The CATESOL Journal

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Introduction to the Theme Section

This special issue on service-learning greatly expands our understanding of service-learning at several ESL levels and in two ESL teacher-training programs. First, what is service-learning and how does it differ from experiential learning, a similar pedagogy? Service-learning is a subset of experiential learning, or experiential education, which views the community or activities outside the classroom as a valid source of learning—either to apply academic concepts and theories that a student is learning in a class or to expand a student's knowledge and expertise in civic activities and action. That is the learning part. However, the service part usually refers to unpaid service (although some definitions do include paid internships) by students to community partners.

Relating service-learning to the ESL/TESL field, students from all levels (elementary through university) can provide service to a myriad of community entities, including ESL students at all levels, elementary or secondary schools, environmental groups, museums, recreation centers, and so forth. An important part of good service-learning programs is the perception that both providers and receivers (including organizations and recipients themselves) obtain mutual benefit because they have provided substantial input about the nature of the service and the learning project. For example, a preservice TESOL major might assist an ESL teacher in an adult ESL classroom to see how certain teaching techniques learned in a university pedagogy class are applied in a real classroom setting. Consequently, the ESL students receive valuable language input and interaction from native or near-native teachers in training and the TESOL program moves toward its goal to successfully train teachers.

In the ideal service-learning experience, both providers and receivers are enriched or empowered by the social, cultural, and intellectual exchange that occurs. Such benefits on the service-learner side may include increased academic knowledge, greater social activism, increased productivity, greater volunteerism, deeper engagement with the community, and less prejudice. On the recipient side, benefits may include better socialization, increased productivity, better understanding of subject matter, better grades, reciprocal knowledge, or increased language proficiency.

Normally, service in the community is accompanied by assignments that students complete during or at the end of the service project. The defining feature of a good service-learning assignment is that it demands reflection on the part of the student. Instructors may require their students to submit regular journals or learning logs. Others may require students to take notes on what they are doing and use these notes to write a final report. The culminating written product may be a poster, Web page, brochure, or a newsletter. Sometimes students share what they are learning through oral means—regular class discussions, a final oral report, or a PowerPoint presentation. The grading of assignments can vary from a check mark that the work has been done to a letter grade, indicating something about the quality and completeness of the work that has been submitted.

Anyone involved with the details of arranging, monitoring, and evaluating service-learning assignments must ultimately answer the question: What is the value of service-learning to our students and to the community? And with that answered, we must also ask: How is service-learning any different from other kinds of learning assignments that require students to make applications to the real world? For if our current assignments generate positive results, why should we do anything different, especially

when it appears to lead to less predictable outcomes and requires more articulation work? The one unique goal often cited across programs and disciplines is the development of civic-mindedness or social justice, which can start as students begin doing service-learning assignments in the community.

For ESL or TESL instructors to make a decision about the worth of service-learning, it would be helpful to have more information about the types of responses that service-learners have to different experiences. What types of preparation or pretraining provide for more success for ESL/TESL students? Do ESL/TESL students from different countries without a history of volunteerism respond differently to the experience? What types of projects/assignments create the most opportunities for student growth in language- and culture-related areas? Which types of service learning projects/assignments and settings are preferred by or are most motivating to students? What motivates students to do service-learning assignments for more than one school term? What are students' beliefs about the applicability of their service-learning experiences to their future ESL teaching careers or in future ESL learning?

What answers does research provide to these questions? At these early stages, not much. At the outset, it should be noted that there are many more published reports detailing service-learner benefits than receiver or community benefits. This is largely because of the orientation of most school-based providers, who are accustomed to demonstrating their achievements to outside audiences in writing. These published studies and reports could paint an inaccurate picture from the service-receiver point of view if the receiver did not have a voice or input in the initial activity or did not feel rewarded in some way by the interaction.

In fact, some professionals critique service-learning as a "do-good, self-righteous, colonialist" activity that does little or nothing for those receiving the service. (See O'Grady, 2000, for a selection of articles related to the implementation of service-learning in multicultural education classes designed to raise consciousness about social justice.) It is thought that if the good act of service does nothing to provide a solution to a problem in which receivers have investment or voice, it could do more harm than good. Others would disagree with this pessimistic, dismissive perspective of the pedagogy, especially those who have taken great care to negotiate projects with community partners, set up appropriate training, designed individualized placements, adjusted and refined models based upon trial and error, and documented many positive psychological, cultural, and cognitive benefits for both providers and receivers.

A recurrent theme at recent service-learning research conferences is the need for more rigorous studies of service-learning in specific disciplines. This is even more true in the ESL/TESL field. Much has already been published on the results of experiments, surveys, and case studies with secondary- and college-level students in mixed-discipline groups showing positive benefits in school involvement, educational aspirations, civic participation, acceptance of cultural diversity and leadership, and commitment to service as a result of service-learning participation (Billig & Eyler, 2003; Casey, Davidson, Billig, & Springer, 2006; Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring, & Kerrigan, 2001; Root and Furco, 2001). However, much less has been published on the value of service-learning in specific disciplines such as ESL/TESL. Higher-quality case studies need to be published along with replicable experimental studies.

Various ESL/TESL or ESL/TESL-related (teacher education, multicultural education, English composition) projects have been described in non–peer-reviewed publications (ERIC documents) and some peer-reviewed publications such as Internet journals, book chapters, and academic journals. The non–peer-reviewed papers usually relate to large-scale reports (e.g., a report from all 50 states on the state of service-learning [Education Commission on the States, 2002]) or to descriptions of smaller-scale projects of several different classes (Kleiner & Chapman,

2000) or the same class over multiple school terms (Dubinsky, 2001; Gonzalez, 2000). The peer-reviewed publications relate to a range of programs (Diaz-Rico, 2004; Minor, 2001; Wurr & Hellebrandt, in press) or a rich description of one class over one or several semesters (Elwell & Bean, 2001; Heuser, 1999; Kesson & Oyler, 1999; Warschauer, 1999). This issue of *The CATESOL Journal* adds six more important articles and one interview to this literature.

Levesque begins this special section with an excellent overview of the varied types of partnerships that have been set up by the Service-Learning office and ESL classes and programs at San Jose City College and in the community (such as immigrant organizations, homeless shelters, schools, senior programs, and environmental agencies). This ambitious program has involved more than 900 ESL students in the past 8 years. Levesque cautions that not all ESL classes should participate and service-learning assignments need to be carefully planned to fit the goals of the class and the community. Overall evaluations of this program paint a very favorable picture of service-learning in the community college curriculum.

Like Levesque, Glicker argues for service-learning at the postsecondary level, in this case in adult noncredit writing courses. In adult school programs, students are often busy working or performing other family responsibilities. Therefore, service-learning is viewed as a time-consuming burden to many students. Glicker believes that by providing opportunities in a study-skills class for students to learn study skills and teach these same study skills to less proficient peers on campus through a service-learning experience, they become more aware of the academic "community" of practice that they seek to enter. With careful guidance from a sensitive instructor and interaction with service providers on campus, a meaningful and effective program for building ESL academic literacy is created.

Next, Phipps describes a service-learning program that has worked effectively for the past 10 school terms at Chaffey College in Rancho Cucamonga, California. ESL and sociology faculty concurrently schedule an intermediate ESL speaking/listening class and an introductory sociology class to facilitate regular tasks and projects between matched students in the two classes. Sociology students gather information from interviews with ESL students to write a life story report. ESL students write journals detailing their feelings about communicating in English with native English speakers. Results appear to be successful, especially when there is close collaboration with the instructors.

In Braunstein's article, we learn that intensive English programs may be less able to tap into funding (as was the case with Phipps) or the services of a central service-learning office on campus (as was true with Levesque) to assist with placement and monitoring of students in the community. At the English Language Program at University of California, Santa Barbara Extension, this is all done by the instructor. Using a personalized approach in an elective course titled English Through Volunteer Work, the instructor assists the student with selecting a site, making the initial contact with the volunteer organization, and monitoring attendance at the site through a time sheet. Service-learners share their volunteer experiences with classmates through PowerPoint presentations. Overall, the results have been positive, giving international students a greater sense of belonging in the community.

Next, Carr, Eyring, and Gallego administer a survey to current students and alumni in a MS TESOL Program at California State University, Fullerton to determine whether those who had a service-learning component perceive greater benefits than those who did not. They find that service-learning is no more beneficial, except in the area of civics knowledge when students are specifically engaged in teaching immigrants about the history, government, and constitution of the US. Despite the lack of significant differences between the two groups, qualitative data indicate that the focused, formal service-learning experience is especially beneficial for those

who have not had these experiences before or for those from other countries in which the classroom environment is quite different from that in the US.

Purmensky, the only Florida author in this collection, surveys 129 preservice ESOL teachers enrolled in an undergraduate linguistics class during one school term. This class includes a 15-hour service-learning component in which students provide one-on-one reading practice to English language learners in a variety of elementary schools in several different Florida counties. The course, which concentrates on linguistics, methodology, and second language acquisition, is one of two courses designed to prepare future teachers to obtain their Florida ESOL Endorsement. Purmensky reports extremely positive results on the part of students and partner classrooms. Preservice teachers report heightened consciousness of linguistic and cultural issues as well as increased respect of ELLs. Elementary partner schools report positive results in reading success and social skills of ELL learners.

Finally, Cerutti provides an overview of how service-learning is integrated into small learning communities at Florin High School in Elk Grove, California. In an interview, he describes the importance of attending to language proficiency level when making service-learning assignments and the all-important role of family and staff in achieving successful service-learning experiences.

It is to be hoped that more studies can be conducted so that we better understand the benefits of service-learning in ESL/TESL. Several journals frequently publish articles in service-learning and would be good resources for information and possible venues for future ESL/TESL articles: *Action in Teacher Education, Equity and Excellence in Education, Journal on Excellence in College Teaching, Journal of Public Service and Outreach, Journal of Teacher Education, Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning, NSEE Quarterly, Teacher Education Quarterly,* and *Teaching and Teacher Education.*

Several important Web sites also provide important information about service-learning for those who want to learn more:

Corporation for National and Community Service
www.servicelearning.org
AACTE National Service-Learning
www.aacte.org/Other_Professional_Issues/service_learning.htm
Campus Compact
http://www.compact.org
Learn and Serve: Higher Education
http://www.cns.gov/ls-hed.html
National Service Resource Center
http://www.etr-associates.org/nsrc
National Society for Experiential Education
http://www.nsee.org
NCTE's Service-Learning in Composition Web site
http://www.ncte.org/service
The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse
http://www.servicelearning.org
Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning
http://www.umich.edu/~ocsl/MJCSL
National Service-Learning Partnership
www.service-learningpartnership.org
International Center Service-Learning in Teacher Education
http://www.clemson.edu/ICSLTE

Finally, for those interested in conducting research in service-learning, a must-have publication is *Assessing Service-Learning and Civic Engagement: Principles and Techniques* (Gelmon et al., 2001). This handbook published by Campus Compact presents important assessment principles and strategies for measuring student, faculty, community, and institutional impact. It also contains a discussion of current methods for collecting and analyzing data in service-learning—a fundamental source for anyone wanting to design a study of his or her own.

Guest Editor

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