre-planned conversations. Drilling

these dialogues just made me more nervous about having a spontaneous conversation because I hadn't memorized the needed language

- (3) Something else also hit me, but only after my visit had already taken place. I realized that I was trying too hard to keep my grammar consistent and correct, and that rather than trying to make my Russian perfect, I should have just been focused on saying what I needed to say and keeping the conversation flowing. The more that I think about it, the more I realize that non-native English speakers speak in broken English all the time, and yet what they intend to say is perfectly clear. I wish I had had that revelation a little earlier so that I could have actually put it to use during my visit, but it's a bit too late for that now, and now I know that I can try out this method in the future

The second factor that has most influenced the quality of the experience for my students appears to be prior experience in immersion settings. The first time that I implemented a community-learning project (in the fall of 2013), my then grade eleven students (approaching IM oral proficiency) were assigned to visit a Russian store and complete some tasks that I had devised (Appendix G). To my great chagrin, many of the students responded negatively to this assignment after the fact, expressing that they felt self-conscious and awkward and that the Russians working in the store did not appreciate their presence and were irritated with them. I and a heritage student in that class were surprised to hear this, as we both frequent this store and have found the store personnel, as well as the Russian clientele, to be very friendly and eager to engage. Upon further explanation, both the heritage student and I understood that the students' reactions were largely due to a combination of them misunderstanding the reactions of the Russians working in the store: they interpreted neutral Russian intonation as harsh, felt ignored since the clerks were waiting to be beckoned before serving them, and assumed that peoples' stare signified irritation rather than curiosity (since a curious person would obviously ask a question, according to them). This was the start of a rich conversation about the dangers of projecting our culturally informed expectations on another culture and about the vast room for cultural miscommunication. Students also acknowledged the role that their own discomfort might have played in making them "less

approachable.” Three groups of students have done this project since this first group, and the reaction of this first group has not been repeated, which could be explained by the fact that the more recent students have had past immersion experiences and do not feel as awkward and self-conscious when engaging with native speakers. Notably, Novice-level students who have never been in an immersive setting have always expressed interest and felt comfortable in doing the community-learning assignments, even the first time around, because they are free to simply observe, without the pressure to engage.

Of the students who have had prior experience in immersive settings, it is the IL-level (not the Novice) students who have expressed the most apprehension. My IL-level students often lack confidence in their ability to use the language spontaneously because of the structured nature of their classroom experience. One IL level student articulated this well:

In spite of the amount of time I spend studying Russian, seldom do I have an opportunity to genuinely converse in Russian. Most often, the speaking I do is restricted to learned phrases for dialogues, or speaking in class with the core of words with which I feel most confident. It was hard to imagine myself just being able to speak without practicing in advance. That was the hardest thing about being at the Russian store.

Many students at the IL level express fear of failure or embarrassment. They fear that they will not be able to execute the task, will not be understood by native speakers, or will not understand what is said to them. Many, however, comment in their reflections on how confidence builds throughout the experience. When confidence does not build, that is usually due to either their perfectionist tendencies or their own unrealistic expectations of the language that they should be able to produce. “I wasn’t able to say exactly what I wanted to say to her. We also were not able to connect because we only talked about facts, not personal details or emotions.” In addition to assisting students to build the habits of mind that would best support comfort in learning in immersive environments, teaching students to align their expectations with their proficiency level is an important gateway to leading them toward greater comfort and appreciation for opportunities for immersion learning. While language proficiency plays a significant role in the students’ affective response to

the tasks, it is, in fact, the intersection between language proficiency and students' own expectations for language production that most determines student comfort with the project.

The written reflections on learning provide much evidence of students' growth as learners. In addition to rich reflection on Russian culture and cultural comparisons, students have expressed achieving a heightened level of self-awareness. They have credited the community-learning experience with leading them to understand obstacles to their learning in immersive environments that are rooted in their personalities (discomfort with unstructured learning and spontaneous language production, fear of failure or embarrassment, a lack of patience with their own skill limitations, an inclination to shy away from challenge, perfectionist tendencies, or lack of resilience). Often this realization, combined with their genuine desire to improve their language skills and their ability to comfortably interact with Russian speakers, has led them to formulate their own personal best strategies for learning in immersive environments, as evidenced by the following reactions from four different students:

- (1) I really had a great time at the restaurant. Everyone was excited to help us speak Russian and make the most out of this cultural experience. I relearned from this evening that there will be things I just do not know how to say correctly, and not to worry about it. The important thing is just to speak and to speak as much as I can
- (2) As a Russian speaker, I grew through allowing myself to make mistakes. In my everyday life I am a perfectionist, which hinders my ability to act in an improvisational speaking scenario most of the time. Finally, I was able to liberate myself of this by telling myself that I did not have to worry about my grammar being correct all the time. Instead I just had to make sure that I got the ideas across to the waiter. Of course, this was a huge challenge for me at first. I wanted to say everything perfectly, so I would take a long time to respond. I would understand what the waiter was saying, but I wouldn't know exactly how to respond. This was a major cause of stress during this excursion, but I did not want to let it ruin the dinner, so I decided to push through it, and I am so glad I did. I will try now to make this a habit

- (3) At this point, I was going to ask our waitress where she was born, but instead froze and could not bring myself to say anything but “thank you” in Russian. I recognize that out of nervousness I often step away from opportunities to speak and am jealous when others tell of their amazing conversations, and so I just realized that I need to force myself to ask questions as a first step. And so, when our server came back with dessert, I asked her where she was born. It was a big first step for me
- (4) I also struggled with understanding some of the things he said sometimes, but I learned that I am good at figuring out these things through context. For example, the waiter would use words that I did not know, but it was easy to get the context from the rest of the sentence and then be able to come up with an appropriate response. I was very pleased to discover this strength, and I believe that it will help me in future immersion scenarios

Repeated experience with the project and instructor’s feedback assist students in developing their ability to accurately assess their current language skills, accept where they are at, and understand where they are going. Recently, fewer students have been expressing unrealistic expectations for their current language production and instead many students have been rephrasing current disappointments into goals for the future. I am receiving more and more comments like the following:

X and I agreed that it would be a very worthwhile place to go on a semi-regular basis. After all, what could be better than Russian vocabulary fueled by good food? It will be fun too to see how much more we can say each time we come as we get to know people here and are capable of more sophisticated conversations with greater fluency. Today, I asked simple questions and understood the answers well. Maybe next time I can plan for a conversation. A year from now I hope to be able to have a real conversation without planning for it. Is that realistic?

In their reflections, students have expressed goals for future experiences without even being prompted to do so. The motif of “next time I will . . .” or “next time I want/hope to . . .” is pervasive in their reflections, echoing the central tenet of the Lifelong Learning Standard: “Learners set goals and reflect on their progress in using languages for enjoyment, enrichment and advancement (National Collaborative Board,

2015, 9).” As students set personal goals, they develop a growth mindset. Gradually over the last couple of years, students have moved further away from an “I can’t . . .” sensibility to a “not yet” understanding. They are seeing that given time, effort, and experience, they can develop both the habits of mind and the linguistic and cultural competencies necessary to engage deeply with Russian speakers.

11. Learner outcomes

This project has exceeded expectations with regard to learner outcomes. Working on the projects, students demonstrate progress on each of the two standards in the Communities goal area: School and Global Communities and Lifelong Learning. Students have engaged locally in global communities through face-to-face engagement in Russian community venues throughout Baltimore and have built the skills for lifelong learning by devising their own projects based on personal interests and individual goals. In addition, students have developed cultural awareness, cultural competencies, and strategies for learning in immersive environments, which have in turn furthered cultural curiosity and extended students’ desire to interact with Russian-speaking communities and their confidence in doing so. Student reports on learning testify to this growth. The nature of the project design and the process of its execution have pushed students to build all of the essential twenty-first century life and career skills, as defined by P21 and to develop many of the habits of mind that Costa and Kallick (2008) deem necessary for a successful life in today’s world. Furthermore, such goals and outcomes have not served as a distraction from proficiency development but rather have assisted in furthering the proficiency goals that already formed the foundation of this proficiency-based classroom curriculum.

11.1. Proficiency development

The requirements for the community-learning project reports (past and future narration, expression of emotion, and support of opinion) reflect curricular goals at grades eleven and twelve (see Appendix A). The projects simply provide a more interesting, memorable, and authentic context in which to practice developing such discourse. The fact that students repeat this project each semester reinforces not only their developing cultural competency skills, but also their communicative skills. With

each experience, they become more comfortable in authentic immersion situations and communicate with greater facility both in interpersonal exchanges and in narrating events and expressing personal emotional reactions, cultural reflections, and cross-cultural comparisons. The final presentational and interpersonal speaking task are conducted without notes for all Intermediate-level students, which ensures that students not just produce but actually acquire the language necessary to describe their experience.

Since the inception of this project in the fall of 2013, I have seen a rise in the oral proficiency ratings earned by students on the OPI section of the Prototype AP® Russian Exam administered in the spring of their senior year. Prior to 2014, IM was the expected proficiency rating earned by strong classroom learners finishing the five-year pre-college sequence, with the IH rating earned primarily by strong students who had also benefited from a National Security Language Initiative for Youth (NSLI-Y) summer immersion experience. In 2014–2016, only three of the IH ratings were earned by students who had additional immersion experience beyond the eighteen-day school trip.

Table 1. Oral Proficiency Interview results 2006–2013 vs. 2014–2016

Proficiency	Friends School Prototype AP® Russian Exam OPI Results (2006–2013) (N = 54)	Friends School Prototype AP® Russian Exam OPI Results (2014–2016) (N = 32)
Novice High	3.7% (2)	0% (0)
Intermediate Low	35.1% (19)	6.3% (2)
Intermediate Mid	46.3% (24)	37.5% (11)
Intermediate High	14.8% (6)	56.3% (19)

With the community-learning project, students, on average, graduate one sublevel higher than those who studied Russian before the inception of the community-learning project. While the relationship between the proficiency gains and community-learning projects must, of course, be seen as correlative rather than causal, the proficiency gains are nonetheless notable. It is not surprising that more students are reaching

the Advanced threshold (IH) thanks to the significantly increased time devoted to Advanced-level discourse functions (narration in all time frames, integration of detailed description with narration, detailed explanation, expression of cultural comparisons, etc.). As a result of the community-learning projects, eleventh- and twelfth-grade students have also been better prepared to engage confidently and extensively with Russians during their eighteen-day spring break trip to Russia, compounding the impact of that experience on their overall language gains.

11.2. Communities standard: Global and school communities and lifelong learning

The community-learning projects require students to engage locally in global communities through face-to-face engagement in Russian community venues throughout Baltimore. In their very design, they address the Global and School Communities goal area of the Communities Standard. More notable is the fact that, as a result, students (and their families) since the inception of this project have a much greater knowledge of the rich offerings of their local Russian community and often take advantage of it now outside of school assignments. They have learned that opportunities for engagement are ten minutes away, not across an ocean, and many students have indeed shown evidence of becoming lifelong learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment beyond the classroom. Students have engaged in personally inspired visits to Russian commercial establishments (especially restaurants and stores) and attendance at Russian cultural events (concerts and festivals), as well as more extensive engagement in Russian-speaking communities. On a number of occasions, initial contact made through the completion of a community-learning project has resulted in an extensive (thirty-hour or more) community service project or a month-long senior work project. Friends School seniors have served as teacher's aides in total-immersion Russian classrooms for a month during their senior work project or as summer camp counselors for a Russian-immersion summer camp program; they have served lunches, organized activities, and taught basic computer use in Russian at a retirement center for Russian-speaking residents from the former Soviet Union. One girl even served for a month as a prep cook and server in a Russian restaurant. By senior year, many students are ready and eager to

seek out unique and more extensive opportunities to engage in Russian with the Russian-speaking community in Baltimore. Even students who do not seek to engage beyond their community-learning projects have experiences as part of these projects that cause them to reflect on cultural products and practices and to draw cross-cultural comparisons. With repeated exposure to the Russian community, increased reflection, and increased opportunities to discuss their observations with their peers and instructor, the Friends School of Baltimore Russian students draw cultural and cross-cultural conclusions that have become more mature and nuanced; the students are developing deep understanding rather than shallow knowledge and are learning to appreciate diversity and to listen to and view others with understanding and empathy. They are truly global citizens in the making. The *World-Readiness Communities* goal area is being met, along with many other objectives deemed necessary for a twenty-first century education.

12. Conclusion

This article has provided a framework for addressing the Communities goal area of the *World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages* (2015) by offering a template for student-driven community-learning projects and by illustrating how these projects may be integrated into a traditional proficiency-based classroom curriculum for each semester of a four-year high school Russian program. The project guidelines address not only the Communities Standard but also the life and career skills put forth in the P21 “Framework for 21st Century Learning” (P21 Partnership for 21st Century Skills 2007). Participating students are assessed on how thoroughly they demonstrate engagement with the Community Standard. The structure of the projects helps them cultivate essential life and career skills and habits of mind that enable them to overcome any roadblocks on the way to successful completion. Without this structure, students are not able to maximize their engagements with real-world speakers. The Communities Standard and the essential twenty-first century life and career skills provide the **WHAT TO DO?** guidelines for student projects while the habits of mind provide the **HOW TO DO IT?** guidelines for student engagement.

While this article is not based on empirical research and cannot substantiate a conclusion that desired learner outcomes have been achieved,

the increased oral proficiency of graduating seniors corresponds to the inception of the project. Much additional evidence (provided through students' detailed reflections on their learning) suggests significant learner outcomes in developing cultural competency skills, essential strategies for learning in immersive environments, and the habits of mind necessary for students to fully engage in learning opportunities in immersive settings.

While designed for a high-school program, this framework could be just as applicable in a post-secondary setting, as it provides a template for how to structure a community-learning project at various proficiency levels to support the development of skills essential for immersion learning, irrespective of the learner's age. The obstacles that I witnessed my students experience with engagement during their first experience abroad are not unique to high-school learners. Indeed, Cadd (2012) and Lindseth and Brown (2014) have addressed these same issues with post-secondary students abroad. Language instructors can provide students with opportunities prior to their study-abroad experience that will help them develop necessary skills for engagement with native speakers, build confidence, and strengthen the dispositions necessary to "behave intelligently" (Costa and Kallick, 16) when engaging with global communities.

Appendix

Supplementary materials can be found at <https://sites.google.com/view/elizabeth-lee-roby/home> or via scanning the QR code below



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