



Foreign/Second Language: Serving through Words

What if learning Spanish were about giving, receiving, and respect?

Jack taught Spanish and regularly used an activity in which the class planned an imaginary vacation to Spain. Although he did not want to change the activity, Jack wanted the students to think more about what sort of tourists they would be. He wanted them to think about giving as well as receiving as tourists and how they could serve others, even on vacation.

"I kept the first part of the lesson the same. The students decided on their vacation and activities, and figured out what words and phrases they would need to negotiate the activities. They role-played different situations, such as what language was necessary for the hotel and the restaurants. They researched this for themselves as much as they could and drew on each other's language knowledge, listing any gaps and how they could fill them.

"I asked the students what language they would need in order to give to the country they would be visiting and how they would show respect. This part of the lesson was about learning the language of manners, helping, encouraging, giving, and serving—language such as 'I'm sorry,' 'Can I help you?,' 'I apologize,' and 'Thank you for helping me.' We also role-played these situations."

What's going on here?

Jack saw learning Spanish as a way of helping students love their neighbor and experience giving and receiving.

He engaged his students in a planning, researching, and experiencing role-playing process that intentionally considered treatment of others, seeking their good, and giving an account.

He reshaped his practice by using a key question to focus on giving, and by supporting it with role-play activities and language practice that were consistent with the new focus.

What does this have to do with faith, hope, and love?

Jesus taught that it is more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). He made it clear that in the kingdom of God, those who are greatest are those who serve. For Christians, this attitude of service stems from a love of God and others; Jesus said that he accepted service and giving done to others as though it had been done to him. The New Testament talks of loving an unseen God by loving people around us.

What difference does it make?

Jack's lesson offered students a different frame as they thought of interacting as a tourist in a new way and using their language skills to seek others' good rather than just access services.

Where could we go from here?

The same kind of changes could be made to any language lesson. Teachers can think both about the language used when traveling to the target culture (e.g., is learning how to complain balanced by learning how to praise and encourage?) and about the language used in class (when talking about likes and dislikes, do students focus only on their own preferences, or do they listen to those of others?).

Digging deeper

Servants were the hired hands and slaves of Jesus's time. Jesus took the word *servant* and gave it a new meaning. A servant previously had been a person under the authority of others, but Jesus redefined it in terms of leadership and greatness. As the "Servant King" he washed his disciples' feet (John 13:14-15) and expected his followers to be willing to

act similarly. The Bible describes how Jesus gave up everything and came in the form of a servant to become a member of the human race ([Philippians 2:5-6](#)). Jesus said that he had come not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many ([Mark 10:45](#)).

The duty is now emphasized of serving God in the world, in every position in life. Abraham Kuyper

Giving is a strong motif in the Bible. God loved the world by giving his only son ([John 3:16](#)). Our giving is in response to God's giving to us. Giving and receiving are essential parts of Christian community life. The Bible describes this as "sowing": putting time, love, skill, effort, and money into others. In turn, people reap what they sow; it is not a rigid equation, but those who sow love are more likely to reap it ([2 Corinthians 9:6-7](#)).

One of the principal rules of religion is to lose no occasion of serving God. And, since he is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve him in our neighbor; which he receives as if done to himself in person, standing visibly before us. John Wesley

The word for "respect" in biblical Hebrew is related to bowing down. Respect and honor were shown by a physical position. We may not have the elaborate courtesies of some cultures, but we still can explore with students how we show respect today.

Next: Words and Care

Word and What if the choice of wo...



