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Review

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Annie R. Abbott. *Comunidades: Más allá del aula*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2009. 157 pp.

Written by Dr. Annie Abbott, Associate Professor of Spanish at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, who has been Coordinator of Spanish language courses for 15 years, *Comunidades* is an intermediate Spanish-as-a-second-language text that is solidly based on the Community Service Learning (CSL) educational methodology. As such it forms part of the interest sphere of languages for special purposes (LSP). It is probably the only Spanish-as-a-second-language text whose special orientation is community interaction with the Spanish-speaking segments of the US population. The author writes this text from a solid background in experiential learning and as the author of several articles on Community Service Learning, which she strives to use as the cornerstone for many of the exercises and assessment tools in the text.

The structure of *Comunidades* is designed to offer a logical sequence of activities. The book is divided into five units (*unidades*), some of which have four chapters and some five chapters for a total of 23 chapters. Written completely in Spanish, the subjects of the *unidades* are (1) introduction to community service learning, (2) public education, (3) social services, (4) aspects and history of our community, and (5) a unit dedicated to reflection, an important aspect of both CSL and experiential learning. The topics of the chapters are meant to provide readings that stimulate discussion related to CSL and provide background for topics of interest to the Spanish-speaking community in the USA. For example, chapter 16 deals with oral history and involves an interview between a young Hispanic and his parents about an illegal crossing into the United States from Mexico. Chapter 6 deals with cross-cultural aspects of working in the Spanish-speaking community, and Chapter 8 discusses the sometimes controversial theme of bilingual education. Each chapter presents the topic first in its social context through a dialogue or vignette illustrating the oral nature of the subject being presented. The author has deliberately selected topics that may be controversial but that will provide

important cultural knowledge for her intended audience of intermediate-level college students and stimulate discussion.

The book is not a review of all grammar points. Instead, it concentrates on linguistic items that students actually have trouble with when they go out in the community. Example of this are filing Hispanic names (lesson 13), orders when helping in a public elementary school (lesson 5), and numbers (lesson 7, especially *Actividad 7-3, Paso 3, p. 2*).

Many of the lessons focus on professional skills that college-age students may not have acquired or perfected yet. Examples of this are writing a professional, detailed thank you note to the community partner (lesson 23) related to a recent headline; and taking complete and correct messages (the number one complaint of community partners, that students can't get telephone messages right).

Transcultural competence is approached by having students first examine their own cultural perspectives and those of others. For example, in Lesson 8, students examine their experiences learning Spanish and then compare them to the experiences of Latino immigrants and the expectations from others that they should learn English.

The online resources round out the activities in the book. At the companion Web site (http://wps.prenhall.com/ml_abbott_comunidades_1/) students can access video interviews, audio files for listening comprehension, pertinent Web sites, and reflection prompts. The online Instructor's Resource Manual includes the typical information—scripts, answer key, teaching tips, and rubrics—as well as a guide for starting a CSL course with a community partner. The author's blog (<http://spanishandillinois.blogspot.com/>) provides additional activities, student reflections, and an opportunity to dialogue about the possibilities and challenges of combining community service learning with the teaching of languages for a specific purpose. For example, one of the blogs deals with the problem of writing an exam for a Spanish CSL course, something that is never easy. Following the advice to “test what you teach and how you teach” carries some difficulties.

Comunidades is a solid book with a new and original approach that integrates practical language, experiential learning, business concepts, and culture in an effective manner. This result comes—no doubt—from the vast experience of the author in the classroom and her extensive first-hand knowledge of community service learning. With the growing rise in Spanish-speaking populations, this book becomes a vital tool for exposing students not only to the spoken language but to aspects of the Hispanic culture with which they will have in the future a business and professional encounter.

ADDITIONAL READINGS

1. Lear, Darcy, and Annie Abbott. "Staking Out a Middle Ground: Innovative Language Programs Give Students Professional Skills and Encourage Service Learning." *The Language Educator* 3.6 (2008): 14–17. http://www.actfl.org/files/TLEsamples/TLE_Nov08_TOC.pdf
2. Pellettieri, Jill. "Measuring Language-related Outcomes of Community-based Learning in Intermediate Spanish Courses." *Hispania* 94.2 (2011): 285–302.

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