Integrating career preparation into language courses

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Lear, D. (2019). *Integrating career preparation into language courses*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.

The book *Integrating career preparation into language courses* was published in 2019 by career coach and university lecturer Dr. Darcy Lear, who has a PhD in foreign and second language education, as well as twenty years of university teaching experience. This book was written to encourage foreign language faculty to incorporate career preparation into their language programs, which may help foreign language students capitalize on their language skills when searching for a career.

In the first chapter, Lear (2019) clearly states that the goal of this book is to provide foreign language instructors with the materials, lesson plans, and assessment tools necessary to help prepare students for the workforce. Lear asserts that this can be done in ways that utilize the skills that students are already learning in their foreign language classes, such as "meeting and greeting, preparing written and verbal summaries, engaging in correspondence and presentations, and digital literacy" (p. 1). The book is organized in a way that allows instructors to choose a chapter that focuses on the workplace skill they would like to integrate (gatekeeping, networking, correspondence, presentations, or digital literacy) and to browse through a variety of engaging activities that can be incorporated into an already existing curriculum. An appendix is available at the back of the book with example assessment rubrics and agenda structures for each skill.

Each chapter starts with a "Here's What You're Already Doing" section that discusses how the workplace skill in question is already being utilized in the foreign language classroom. This is followed by a "Here's What to Add" section with suggestions on workplace-specific additions. Finally, there are clearly labeled lists of supplemental pedagogical materials, activities, and assessment tools that are differentiated by level (novice, intermediate, and advanced) and sufficiently detailed to allow for easy replication in the classroom. Ideas for adaptation are provided for situations in which certain material has not yet been studied in the curriculum.

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In the "Gatekeeping" chapter, Lear (2019) discusses how professors can train students to collaborate with classmates using written and spoken communication skills in a way that will increase their level of independence, ability to deal with ambiguity, and problem-solving and decision-making skills. It is vital that students find ways to "show, not just tell" (p. 10) how the skills they've developed can be transferred from an academic culture to a workplace culture. Of particular importance are the sharing of contact information and being able to give or take a basic message in a second language. Even the most basic language skills, like the alphabet, can be shown to have real-world relevance. Students must develop transcultural competence, or the ability to "see their own culture and cultural artifacts from an outsider's perspective" (p. 15). In doing so they learn to analyze the effect that communication errors may have, while developing an understanding of the linguistic and cultural barriers that may impact one's ability to gain access to an organization.

In the "Networking" chapter, Lear (2019) illustrates how educators can move beyond the simple get-to-know-you questions used in foreign language classrooms and add training in professional networking to help students further develop transcultural competence. Students can practice acquiring an understanding of what is culturally appropriate through observation, conversation, and trial and error. They can also refine their awareness of how body language communicates that which is not spoken. Furthermore, they can continue to develop crucial listening skills. These skills can be applied not just in the target culture of the language being studied but also elsewhere in the workforce.

In the "Correspondence" chapter, Lear (2019) explains how professional correspondence methods such as agenda preparation, email writing, and cover memo preparation can be incorporated into lesson plans in ways that can both enhance students' professional skills and reduce their dependence on the instructor. Again, Lear focuses on reflection and development of transcultural competence when completing these activities.

In the "Presentations" chapter, Lear (2019) suggests that instructors ask students not just to perform formal presentations to a passive audience, but to construct presentations that actively engage audiences just as may be expected in the business world. Reporting back from group work can be incorporated as practice for completing project or committee updates. Students can also be asked to present as though they are participating in a job interview.

In the final chapter, "Digital Literacy," Lear (2019) stresses the importance of allowing students to troubleshoot their own technical issues while using discussion threads, online research tools, and other technology. Students should also be encouraged to practice skills such as web site development and database management and be able to communicate what they can and cannot do with technology. This chapter also suggests activities for different types of technology. These include word processing software, design software, spreadsheet and database applications, digital slide and presentation applications, web site design, and troubleshooting.

A potential limitation of this book is its focus on English as the first language (L1) of students when this is not always the situation in language learning classrooms. Suggestions for expanding activities to include students with an L1 other than English would be a helpful addition. Additionally, it would be beneficial to include more example rubrics and tables in the appendix. More examples that integrate language proficiency with workplace skills, such as the "can do" statements from the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) in the networking skills assessment, would be

particularly useful. Taking these steps may provide educators with an even more expansive toolkit to assist them in meeting the needs of their students.

The wide variety of activities and ideas provided by this book makes it a practical tool for educators wishing to prepare their students not just for target culture immersion, but immersion into the working world. Lear (2019) very clearly illustrates how the traditional reading and writing literacy that is taught in foreign language programs can be utilized in developing a workplace literacy. This book would be a highly valuable asset for any foreign language educator or curriculum specialist hoping to incorporate more real-world applicability into their pedagogical practices.

References

Lear, D. (2019). *Integrating career preparation into language courses*. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press.