“It gave me the confidence to talk to people in my neighbourhood”: Understanding the Impact of Sociocultural Activities Hosted by University Language Learning Centers

Immersive outings in the city, animated conversation circles, and fun game nights facilitated by students in the target language — these are a glimpse of the offer of three Quebec universities, where sociocultural activities redefine language education beyond traditional classrooms. These universities are exploring new ways to ease their students into practising the language — tapping into informal and experiential learning.

Building on previous findings by Reva (2012), Yildiz (2016), Sandal, Detsiuk & Kholiavko (2020), and Cabrera Arias (2022), this qualitative, phenomenological study aims to transcend the quantitative inquiry of whether non-classroom activities benefit language learners. Instead, I seek to understand:

1. What unfolds within the diverse experiences of participants in immersive sociocultural activities? What about the experiences of those involved in setting up and running such programs?
2. Do such activities offer opportunities for Lx / L2 socialization (Duff, 2011)? If so, how, and what are the implications for Lx education for adults?
3. What nuanced challenges and advantages emerge in the qualitative exploration of launching and sustaining such programs? Interviews with students, facilitators, coordinators, educators, and directors at three university language learning centers in Quebec have been conducted, and this study is currently in its data analysis phase, with fascinating patterns emerging so far (language learner confidence, social anxiety, Lx/L2 socialization (Duff, 2011), and attitude-behaviour relation in language (Ladegaard, 2000), and learner’s personal investment (King, Yeung & Cai, 2013).

This study unveils a topic that is severely understudied — and that was never approached from the lens of Lx/L2 socialization before. It comports fascinating practical implications for any language teaching entity seeking to develop a program of activities taking place outside the classroom. Furthermore, in the age of AI, it is highly possible that an increase in informal learning may emerge as a notable trend for the future.

SPEAKER

CHAMA LAASSASSY

Chama Laassasssy is a lecturer and researcher at McGill University, as well as a community organizer and activist. Various of her personal experiences teaching and learning languages, as well as coordinating alternative education programs have ignited an interest in outside-of-the-classroom learning and how it can provide students with rich learning opportunities. Chama is concurrently working on an asset-based community development initiative aimed at addressing dropout prevention in her native country Morocco, specifically in Nador and its outskirts. This initiative employs alternative education methods and play-based pedagogy to ensure teens stay in school.