Connecting to the Community: Service-Learning Methods in an ESL Classroom

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CONNECTING TO THE COMMUNITY:
SERVICE-LEARNING METHODS IN AN ESL CLASSROOM

by

Chelsey Sara Funk

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree

of

DEPARTMENTAL HONORS

in

English Teaching
in the Department of English

Approved:

UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY
Logan, UT
Acknowledgements

I would like to express sincere appreciation to my thesis advisor, Dr. Sonia Manuel-Dupont. Sonia helped me find a project that incorporates my diverse interests and is meaningful on both a personal and professional level. She provided invaluable insights throughout every step of the process, and I am grateful for her enthusiasm and her firm belief in the potential of all students, including me.

I would also like to thank my departmental honors advisor and committee chair, Dr. Phebe Jensen, and my additional committee member, Dr. Joyce Kinkead. Dr. Jensen and Dr. Kinkead gave useful feedback and advice, and I appreciate the interest they have taken in my thesis and my future.

Additionally, I thank Melinda Lofland for her guidance and her willingness to let me work with her amazing students. I thank Ginny Tremayne and the rest of the staff at the Hyrum Library for their friendly assistance in providing a venue for our community presentation. I also thank the USU Department of Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education for donating books for the presentation.

Finally, I would like to thank my various professors at Utah State University and my Honors advisors for encouraging me and broadening my perspective throughout my university experience. I will carry their influence with me as I begin my teaching career.
Abstract

High school English as a Second Language (ESL) students often feel separated from their schools and communities. These feelings of separation can lead to low engagement and low achievement despite the students’ desire to do well in school. One method used to counter low engagement in mainstream classes is service learning, but there is little research on service learning with ESL students. In this study, an existing group of 9th grade ESL students was taught and observed to determine the feasibility and effectiveness of using service-learning methods. The project endeavored to tie academic work to community involvement and therefore increase student engagement and academic confidence. Throughout the implementation of the service-learning project, students displayed increased classroom involvement and reported improvements in attitudes and self-assurance. The methods and procedures described in this paper can be adapted to larger class sizes and a variety of projects in order to increase engagement and academic confidence in ESL students.

IRB Approval:

“Connecting to the Community: Service Learning Methods in an ESL Classroom” (Protocol #5044) was approved by Utah State University’s Institutional Review Board on March 18, 2013 (see Appendix A).
Connecting to the Community: Service-Learning Methods in an ESL Classroom

In the summer of 2012, I spent two months teaching English in Cambodia. This experience opened my eyes to the importance of empowering students through language education. When I returned to the United States, I added an ESL (English as a Second Language) minor to my English Teaching bachelor's degree and began volunteering in local ESL classrooms. A major difference I saw between English Language Learners (ELLs) in Cambodia and ELLs in Utah was that my Cambodian students had a stronger sense of community with each other and in their neighborhood and city. This corresponded with a more positive attitude about school and specifically about learning English. The ESL students in Utah seem disconnected from their community and even from the mainstream classes in their own schools. As a result, many ELLs lack confidence in academics. I began talking with my ethnic literacy professor, Dr. Sonia Manuel-Dupont, about how to improve students' attitudes through community involvement. As a result, we designed a plan to implement a service-learning project that would enable teenage ESL students to be leaders in their community.

Rationale

In 2009, three psychologists studied 103 instances of service learning, analyzed the academic, personal, social, and citizenship outcomes for participants, and "found the largest changes for academic outcomes and for beliefs, knowledge, or attitudes toward those being served" (Conway, Amel & Gerwien, 2009, p. 240). They studied 3 elementary school projects, 6 middle school projects, 33 high school projects, 46 university projects, and 15 projects with adults or mixed participants. Academic and personal outcomes were highest in projects that were connected to curriculum and incorporated structured reflection. The researchers reported, "Any one of the major types of outcomes is viable for service learning courses, but we suggest
targeting particular outcomes and designing service learning experiences appropriately” (Conway, Amel & Gerwien, 2009, p. 240). Taking this recommendation into account, I created a service-learning project to teach my students to value their English education while empowering them to succeed academically and socially.

**Review of Literature**

Service learning is best defined as “a research-based teaching method where guided or classroom learning is applied through action that addresses an authentic community need in a process that allows for youth initiative and provides structured time for reflection on the service experience and demonstration of acquired skills and knowledge” (Kaye, 2010, p. 9). High school students are told to be responsible and self-motivated, but then they are placed in learning environments that inspire negligence and apathy. Students can easily identify “busywork that [has] little connection to deep learning” and “while many are willing to play the game to avoid being challenged, others are distraught at the realization that they are being shortchanged” (Delpit, 2012, p. 74-75). Students do not feel responsible when copying phrases from a textbook or passively watching a video. They do not feel motivated when they cannot see the purpose of their academic work.

However, service learning encourages students to take initiative and care about an authentic need. Service learning gives teenagers the rare “opportunity to be responsible, caring, participating members of society. Rather than prolonging their dependence on adults, undermining their self-esteem and crippling their capacity to care, schools with service learning components can empower youth to succeed” (Witmer & Anderson, 1994, p. 5). Contrary to popular belief, teenagers are not innately apathetic. In reality, “teens are some of the most active participants in service and social action. In the United States alone, over 15 million young people
volunteer with community organizations each year” (Lewis, 2008, p. 1). Researchers who collected data from 187 elementary and secondary school students recommend, “Service-learning should be advocated more enthusiastically in secondary schools than in elementary schools” due to the self-esteem benefits for teenagers (Wang, Greathouse, & Falcinella, 1998, p. 104). Service learning directly “connects school-based curriculum with the inherent caring and concern young people have for their world” (Kaye, 2010, p. 8). When teachers commit “to the belief that young people are competent, capable, and quite able to make a contribution to their world,” the students will rise to fulfill higher expectations (Witmer & Anderson, 1994, p. 9).

Program Design

After meeting with the ESL teacher at South Cache 8-9 Center, I decided to work with a pre-existing class of six ninth-grade ESL students (see Appendix B). I implemented this pilot program on a small scale so I could most effectively monitor individual students’ attitudes and experiences. It was also important to know the students well enough that they would be comfortable talking with me, and I knew I would only be working with them for a few weeks.

When designing this project, I turned to the work of service learning specialist and former classroom teacher Cathryn Berger Kaye. Kaye identifies five stages of service learning: investigation, preparation and planning, action, reflection, and demonstration. Lesson plans and materials for my service-learning project at South Cache are placed in this section, organized by Kaye’s stages.

Investigation

Investigation includes analyzing “the resources within the student population” as well as “community need” (Kaye, 2010, p. 16). Ideally, the students complete this process themselves in
a classroom setting. However, due to time constraints and available resources, I investigated the students’ abilities and the community need before telling the students about the project.

To assess the students’ resources, I observed them at school for a total of four class periods. I learned that all six could communicate well in English, but only two of the six students were passing a majority of their classes (M. Lofland, Personal Communication, March 20, 2013). After building rapport with the students, I privately asked Student 2 why she was getting so many Fs. She said, “I don’t do my homework. And it’s hard.” I asked her what makes it hard, and she responded, “I don’t really get what they [teachers] want me to do. I want to learn, but homework is confusing and stupid.” I offered to help her with her geography homework, and I explained that she was supposed to label rivers and mountains and then color different regions of the map different colors. She looked at me and said, “That’s easy, though. And kind of stupid.” Fighting the urge to agree with her, I told her that coloring the map will help her understand and visualize what her teacher is talking about in class. She shrugged and got to work labeling.

As I spoke with the other students and helped them with homework at the end of each class period, I became convinced that their poor grades were not the result of inability or apathy. These students were failing several classes primarily because they didn’t understand instructions the first time, and they felt like they were too far behind to catch up. Students expressed a desire to learn and succeed in school, but they felt doomed to failure. I knew that I couldn’t restructure their classes or explain everything a second time for them, but I hoped that the service-learning project would give them confidence in themselves and help them feel more support from their school and community. I began planning student activities that would challenge the students appropriately and allow them to help each other learn, building a stronger classroom community while working to help the community at large.
I investigated the community need by talking with Dr. Manuel-Dupont about the lack of literacy education among parents with young children in the community. Many parents are short on time and resources, but reading to children helps them succeed in school and in life. I thought this issue would resonate well with the students, and we decided that the students would research why parents should read to their children and present their findings to the community. Dr. Manuel-Dupont offered additional resources, making it possible for us to give picture books to each child who attended the presentation.

**Preparation and Planning**

Preparation occurs as “students explore, research, and discuss the topic… In this process of active learning and critical thinking, students grow to understand the underlying problem as well as related subject matter. Analysis, creativity, and practicality lead to plans for action” (Kaye, 2010, p. 16). The preparation and planning stage for this project took place during eight class periods over the course of two weeks.

**Lesson 1: Introduction to Research**

After briefly introducing themselves, my students completed an opening questionnaire so I could gauge their understanding of and interest in service learning. The written questionnaire was immediately followed by a verbal discussion. When asked about their current community involvement, the students wrote that they played a variety of sports (soccer, basketball, softball, and volleyball), and many students participated in church youth groups. I asked if they saw a connection between school and these activities, and the students all agreed that community activities are separate from school, except for the fact that they see some of their friends at school and at community activities. It would be a new experience for all six students to directly transfer education into action in their communities.
When asked to define community-based learning, Student 2 wrote, “I don’t know but probably means working for the government? [sic].” Student 5 responded with a simple “idk [I don’t know].” Student 3 suggested that community-based learning “is where a town gets together and learns something.” During our discussion, I defined community-based learning as gaining knowledge or skills that help us serve in our communities. I told the students that we would be starting a project that would allow them to use what they learn in school to benefit the community. Several students looked skeptical, and the others looked nervous. I further explained that they would be researching information on reading to children, then presenting their research to parents and children in the community. The students told me they had very little experience with doing their own research, but I assured them that we would work on it until they were comfortable.

Utilizing several ELL teaching strategies, I introduced our first major learning activity. I created a graphic organizer to help the students keep track of all the components they needed to find when doing research on the Internet (see Figure 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Introduction to Research</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Names:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date:</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Write answers and citations for each research question in the spaces below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question: Where was William Shakespeare born?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Answer: Stratford-upon-Avon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Organization: Amanda Mabillard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of Article or Webpage: Shakespeare's Birth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Published: 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Retrieved: March 26, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web URL: <a href="http://www.shakespeareonline.com/biography/shakespears">www.shakespeareonline.com/biography/shakespears</a> birth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Research Question: What are the first four lines of the song "Marry You" by Bruno Mars?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Just a feeling right now it's got me so paranoid. Just a feeling right now it's got me so paranoid.</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>Author/Organization</th>
<th>GraceUFC</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of Article or Webpage</td>
<td>Marie lyrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Published</td>
<td>2018</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Retrieved</td>
<td>March 28, 2018</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Research Question: How should I ask someone out on a date?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>If you get told no, be upfront and ask again if you're really sure, but rely on your intuition.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Organization</th>
<th>Yun Kim</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of Article or Webpage</td>
<td>The Nick Vujicic's guide to asking a guy out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Published</td>
<td>December 15, 2011</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Retrieved</td>
<td>March 26, 2013</td>
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</table>

### Research Question: What do tigers eat?

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<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>Meat</td>
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<tr>
<th>Author/Organization</th>
<th>Michael Piazza</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of Article or Webpage</td>
<td>WWF Global</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Published</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Retrieved</td>
<td>March 26, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web URL</td>
<td><a href="http://www.wwf.org/what.We.do/endangered.species">www.wwf.org/what.We.do/endangered.species</a></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Research Question: Who invented television?

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<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>Philo Farnsworth</td>
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<th>Author/Organization</th>
<th>Ploy Link</th>
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<tr>
<td>Title of Article or Webpage</td>
<td><a href="http://phys.org/science-news">phys.org/science-news</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Published</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Retrieved</td>
<td>March 26, 2013</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Research Question: When was the Constitution of the United States signed?

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<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>September 17, 1787</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author/Organization</th>
<th>A&amp;E Biography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title of Article or Webpage</td>
<td><a href="http://history.com/science">history.com/science</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Published</td>
<td>2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date Retrieved</td>
<td>March 26, 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Web URL</td>
<td><a href="http://www.history.com/today-this-day-history-us-constitution-signed">www.history.com/today-this-day-history-us-constitution-signed</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*Figure 1: Introduction to Research Graphic Organizer (multiple student responses are included)*
We answered the first question as a large group and then split into pairs to finish the worksheet using classroom computers. I monitored the students closely and answered their questions, but I was impressed by how quickly they identified and recorded necessary information. One girl giggled at the idea of researching Bruno Mars song lyrics, and the boys were especially eager to answer the research question, “How should I ask someone out on a date?” The other questions required students to search for more academic information, but it was all easy to find. The purpose of this assignment was to teach students to select legitimate Internet sources that include author or reputable organizations as well as publishing dates. As I monitored the student’s progress, I explained the importance of checking for legitimate authors and recent publication dates in order to avoid collecting false or incomplete information. The students worked to the end of the class period, and when the bell rang, Student 6 exclaimed, “Class is over? It feels like we just got here.” My goal of creating a closer classroom community was off to a great start, but I still had to help my students gain confidence in their larger community.

Lesson 2: Community Project Research

At the beginning of the second class period, I reminded the students that we would now be researching child literacy for our community presentation. I asked the students to come up with research questions and wrote them on the board. It was easy to get feedback from the students because the structure of service learning facilitates a democratic learning environment. The students already felt ownership for their project, and they wanted to make as many decisions as they could. We first listed question words on the board (who, what, when, where, why, and how), and then the students came up with full questions. Our list included:

- Who should read to children?
- What should you read to your children?
• When should you read to your children?
• How much time should you take to read to children?
• Where can you get books?
• Why is it important to read to children?
• How does reading to children help them in school?
• How old should kids be when you read to them?

After listing all the questions, the students voted on which questions they thought were the most important and the most interesting. We narrowed our research to three questions: Why is it important to read to your children?, How does reading to children help them in school?, and What should you read to your children?

I then passed out a blank graphic organizer (see Figure 2) and assigned the students to work in pairs. Each pair focused on one of the three research questions.

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**Community Project Research**

**Names:**

**Date:** 3/26

**Research Question:** How does reading to children help them in school?

**Answer:** “90 percent of children’s brain development occurs during their first five years of life. Reading out loud to them early on provides literary benefits.”

**Author/Organization:** Denise Adler

**Title of Article or Webpage:** Skills for School

**Date Published:** October 5, 2008

**Date Retrieved:** March 26, 2013

**Web URL:** [www.reading.com/news/2008/oct/05/reading](http://www.reading.com/news/2008/oct/05/reading)
Figure 2: Community Project Research Graphic Organizer
The students worked well for the rest of the class period. I monitored their progress, answered questions, and gave suggestions, but the students were engaged and intrinsically motivated to complete their research. My most common suggestion was to slow down and read carefully to make sure that the source was relevant before filling in the citation information.

Lesson 3: Community Project Research cont.

I began class the next day by asking if the students had questions about our project. Several students were concerned with the presentation. They worried that they wouldn’t know what to say and that they would look stupid. I explained that was why we were doing research first – to help us know what to say and sound smart. I told the students that people who give speeches or presentations in public sound smart because they have done a lot of reading and researching in preparation. The students were slightly comforted by this, but several students were still nervous about speaking in public.

The students spent the majority of the class period working in research pairs. I hung back and observed them working. The students were genuinely excited to find answers to their research questions, and working in pairs helped them check each other’s work. One pair was especially vigilant. When Student 6 started filling out their paper with citation information, Student 5 stopped her: “Wait – it doesn’t say date published.” Knowing that their source was not as valid without a publishing date, the two students moved on to another source. A few minutes later when Student 5 was taking his turn writing, Student 6 shouted, “Hey! It doesn’t have an author!” At first he thought she was teasing him, but he also could not find an author, so they laughed and tried a different source. I was impressed by how well these students internalized the instructions and monitored themselves and each other.
The other four students also worked well together and produced high-quality research. I told them honestly that their research was better than the research I have seen from many college freshmen. Student 3 commented modestly, “It wasn’t that hard. We just followed the paper.” I told him that being able to figure out instructions is a valuable skill and that some people just give up when they don’t understand. I asked the class what they could do if they didn’t understand instructions, and a couple of the kids suggested that they could ask the teacher or their fellow students. “But some teachers don’t want to help you,” claimed Student 6, “and the other students don’t know anything.” I encouraged the students to ask questions anyway, because you’ll always get further asking questions than if you just give up.

It was surprising how easily conversations like this one came up in our service-learning classroom environment. Usually when I am teaching, I am worried about getting through enough of the material and having time for the activities, but a service-learning classroom feels more adaptable. It is easier to invite and address student concerns when the students are heavily involved in their learning experience.

Lesson 4: Presentation Handout Design

Students came to class prepared to talk about their research. They presented their sources to the class in their research pairs, and all the students helped choose four quotes from each pair to include on a handout for our presentation. We numbered the quotes as students presented, and then talked about what information was most helpful and why. Narrowing down the research helped the students see that even when a source is valid, it may not be interesting or relevant enough to include in the final product.

All of the students contributed to the discussion as we chose our favorite quotes and formatted the handout. I drew two large rectangles on the board and let the students fill in where
they wanted certain information, leaving space for a title, their names, and some pictures. At the end of the class period, I collected the research worksheets so that I could type the handout based on the students’ design. Ordinarily, the students would compile the handout, but with our class time so limited, I took on this task, following their specifications closely (see Figure 3).

Reading to Your Children

[Names of students]

How does reading to your children help them in school?

“You may think that your child’s reading experience is simply that reading book which comes home from school, but reading is happening all the time in a classroom and in school.” – Oxford University (2011)

http://www.oxfordowl.co.uk/School

“The ability to read will help them comprehend subjects better at school. ... Children with poor reading skills end up receiving poor grades, get easily distracted and frustrated, have behaviour problems, seem to dislike school and often fail to develop to their full potential.” – Aparna Namibiar (May 31, 2008)

http://voices.yahoo.com/how-reading-helps-children-1518105.html

“Kids who are first learning to read get more information from listening to books than from reading them independently. This is especially true of vocabulary — they’ll learn more about what words mean by hearing books read aloud and discussing words with parents than from reading on their own.” – The Nemours Foundation (2013)

http://kidshealth.org/parent/positive/all_reading/reading_schoolage.html#cat20617

“Begin reading aloud to your child as soon as you can. Children will learn to read more easily if they have experience with reading before going to school.” – Denise Snider (October 5, 2008)

**Why is it important to read to your children?**

Reading brings children and parents closer together. — Early Moments (2012)  

"Reading is an important skill that needs to be developed in children. Not only is it necessary for survival in the world of schools and (later on) universities, but in adult life as well. The ability to learn about new subjects and find helpful information on anything from health problems and consumer protection to more academic research into science or the arts depends on the ability to read." — Barbara Freedman-De Vito (2004)  

"Children whose parents read with them learn to read early and well. It's as simple as that! Getting your child ready to read is getting your child ready to succeed in school. ... Reading is the most fundamental skill your child will use during his or her 12-20 years as a student." — The Children's Reading Foundation (2011)  
http://www.readingfoundation.org/parents.jsp

"Reading to a child can and should begin as soon after birth as possible, as it will help with brain development, speech skills, as well as simply bonding with the child, which will help in other developmental areas as well." — Tracy Buckler (2010)  

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**What should you read to your children?**

"Books ... help parents to immerse their children in rich and varied language. Books of *narrative fiction* spark children's imagination as they entertain and inform them about their emotions. Books of *informational non-fiction* answer questions, providing concepts and knowledge that are the cornerstones of science and math. Both types are important and all of their benefits can be realized with books in *any language*. Parents should feel empowered to read aloud in Spanish, Chinese, or whatever their native language." — Dr. Virginia Mann (March 6, 2012)  
http://www.scilearn.com/blog/virginia-mann-ph.d/

"Try finding library books about current issues or interests in your family's or child's life, and then reading them together. For example, read a book about going to the dentist prior to your child's next dental exam, or get some books about seashore life after a trip to the coast. If your child is obsessed with dragons, ask your librarian to recommend a good dragon novel for your child." — The University of Michigan (2013)  
http://www.med.umich.edu/yourchild/topics/reading.htm

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*Figure 3: Reading to Your Children Presentation Handout*
Lesson 5: Posters and Fliers

At the beginning of the class period, I gave the students copies of the handout and asked them to review it. The students read through their sections carefully, and Student 1 pointed out where I had forgotten to put the publishing date for one of his sources. We looked on his research worksheet and wrote in the correct date.

With our research completed, I told the students it was time to advertise for our presentation. First, we listed all the necessary information on the board, including the date, time, location, and title of the presentation. Then the students chose to split into two groups: four students worked on posters and two students made fliers on the computer.

A small controversy occurred over whether we should say that the presentation would be given by ESL students. Several students thought it was a good idea, but Student 5 was adamantly against it. I asked him why, and he said, “It makes me feel stupid” to be identified as ESL — “like I don’t know English.” I said that being an ESL student actually means that he knows at least two languages fluently. I told him that I took French classes in high school, but I hardly know any French. Student 6 said, “That’s because you didn’t have to learn everything in French. We have to learn everything in English, so we know it more.” I told her she was right, and that it is impressive to be an ESL student. Student 5 wasn’t totally convinced, but he went along with the majority vote.

The boys worked on creating fliers. They finished a flier in English (see Figure 4) and asked me if they could make a flier in Spanish as well (see Figure 5). I told them I thought that was an excellent idea, and they got to work, using an online translator when they weren’t sure about the spelling. This idea prompted one of the students working on posters to make a couple of Spanish posters as well.
Reading to Your Children
Presentation by ESL students from South Cache 8-9 Center

Bring your children who are six and younger and get free books!

April 17, 2013 at Hyrum library
Story time Room at 7:00 pm

The address is 50 West Main Street
Hyrum, UT.

Figure 4: Presentation Flier in English

Leerles a sus hijos
Presentación a cargo de los estudiantes de ESL
De South Cache 8-9 Center
Traer a sus hijos que son seis o menos y obtener libros gratis!
Abril 17, 2013 en Hyrum Biblioteca en la sala La hora del relato.
La dirección es 50 West Main Street Hyrum UT.

Figure 5: Presentation Flier in Spanish
Lesson 6: Posters and Fliers cont.

We spent the next class period finishing up our posters and fliers. A few students printed off pictures from the Internet to glue onto their posters. Student 6 printed off a picture of an African-American family reading together and explained to me, “It wouldn’t be fair if we didn’t have pictures of this kind. If we don’t use their color, they will not want to come.” I nodded, impressed with her sensitivity to other ethnic groups.

At the end of the class period, each student took a couple of posters and a stack of fliers. We talked about where we should put the posters, and each student came up with specific places for their posters including elementary schools, preschools, daycare centers, and local businesses. They made plans to go to elementary schools in pairs and give parents fliers when they came to pick up their children. The students took the initiative, and I simply reminded them to ask for permission before hanging up a poster.

Lesson 7: Planning the Presentation

I started class by asking about the students’ advertising efforts. The students excitedly reported that they talked to several parents and hung posters all over the city. I was expecting a few of the students to forget or give up, but five of the six students hung posters and passed out fliers, and the other student gave his parents some fliers to take to work.

After talking about advertising, I split the class into research pairs and handed out index cards. I told them to decide together what they wanted to say in the presentation, but each student needed his or her own card. Once they decided what they were going to say, they made two copies of their part – one for them to practice with, and one for me to keep and bring to the presentation in case they lost or forgot their card. The students followed directions well and cooperated with their partners.
Lesson 8: Practicing the Presentation

Students presented their individual parts of the presentation to the class today, and we discussed and asked questions to each presenter. Student 3 took on the role of teacher and announced before his presentation, “I’m going to ask you a question after, so pay attention.” True to his word, he concluded his part by asking each of the other students in turn what they learned. The other students responded surprisingly well, even when he insisted that they each choose something different.

The students were still nervous about presenting in front of other people, but they admitted that they felt more confident now that they knew what they were going to say. Overall, they were excited to share what they had learned and give free books to the children.

Action

Action means applying what the students have learned in a way that benefits the community. Action must “have value, purpose, and meaning as students continue to acquire academic skills and knowledge” (Kaye, 2010, p.16). It is important that each student takes an active role in service learning and receives the full benefits of acting with purpose.

On the day before their community presentation, the students came to Utah State University to choose books from the bi-annual Scholastic Book Fair sponsored by the Department of Communicative Disorders and Deaf Education. The students were each allowed to select five children’s books for their presentation as well as one book to keep for themselves. It would have been far more convenient for me to simply choose the books myself rather than charter a school bus and bring the students to campus that morning, but “A sense of agency ... [is] critical for the transition to action” (Strain, 2005, p. 68). I wanted to make sure that the students felt responsible for each stage of their project. If they felt removed from any part of the
process, I worried that the students would not be invested in the final outcome. Fortunately, the students were able to attend the book fair and find children’s books to hand out after their presentation.

The community presentation was scheduled for 7:00 p.m. the following evening, so the students and I met at the library at 6:30 p.m. to set up and practice. As we set up cookies and books, Student 3 asked if after our presentation, he could read one of the books to the kids. I told him that was an excellent idea and asked if any of the other students wanted to read a different book. Student 3 eagerly suggested that we split the children into two or three groups and read different books to them, then rotate groups. I immediately supported this idea and a couple of other students volunteered to read, but Student 5 muttered, “If any kids come...”

Sadly, this was a valid concern. At 7:00 p.m., there were only eight audience members: Student 4’s cousins, Student 2’s niece, Student 1’s parents, Student 3’s father, and my professor. The students and I were disappointed that our advertising efforts had not achieved significant results, but we went ahead with the presentation anyway. I briefly introduced the students by name as Student 2 distributed handouts, and then I sat down and let the students take over.

The students presented their carefully researched parts, reading from note cards without making any mistakes. After the students had presented, they took questions from the audience. They talked about their favorite children’s books, specific skills that children can learn from books, and the benefits of older siblings reading to younger siblings. Then Student 3 read a children’s book about a pet dinosaur. It was amazing to hear him read carefully and loudly so that the children could understand; in class, he usually mumbled. If I had asked him to read a children’s book in the classroom, he would have flatly refused or muttered through it. But during our community presentation, it was his idea to read a children’s book, and he read well because it
mattered. He was reading a book to demonstrate how to read to children, and he was now an expert on the subject.

After the presentation, the students and audience members ate cookies and looked through the books. I especially enjoyed talking with Student 1’s parents and Student 3’s father. They were amazed with the preparation and dedication that their sons had shown. I got the impression that these parents rarely knew what their sons were doing in school – not because they didn’t want to know, but because they had never been able to observe their sons in action. They probably got progress reports and attended parent teacher conferences when they could, but they were so excited to see their sons get up in front of people and talk about what they had been studying. Service learning gives students the ability to show off what they have learned in a clear, meaningful way, and I could tell that this project impressed the students’ parents.

The students and audience members each got to take a children’s book home with them; then we donated the excess books to the library. After we cleaned up, I gave the students McDonald’s gift cards and personalized notes to thank them for their hard work. The students were still a bit frustrated that more people did not come, but they left that evening with a sense of pride in their accomplishment.

**Reflection**

Reflection is “a vital and ongoing process that integrates learning and experience with personal growth and awareness” (Kaye, 2010, p. 17). Reflection occurs throughout the service-learning process as we make plans and assess our progress, but I set aside one last class period to reflect on the students’ experiences overall.

At the beginning of the class period, I passed out another questionnaire. The first question again asked the students to define community-based learning. This time, their answers described
service learning: "Community-based learning is like doing projects," "learn something then show it," and "It’s where you learn something in school and present it at the community." Later in the questionnaire, I asked if they would recommend community-based learning to other ESL students. All of the students said yes, and I asked them to explain why. Student 4 wrote, "Because it’s a great way of communicating with others and it helps change things in a good way." Student 3 wrote, "Yes, because I think everybody that does community-based learning would be learning new things and I think it was fun when we did it so I do think that it will be a fun project for them." Student 6 said that all students should do community-based projects "so they could learn more even if they already know things."

The rest of the questionnaire asked the students what they liked and disliked about the project and what they would change to make it better. Student 2 said that she "liked getting books because it’s fun searching for good books to read," but she "hated reading to the audience cause I was kinda nervous." But her least favorite part of the project was Student 6’s favorite. Student 6 said she liked "the fact that we had to stand up and talk, because it was actually fun." She didn’t like "when no kids came [besides relatives] because it was kind of embarrassing." Two other students mentioned that not enough people were there, and everyone said that more audience members would have made it better. We talked for a while about what we could have done to make sure that more people came. Student 3 said more kids would have shown up if we had played soccer, but Student 1 reminded him, "Our project was about reading, not soccer." Student 1 suggested that we could have talked to kids and their parents at local schools, but Student 6 told him, "We talked to them!" Student 2 added, "We went to the schools and handed out fliers and everything."
I asked the students why they think more people didn’t come, and Student 6 immediately said, “They didn’t care.” I asked the other students if they agreed, and they thought for a minute. Student 1 said, “I think they care. Maybe they just didn’t have time or didn’t know about it.” We brainstormed ways that we could advertise better. Student 4 suggested that we put an announcement on the school website. Student 2 said that maybe we could hand out fliers one week in advance (like we did) and the day before the presentation as a reminder. Student 1 said that we could have personally invited people that we know. He admitted that he didn’t really invite anyone he knew because he didn’t know if it was going to be good. “Now that I know it wasn’t embarrassing or anything, I would tell more people about it,” he said.

By the end of the class period, the students had expressed more frustration than satisfaction with their project, based entirely on the lack of community attendance. I asked them again if they would recommend this sort of a project to other ESL students. I said, “It’s really okay if you don’t recommend it. I maybe want to do something like this with my future classes, but I don’t want to do it if it’s too frustrating to the students.” To my relief, all of the students reassured me that even though not many people came, it was the most fun and useful project they had done all year. Without hesitation, Student 6 said, “Yeah. Do it with your students. They will like it.”

**Demonstration**

During the demonstration stage, “students make explicit what and how they have learned and what they have accomplished through their community involvement” (Kaye, 2010, p. 18). Their work can be demonstrated through “public presentations – displays, performances, letters to the editor, photo displays, podcasts, class lessons – that draw on the investigation, preparation, action, and reflection stages of their experience” (Kaye, 2010, p. 18). Because of my time
limitations, I was not able to observe my students during the demonstration stage. However, their
teacher used pictures from the presentation to create a poster display in the main hallway of their
school, and she told me that the students talked about this project at the end of year party. They
told their parents and family members what they had learned and talked about their favorite parts
of the project.

Results

Service learning is meant “to promote socially responsive knowledge, self-efficacy and self-
estee m, compassion, and political participation” (Conway, Amel & Gerwien, 2009, pp. 239-240). I
observed an increase in self-efficacy and self-esteem in all of my students. At the beginning of the
project, no one was excited about the community presentation. They all thought they wouldn’t know
what to say, and they were worried about looking and sounding stupid. But as they researched and
planned together, the students gained confidence and more positive attitudes. On the day of the
presentation, most of the students were visibly excited to share what they had learned, and even the
more quiet students said later that they were surprised by how much they enjoyed the presentation. They
learned that they could become experts and succeed academically and socially in multiple settings.

Additionally, service learning “provides opportunities for students to form bonds with each
other, with faculty, and with community members while undertaking worthwhile projects” (Eyler, 2002,
p. 518). Because of the interactive nature of this project, teachers have more opportunity to know their
students individually. I was able to have a closer relationship with each individual student than I have
working on strictly academic projects with other students with whom I have spent more time. Service
learning fosters a cooperative, flexible learning environment wherein every student’s voice is heard. The
students became more comfortable with each other as they worked together toward a meaningful goal.
They warmed up to me quickly because I was helping them achieve something important. And they
went outside of their comfort zones to talk to parents and principals at local elementary schools to advertise for our presentation.

Developmental theorist Anne Colby writes, “Experiential learning, including service-learning, centrally acknowledges the context specificity of learning, providing educational settings that are less artificial than the classroom and much closer to the context in which students will later perform” (Strain, 2005, p. 61). Though it was focused on the topic of literacy, this project taught the students a pattern for bringing any information to their community. They now know the process for informing the public about political issues, environmental concerns, or even entrepreneurial endeavors. And most importantly, they know they can actually follow this process on their own.

**Recommendations**

This pilot program successfully increased student engagement and improved student attitudes based on student observations and comments, but several improvements and adjustments can be made in each of Kaye’s five stages.

**Investigation**

With more time and resources, students can identify and investigate an authentic community need themselves. Many types of service learning projects can be beneficial to high school ESL students, including mentoring elementary school students, helping immigrants fill out paperwork or learn English, or even researching a problem in the environment and taking action to improve the situation. The needs and interests of specific students should be considered, and students should choose the scope and content of their projects as much as possible.

**Preparation and Planning**

Class time was used efficiently during our preparation and planning stage, but with more time, the students’ research could go beyond Internet searches. The students could visit their school or
community library to find books and get ideas for further research. They could also interview a specialist in their community (for a literacy project, a developmental psychology professor or child educator could be appropriate). Introducing students to a variety of research methods would add to their academic skills and give them confidence in more areas.

**Action**

Our largest problem was community attendance. In the future for similar projects, I would recommend two presentations – one during the day to children at the elementary school, and one in the evening for parents. More children could get books, and the children’s presentation could act as an advertisement for the parent presentation. We could send books and notes home with the children and ask them to tell their parents about the presentation that evening. Children would also be welcome at the parent presentation, but having two presentations would broaden and increase our audience.

**Reflection**

My students filled out questionnaires at the beginning and end of this project and talked informally about the assignment as we worked. However, Janet Eyler, an education professor at Vanderbilt University, recommends that students reflect continually by writing in a journal every day through the duration of the project. The key to making journal writing effective is “to structure the journal so that the student pushes beyond mere description to identifying questions to pursue and connections between the course of study and the community experience” (Eyler, 2002, p. 528). Eyler also suggests that students complete final reflective projects ranging “from formal presentations, linking theories studied with their experiences, to debates or mock legislative hearings to videos or other artistic expression” (Eyler, 2002, p. 530). Students could be given the choice between writing a formal paper or completing a more artistic project, or they could complete a group reflection assignment. Adjustments can be made depending on the interests and dynamic of the student group.
Demonstration

The demonstration stage could be made more authentic by inviting the local newspaper or TV news station to do a story on the students' experiences. This would provide students with the impression that what they are doing is important enough to be noticed by the community at large, not just the community members they are serving.

Conclusion

Though limited in duration and sample size, this service-learning project supports the assertion that "community involvement that is linked to student learning has a greater effect on achievement than more general forms of involvement" (Henderson & Mapp, 2002, p. 38). The learning activities in this study can easily be adapted to a longer project and a larger class size with positive results. Service learning increases student attitudes and achievement because "As students experience the relevance of the learning process, take on roles and responsibilities that contribute to successful collective outcomes, and are depended upon by others, they tend to want to participate. They stay engaged and involved in learning" (Kaye, 2010, p. 12). Student engagement is especially important with ESL students, since they may feel excluded from the dominant culture. It is essential to teach students how they can contribute to society in meaningful ways and guide them through the process of using their skills to help the community in various contexts.
References


Author's Biography

Chelsey Funk was born and raised in Cache Valley, Utah. After graduating from Sky View High School in the spring of 2009, Chelsey was accepted to Utah State University. She pursued a dual bachelor's degree in economics and English teaching, adding minors in psychology teaching and ESL teaching. Through her involvement in the Huntsman Scholars Program, Chelsey has traveled and studied in Russia, Armenia, Turkey, Switzerland, Italy, Belgium, France, and Sierra Leone. In the summer of 2011, she completed a business internship in Ghana, teaching business classes and allocating micro-loans. During the summer of 2012, she taught English to children, teenagers, and adults in Cambodia, earning an international TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) certification. As an undergraduate, Chelsey has worked as a teaching assistant, a writing fellow, an undergraduate teaching fellow, and lead staff at the research-based ASSERT (Autism Support Services: Education, Research, and Training) preschool. She has also served as historian and secretary of Sigma Tau Delta, the English Honors Society. Chelsey has volunteered as a classroom aide at Wilson Elementary, Adams Elementary, Logan High School, and the English Language Center. After student teaching in the spring, Chelsey will graduate in May 2014 and begin teaching high school. She plans to pursue a graduate degree in international education and development.
Appendix A:

Institutional Review Board

Letter of Approval

FROM:
Melanie Domenech Rodriguez, IRB Chair
True M. Rubal, IRB Administrator

To:
Sonia Manuel-Dupont, Chelsey Funk

Date:
March 18, 2013

Protocol #:
5044

Title:
Connecting To The Community: Service-Learning Methods In An ESL Classroom

Risk:
Minimal risk

Your proposal has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board and is approved under expedite procedure #7 (based on the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) regulations for the protection of human research subjects, 45 CFR Part 46, as amended to include provisions of the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, November 9, 1998):

Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies. This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file for the period of one year. If your study extends beyond this approval period, you must contact this office to request an annual review of this research. Any change affecting human subjects must be approved by the Board prior to implementation. Injuries or any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board.

This approval applies only to the proposal currently on file for the period of one year. If your study extends beyond this approval period, you must contact this office to request an annual review of this research. Any change affecting human subjects must be approved by the Board prior to implementation. Injuries or any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects or to others must be reported immediately to the Chair of the Institutional Review Board.

Prior to involving human subjects, properly executed informed consent must be obtained from each subject or from an authorized representative, and documentation of informed consent must be kept on file for at least three years after the project ends. Each subject must be furnished with a copy of the informed consent document for their personal records.
Appendix B:

Student Profiles

Six 9th grade students from an intact group were involved in this pilot study.

**Student 1** is a native Spanish speaker born in the United States. His parents emigrated from Mexico, and his mother works at a daycare program for migrant children. His English is proficient and his teacher assumes that he will quickly test out of the ESL program. He was placed in ESL because he moved in the middle of the school year and his records show Spanish as his home language. He was a good leader to the other students and was usually the first student to share ideas with the class.

**Student 2** is also a native Spanish speaker. Her family comes from Mexico, and she has a large extended family in the United States. She loves playing soccer and listening to Bruno Mars. She was initially nervous to complete this project, but she became more positive and excited as time went on. She enjoyed preparing for the presentation by choosing books for the children and creating posters.

**Student 3** was adopted from Ethiopia as a young child. He was not literate in his native tribal language and does not remember very much of it. His adoptive parents are both native English speakers who speak English at home. He was often quiet and distant, preferring to work alone, but he researched well with Student 2. When it was time to present, he carried his newfound authority with pride.

**Student 4** is Mabaan, meaning that she belongs to an ethnic group from South Sudan. She speaks a combination of English and the Mabaan language at home and with her cousins. She was also quiet and thoughtful, but she had a positive attitude and was willing to work with all of
the other students. She worked hard in all of her classes and had the best attitude about school in general.

**Student 5** is a native Spanish speaker whose family comes from Mexico. He was disruptive at first, but once he had genuine responsibilities, he focused well. He was quick to apply his new research skills, and he kept the other students on track. He speaks a lot of Spanish with his family and friends, but he insisted on using an online translator when translating the fliers into Spanish because he is not confident with his Spanish spelling and grammar.

**Student 6** is from the Marshall Islands and speaks a combination of Marshallese and English in her home. She was sensitive to and knowledgeable of multicultural perspectives. For example, she told me that Bruno Mars is “handsome and talented” because his father is Puerto Rican and his mother is from the Philippines. She is outspoken and inquisitive, and she was friendly towards the other students. She had some great insights throughout the project.