

Learning the Language of Global Citizenship: Strengthening Service-Learning in TESOL

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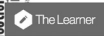
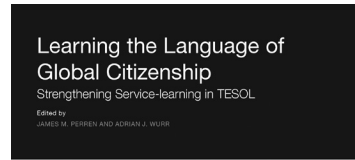
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Despite my best efforts, I frequently found myself in the position that I feared most: sitting and being present with the family . . . In my other volunteer experiences, that isn't usually a requirement . . . I think that "doing" makes my encounters with injustice bearable for me. "Being" is hard, but maybe the act of being present with this family and allowing myself to be seen by them was a gift. It was a gift for me and it is something that will be with me for the rest of my life. —Student participant in Grassi and Armon, Chapter 16.

As seen in the quote from Grassi and Armon's study above, effective service-learning programs and projects can provide participants with meaningful experiences that are distinct from other social contribution or volunteer efforts, and can facilitate reflection, awareness, and reconstruction of their views and attitudes towards marginalized populations, such as by helping participants break down stereotypes and recognize challenges that the marginalized face.

Perren and Wurr introduce their goal for the edited collection *Learning the Language of Global Citizenship: Strengthening Service-learning in TESOL* as advancing scholarship in service-learning in the field of TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages), while recognizing that many community organizations and partnerships unquestionably value the skills and benefits that English-language learners bring. The first volume of *Learning the Language of Global Citizenship*, published eight-years prior, introduced the groundwork for approaches and research in domestic and international service-learning efforts. This second volume extends the first by providing a variety of insights into approaches and strategies for researching, teaching, and administrating effective service-learning programs and projects with culturally diverse language users and learners.

Throughout the collection, the researchers and contributing authors show their sensitivity and attention to participants who have traditionally been marginalized, taking approaches such as framing service-learning relationships as mutually beneficial, terming learners as ELLs (English-language learners) or participants,



and giving participants the option of using or not using their real names in the publication. Most authors contextualize their approach, recognizing some dissonance in the way service-learning projects typically frame ELLs as the served, and seeking to frame the mutually beneficial roles of all participants.

The collection is organized by context and purpose of the collaboration with the community partner. For example, chapters report on studies which investigate service-learning partnerships of university students with Intensive English Programs and within a variety of academic, community, and professional contexts (Parts I, II, III), as well as those which investigate teacher-education classes partnering in a variety of US and international contexts (Parts IV, V, VI). Within these divisions, readers can additionally find a variety of foci in the chapters. In the first three parts, for example, Leanne Cameron considers the long-term impacts and implications of ELLs engaged in education for social justice (Chapter 3), Rachael Wendler Shah examines community members' perspectives, making recommendations for framing the partnership and designing the curriculum (Chapter 7), and Netta Avineri explores pre-service teachers' intercultural interactions and self-awareness of shifting identities developing through service-learning encounters (Chapter 8). In the latter three parts, for example, Santoi Wagner and Jacqueline G. Lopez address the challenges and support needed for international student teachers (Chapter 11), Elizabeth Grassi and Joan Armon examine the impact and relevance of immersing pre-service teachers in a new culture and language with local immigrant families (Chapter 16), and Denise Blum uses Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP) to interrogate discourse that promotes English as a dominant language (Chapter 20).

In Chapter 7, "It was Sort of Hard to Understand Them at Times': Community Perspectives on ELL Students in Service-Learning Perspectives," Rachael Wendler Shah investigates the perspective of community member participants, while interrogating a problematic power dynamic implied by a traditional service-learning paradigm. Through interviews with a high school teacher partner and three of her students who self-identified across a range of social and linguistic boundaries—including Latino/a, LGBTQ, bilingual, with close family connections in Mexico—Wendler Shah examines the "shifting notions of who the 'expert' is in the relationship" (169). She notes that differences in age and education level between university and high school students in service-learning exchanges tend to bring a traditional server and served power dynamic, and in this study, she explores how that may be disrupted by the participants' perceptions of language proficiency and cultural familiarity.

The high school teacher in Wendler Shah's study reported that her students—who had in the past worked with "*mainstream* college classes"—tended to feel "really nervous" working with college students, whom they perceived to be "so much better than [themselves]" (175–76). Wendler Shah explains that the teacher saw a tremendous impact from her framing: a service-learning exchange with partners who didn't speak English as their first language, who sounded like them or had even more grammatical challenges, who were the best and brightest from other countries. The sophomore high school student in the study suggested that other high school underclassmen should be partnered with international students so that all the

students would be on a more equal level. The interactions of language proficiency with other markers associated with power, such as age and education, were evident as this student explained his feeling that “if [my partner] was a [native English-speaking] student from here in college that I wouldn’t have been on the same level as them, like I would have been far behind of what level they were on” (177), implying that the international student’s English proficiency pulled them down to his level.

The power shift appeared to be influenced not only by language skill but also by the ELL’s international status or experiences of living in an unfamiliar country. As the high school students recognized the more personal challenges their partners faced as well, they expressed feeling “pity” or sympathy for the loneliness and homesickness their international student partners must be feeling at being so far from home. Wendler Shah reflects on the questions that arise from this reversal of attitudes and power toward who is being served by whom. In this case, while the disruption of the power dynamic may raise the high school students’ awareness for the issues the international students encounter, Wendler Shah notes that the imbalance of power had merely been reversed, not made more equal, and that this can result in international students feeling disempowered or reticent to speak for fear of being perceived as unintelligent (179).

Two significant recommendations arise as takeaways for building service-learning partnerships with ELL participants. A key insight that Wendler Shah highlights from the high school teacher in the study is the importance of building the partnership as equal and intentionally and verbally framing that in the partnership to the partner groups. The instructors recognized a potentially problematic power dynamic if the college students were positioned only as “mentors” to the younger high school students, so they shifted the curriculum such that both groups were positioned as experts, re-structuring the partnership around areas of strength that each group would bring. Additionally, as is a theme noted throughout several chapters in this collection, Wendler Shah identifies ongoing reflection by both students and instructors as key for connecting the experience to learning. In this case, regular reflection and discussions by the instructors allowed them to adapt as necessary to nuanced interactional or cultural dynamics between students, such as those influenced by gender, sexuality, neurodiversity, economic background, and language proficiency. Reflecting with students led to opportunities to address what was going well, as well as interactions that were “just plain weird,” leading to open discussions regarding topics such as cross-cultural norms (184).

In Chapter 16 “Re-envisioning Teacher Preparation: The Transformative Power of Teachers Studying ‘Abroad’ in the Neighborhood,” Elizabeth Grassi and Joan Armon introduce a community-based Spanish-English exchange program. The program shifted in design from 2006 when it began, and this study reports on four semesters interspersed between 2007 and 2013. Grassi and Armon introduce contextual factors that influence their programmatic goals, including diverse students in the community and pre-service teachers who were 90% white females who spoke only English, a nationwide trend. The key theoretical perspectives that they introduce to frame their approach are an awareness of the “funds of knowledge” that diverse

students bring through the value of their experiences as well as an emphasis on a “paradigm change” (431), allowing pre-service teachers to gain awareness through positioning the immigrant families in positions of power by hosting the pre-service teachers for visits solely in Spanish for the first half of the exchange period.

The methodology of the study included active ethnography, with the pre-service teachers—that is, as students—writing field notes after each visit and reflections throughout the exchange, and these were analyzed for recurrent themes. Grassi and Armon explored the themes for pre-service teachers’ awareness and paradigm shifts, as well as applications for teacher education. In early visits, some students reported feelings of awkwardness when not knowing the culturally appropriate behavior and even expressed anger at being “made uncomfortable and made to feel out of place—especially in their home country, by someone who is different than them” (437), in the words of one student participant in a first reflective essay. Grassi and Armon note that ELL students also experience culture shock when they are in a class where things are done differently, and that this program could address what is often a gap in teacher training for dealing with this felt sense of disorientation. In addition to these observations about themselves, students also reflected on their discovery of the challenges that immigrant families faced as well as questioned their own beliefs or biases.

These inward and outward reflections based in experience, in which the power dynamic has been shifted, may be critical steps in a stage of advocacy that Grassi and Armon suggest is needed in teacher education. They draw from Coleen Wiessner and Jack Mezirow in suggesting that social action is a form of learning that can lead to future action, and conclude that with demographics as they are in schools today, a needed part of teacher education is “experiential learning and motivation to confront their biases and ignorance of the cultures, languages, histories, successes, and challenges of the ‘other’” (461). Some pre-service teachers’ reflections that came later in this study indicate that they were making this move, such as by responding to family and friends who made racist comments, explaining the struggle that immigrants often go through or the respect of which they are worthy.

In Chapter 20 “Because I Want to Serve the Gringos’: Critical Race Pedagogy and Teaching English in Mexico,” Denise Blum suggests that coupling Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP) with service learning in teacher education can provide an approach to problematize and challenge the tendency to accept and promote the teaching of English around the world. To provide background on her approach and the context of her study, she introduces the growth of international service-learning on university campuses as aiming to increase global awareness but often falling short of altering student perspectives and instead result in “reproduc[ing] hierarchical power relations between students and local community members” (543). She suggests that while Tania Mitchell advocates for a critical approach that works toward authentic relationships and redistribution of power within a social change orientation, there is little direction on how to accomplish that.

With CRP, based on Critical Race Theory, as the framework for selecting readings and reflection activities, Blum first led a group of ten teachers through

course content focused on topics such as globalization and Mayan social issues and included pre-departure face-to-face and online discussions. The course then included two weeks teaching English to an immigrant service-worker population in Playa del Carmen. Her goals for the course included four elements, including understanding power and positionality issues, serving through teaching, reflecting to discover biases, and improving both teaching methods and attitudes toward immigrant students. Teachers' narratives in the study reflect their observations, such as regarding their own need to adjust to the challenges of teaching here and a recognition of wanting to "prioritize the needs of the students and their families above . . . efficiency and authority" (555). Reflecting on the course readings, teachers identified their concerns for the impact of tourism on the devaluing of the people's labor as well as the conflict they felt toward the exploitation of the laborers caused by tourism.

Blum notes that teacher education courses often include topics in multiculturalism but that the combination of service learning with Critical Race Pedagogy (CRP) pushes students to move beyond "acknowledging 'difference' and to begin to deconstruct and interrogate power relations and their roots in the target community and larger society" (560). I interpret her approach as giving service learning the function of tying experience to academic goals and CRP as providing the necessary framework for pushing participants to shift their attitudes and behaviors as they reflect on their own positions on "what 'good' means to whom, and how we get there" (561). Teachers' reflections illustrate success in attitude shifts, as several expressed a sympathetic awareness of the working and living situations of the students they taught as well as the conflict that they felt toward their own participation in teaching English that would perpetuate the exploitative business of tourism in Playa del Carmen. Blum states that the goal of the project was to create a "truly emancipatory [international service-learning] project" (543) that might lead beyond personal transformation to social transformation of oppressive structures, so further steps may be needed to investigate whether the teachers' critical reflections on attitudes impacted either short-term or long-term interactions.

Throughout these chapters, two themes arise from the discussions and findings in the studies in this collection, and the approaches in the different chapters can provide insights to researchers, instructors, and administrators who are interested in service learning as a socially impactful and transformative approach and pedagogy.

The first theme that arises is the imperative for reflection throughout the service-learning collaboration. While all the researchers used reflection as data points, a number emphasized the need for reflection as part of the learning process (e.g. Wendler Shah). A couple of researchers emphasized the need for training the participants to consciously reflect (e.g., Permensky) as well as the need to train teacher educators to guide the reflection, especially in cultures where reflection hasn't been received much attention (e.g., Rejeki Murtinengsih). As a research strategy, the reflections provided meaningful insights into participants' thinking and shifts in thinking. As a teaching strategy, the reflections provided the participants with opportunities to integrate what they were experiencing with what they were thinking and learning.

The second theme that emerges is the variety of approaches to service learning and variety of goals for the service-learning projects, depending on the objectives that the course or program has for participants. Readers may be interested in how researchers or programs sought and negotiated mutually beneficial goals in the collaborations, as well as how researchers or programs approached the dissonance and power dynamics involved in situating who provides service and who is served. Researchers frame their service-learning approaches with a variety of goals: for example, goals of promoting a participatory citizen with further developed skills such as in attitudes or leadership, or with explicit social justice aims such as building genuine relationships and changing unequal power structures. See Mitchell's article "Traditional vs. Critical Service-Learning" for further distinctions between these approaches to service learning.

Each researcher in this collection acknowledges power dynamics negotiated within their service-learning programs and projects, and each arrived at or reported on their approach to dealing with the framing that contributes to those dynamics. While Mitchell differentiates a "critical" social justice aim from "traditional" service learning goals, another question has emerged through the variety of partnerships in this collection: how else can the partnership be framed, perhaps without any participant as recipient of service or as provider of service?

For example, some service-learning experiences in this collection include "service" provided to each other, and some include a product outcome as a service provided for a community partner in which the students benefit from the opportunity to participate in a professional development experience. Other experiences are framed with mutually beneficial goals rather than "service" from either side of the partnership. The authors respond to the term *service* in a variety of ways. For example, Cameron (Chapter 3) frames both groups in the partnership as having a "service" requirement. Miller and Kostka (Chapter 4) frame the partnership as a project, outlining the roles of each partner group. Wendler Shah (Chapter 7) distances "served" from the term's definitional and connotative meanings with quotation marks and additionally addresses when participants felt that they were serving others.

The collection editors Adrian Wurr and James Perren suggest in their introduction that service learning and TESOL are becoming more visible and that there are questions as to whether the partnerships can be as mutually beneficial as they are billed to be. Marshall has raised the challenge beyond mutually beneficial partnerships to "creat[ing] relationships that neither ignore the realities of social inequality in our society nor attempt to artificially homogenize all people in the service-learning experience" (58–59). She frames this within the approach of critical service learning with a "service" component, yet community literacy scholars, community members, and educators will find this collection useful in seeking to recognize and consider the realities of social inequality while setting goals, organizing logistics, and framing the partnership—with or without a giver or receiver of *service*. The collection's authors show that community or service-learning partnerships with ELLs can be mutually beneficial for participants as well as have socially impactful

potentials such as to foster new self-awareness of shifting identities, to shift power dynamics, and to disrupt dominant discourses.

Works Cited

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