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SERVICE-LEARNING AND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN SECONDARY
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS

by Martha E. Schultz

A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master
of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Overview

Before getting my teaching license, I worked in a high school in rural Minnesota as a community education youth development coordinator. I oversaw after school programs, ran volunteer activities, and opened my doors to any student who might need an escape. I was passionate about my work and spent well over the typical workday coordinating college access field trips, attending community meetings, and working one-on-one with youth. Because of the relationships I developed with students and their families, my position evolved into student advocacy work as well. I supported my students in the community and I advocated for them within the school system. During my time in this position, one topic that came up frequently was post high school plans. The typical “When I graduate” discussion students often had changed to “If I graduate” for many of my students when their senior years approached and they still lacked credits to graduate or the English language skills to pass state tests. The majority of my program participants were immigrant youth and English language learners (ELLs) having come to the United States in the last 8 years. Without a high school diploma, my students saw a future of working on the line at the local turkey processing plant next to their mothers, aunts, uncles, and older siblings. Their aspirations to receive a high school diploma caused many students to become skeptical of English Language (EL) classes, viewing them as a waste of time. At the same time, I often watched many students reluctantly age out of the school system without gaining enough English language skills to easily access employment or further education. Of those who earned a high school diploma and went

on to post-secondary school, many had to enroll in remedial classes due to their limited English language proficiency levels. During my time working in community education up until my time now teaching, I often have thought about how to better support these students. ELLs were attracted to my programming that connected them to the community. I saw a great benefit in ELLs participating in my community outreach activities and I could see an even greater benefit by embedding these volunteer service activities into the typical school day and EL curriculum. My experiences led me to research the question: *How does service-learning promote academic success and language acquisition in secondary ELLs?*

Rationale

When I worked for this rural district in Minnesota, I did not have my EL teaching license and I did not have experience teaching in a traditional sense. After getting my Bachelor of Science degree a few years before, I served as an AmeriCorps member for a district in rural Minnesota while trying to figure out my next step. I wanted to go back to school and I was deciding between exploring my interest in the sciences through medicine or looking into another passion of mine: social justice. While serving as an AmeriCorps member, some of my time was spent in an EL classroom. As I was searching for my calling, both my mom and my sister told me to get my EL teaching license because I often shared stories with them about my work experiences. I quickly shot their idea down. I wanted to pursue a more glamorous career. As my year in AmeriCorps came to an end, I still was unsure about what to do next, so when another job working with youth presented itself, I continued what I knew best: working with students.

My mom is a teenage mental health social worker. When I was young, I frequently tagged along with her on her work adventures. My childhood memories are filled with visions of riding in the backseat of her oversized white station wagon as she picked up kids and drove them to appointments and activities. I quietly observed as my mom had conversations with them along the way, built relationships, and addressed their needs. To her clients, my mom is a caring, humorous, and quiet listener. Nothing surprises her. She builds trust with her kids by being a reliable adult. She takes calls in the middle of the night and she is there to pick her kids up before school and after school. My mom is a dependable and caring adult for those who need it most. Before I even reached middle school, my mom was preparing me to be a teacher.

When I started my new job as the Youth Development Coordinator right after college, I did my best to follow my mom's example and put my students' unique and diverse needs in mind when crafting programming. Of course, I made a lot of mistakes along the way. When I doubted my decisions or the direction my position was taking me, I remembered to always consider who I was trying to serve. I stayed in my job working in community education for much longer than I originally planned. I could not leave my students and I realized there was fulfillment in working in a job you are passionate about. I enjoyed my job, but at the same time, I became frustrated that many students with whom I worked lacked advocates within the classroom. Some students and their families did not understand why they were still enrolled in EL classes. They felt they were not progressing academically and were not benefiting from isolated EL instruction. Additionally, because of standardized test requirements at the time, some of my students were passing all of their classes but failing the state tests repeatedly due to language

barriers, resulting in them never graduating from high school. These students would come back to visit me and they would tell me about their experiences of freezing conditions working overnight shifts pulling apart frozen turkeys at the local turkey processing plant. These students and I would explore the idea of studying for and earning their Graduation Equivalent Degree (GED), but I could tell in their eyes they knew this was a dream they would never reach. After 8 years of working with remarkable immigrant youth, I finally decided to get my teaching license so I could do even more to support the students with whom I worked. I felt I could make an even greater impact within the classroom by bringing my community building experience into the classroom.

Context

In my youth development training, I would constantly hear about what to avoid: do not create programming that only makes a surface-level impact. Grant funders did not want to throw money at things that were simply about *volunteering* and required no deeper connection to learning. Through training, I thoroughly studied the social-emotional and community benefits of service-learning. While I was not a school day teacher with the same ability to embed continuous curriculum into my afterschool programming, I modified volunteer events to ensure there were elements of learning and reflection. When I began offering volunteer and service-learning programming to my high school students, I witnessed my program enrollment skyrocket. Students loved doing projects in the community and ELLs were specifically attracted to these programs.

When I began thinking about a topic to research for my capstone, I remembered an interaction between one of my students, Hanan, and me. Hanan was an immigrant from Ethiopia. She had been in the country for two years when I first met her. She

popped her head into my office one day and asked, “What are we doing today, Miss?” I had never interacted with Hanan prior to this, but she had heard about my programming from classmates and wanted to be a part of it as well. Every day for months Hanan peaked her head into my office and asked the same question. On the volunteer sign-up sheets outside my office door, Hanan’s name would be at the top of every event. Though Hanan had been in the community for a few years, many parts of our community were still unknown to her. Through volunteering, she discovered the nature center, the community center, and the community college. She formed relationships with public health workers, law enforcement officers, and undergraduate students from neighboring colleges. My relationship with Hanan grew and I began to learn about her experience of coming to the United States. We incorporated her interests into future programming, she served on local nonprofit boards as a youth representative, and she added to her professional development portfolio.

Hanan signed up for any project that connected her to the community. She was not alone. My student volunteers served food to senior citizens at community dinners, they staffed face painting booths at preschool events, they dressed up in costumes to teach youth about road safety, and they worked with law enforcement to encourage their peers to wear seatbelts. Through every activity, my students interacted with adults within the community and they gained professional skills. Students were motivated and excited about their work. I could see the impact it made on the community as well. For some older white members of the community, these volunteer experiences were the first time they had genuine conversations with immigrants and students-of-color. In a community with many people resistant to immigration, it was monumental to witness these personal

connections. I have indescribable pride for how courageous my students were as they built bridges across cultural divides and acted as diversity educators.

While I no longer work for the same district, I maintain my connections with many community members and former students. The district hired a passionate and experienced EL coordinator, a position they did not have before, and there are many improvements in the school's EL curriculum and connection to the immigrant community. Now, as a licensed EL teacher, I cannot help but think about my past experiences in connecting youth to the community. The excitement for learning and engagement my former students had was undeniable. My goal is to bring this excitement into the EL curriculum.

Summary

My experience seeing newcomer ELLs struggle when faced with the daunting task of becoming proficient in English and passing high school requirements in a short time frame prompted me to begin researching the value of service-learning in the EL classroom. I witnessed the common issue of students feeling stalled in EL classes many years ago while I worked in youth development. They lacked enthusiasm for continuing in EL services, but their English language skills were not strong enough for them to exit out of services. These same students, however, raced at the opportunity to do service-learning projects and practice English in the community. Through community engagement, they built relationships and experienced social-emotional gains.

In the following research, I will look into how service-learning promotes academic success and language acquisition in secondary ELLs. In Chapter 2 of this paper, I will conduct a review of relevant literature. In addition to providing an

introduction to the pedagogy of service-learning, I will describe demographic information about ELLs and the struggles they face in our schools. In this chapter, I will look into EL best practices to meet the needs of our ELLs. The chapter will also address the positive academic and social-emotional impacts of service-learning for language learners. This literature review will allow me to make the argument that service-learning is an effective tool to promote language acquisition and it should be embedded into the secondary EL curriculum. In Chapter 3 of my paper, I will describe how my research will be applied in the classroom. Chapter 3 will outline my plans for a service-learning toolkit for EL educators to use to initiate service-learning in their schools. Finally, in Chapter 4, I will reflect on my project and make recommendations for future work.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Introduction

Researchers have well understood the benefits of service-learning in an academic setting for the last few decades. As a result, the service-learning pedagogy is growing across disciplines. Service-learning makes learning more meaningful and strengthens students' motivation (Bradford, 2005). Additionally, service-learning enhances civic engagement while improving the community (National Youth Leadership Council, n.d.). Studies show service-learning increases student learning across content areas (Prentice & Robinson, 2010; Warren, 2012). However, the majority of research citing the positives of service-learning involves dominant-culture and dominant-language participants (Askildson, et al., 2013). In the last decade, researchers have begun to look at this gap in research investigating the benefits of a service-learning curriculum in EL courses. Despite this uptick in research related to ELLs, most research still focuses on language gains related to service-learning in older language learners at the community college or the post-secondary level. There is a void of research related to implementing this teaching method with elementary and secondary ELLs. Service-learning is proven to be effective as a language development teaching tool for adult second language learners (Baker, 2019). Because second language acquisition follows the same order no matter the age of the learner, service-learning is a promising and creative method to improve students' conversational and academic language in the middle and high school EL curriculum. The following chapter is a review of the literature addressing the research question: *how does*

service-learning promote academic success and language acquisition in secondary ELLs?

The United States is, and has always been, multicultural and multilingual. Over 4.7 million children in our public school system have a home language other than English. These students bring rich perspectives, knowledge, and opportunities to the nation's schools. Studies show individuals who speak more than one language have benefits including increased mental flexibility, superior problem-solving skills, and a greater understanding of language (Burton, 2018). Despite this, the educational system is failing these multi-language learners. Students with a home language other than English have higher high school drop-out rates and perform lower on reading and math proficiency exams compared to their non-ELL peers (Short & Boyson, 2012). As immigrants begin to settle across the United States, in urban as well as suburban and rural areas, the need for successful English language instructional tools in nearly every school is growing. This paper will argue service-learning is an underused teaching method, it fits seamlessly into proven best practices of teaching ELLs, and it can play an important role in promoting academic success and language acquisition within EL programs.

This chapter begins with an introduction to service-learning. From there, the chapter moves to an overview of ELLs, including demographic information about this large heterogeneous group. The paper will explore federal education policies that impact the education of language learners. Following this, the chapter discusses the many challenges ELLs face in our schools while demonstrating the need for quality EL education to ensure this vulnerable population is not being left behind. Finally, Chapter 2 will move to explore research on EL best practices and how these promising strategies

seamlessly align with the benefits of service-learning experiences. The EL best practices discussed in this chapter include: teaching in language-rich environments, engaging with the community, using home language and culture as a resource, providing social-emotional supports, and building student ownership.

Through the in-depth look into service-learning and ELLs and the positive results that ensue from incorporating service-learning into an EL curriculum, this paper will lead readers to the conclusion that service-learning can be used as an effective tool to improve academic success, promote connectedness, and build language acquisition.

History of Service-Learning

Service-learning is an effective tool to further classroom knowledge and enhance the community. With roots in volunteerism and service to the community, service-learning is not new. Research on service-learning frequently cites philosopher John Dewey as inspiration in both philosophy and pedagogy, paired with David's Kolb ideas of reflective thinking (Flecky, 2010). In the past few decades, service-learning has gained popularity as a tool for instruction in a variety of disciplines. According to the National Youth Leadership Council, (n.d.), service-learning is "an approach to teaching and learning in which students use academic and civic knowledge and skills to address genuine community needs" (para. 1). A more practical definition of service-learning is provided by Jacoby (1996) defining service-learning as "a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote student learning and development" (p. 5). Service-learning can take many different forms. Examples include: Learning about pollination in the classroom while working with city officials to build a

bee-friendly habitat, reading to younger students while learning about organizational skills, or investigating local health issues while creating public health posters for community display. Setting itself apart from volunteerism, service-learning involves integrating knowledge and skills taught in the classroom in addition to fulfilling a community need (McLeod, 2017). For service-learning to be most effective, research shows the efforts must be meaningful, reflective, encompass youth voice, link to the curriculum, respect and promote understanding of diversity, forge genuine and mutually beneficial partnerships, contain quality assessment, and have sufficient duration (National Youth Leadership Council, 2008). The effort to formalize service-learning and meet these criteria should not hinder EL educators from attempting it even if not perfected. In *Service Learning and Community Engagement for English Classes*, McLeod (2017) eases educators' stress of creating seamless service-learning projects when writing, "no service-learning project is ever truly a failure, especially if it is an English-focused project, because already the effort by the students to understand a community need and formulate a project plan to address it consolidates their language skills..." (p. 21).

As this chapter will investigate further, the benefits of service-learning are widespread. Research shows many positive results of service-learning, including increased student motivation, life skills development, improved student engagement, and personal and interpersonal development (Flournoy, 2007; Astin & Sax, 1998; Rockquemore & Schaffer, 2000; Gullicks, 2006). As a tool for second-language acquisition, service-learning has also expanded (Baker, 2019). However, most research involves participants who are of the English-speaking majority providing service to a non-English speaking population (Langseth, 2012).

While some teachers might not feel service-learning is an appropriate fit for the EL classroom, in *Strategies for Teaching English Learners* Díaz-Rico states service-learning can be successful if the components of preparation, performing the task, and reflection are present. Arguing service-learning creates an opportunity for partnership between abstract classroom content and real-world experiences, Díaz-Rico (2013) writes, “English learners have a strong need to feel part of the community, be that their classroom community, a community in which they are sojourners, or a community into which they have integrated” (p. 396).

English Language Learners

Nearly 1 in every 10 public school students in the United States is learning to speak English (U.S. Department of Education: Office of English Language Acquisition, 2016). The term *English language learner* used to describe students in this diverse subset is “a non-native speaker of English who is in the process of attaining proficiency in English” (Wright, 2010, p. 1). ELLs are the fastest-growing subgroup of the school-age population. From 2000 to 2016, the percentage of students in U.S. public schools receiving EL services grew from 8.1 percent (3.8 million students) to 9.6 percent (4.9 million students) (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). While ELLs still predominantly reside in urban areas, rural and suburban areas have seen a rise in this student population, creating a unique challenge for districts unaccustomed to educating them (Tung, 2013).

California has the largest ELL population with 29 percent of all school-aged language learners, but states across the country, particularly in the Midwest and Southeast, have seen a large ELL population growth over the past decade (Breiseth,

2015). Minnesota, for instance, has experienced a 300 percent growth in ELLs over the past two decades (Minnesota Department of Education, 2017). Eight percent (73,128 students) of all public school students in the state are ELLs (Sugarman and Geary, 2018). Despite this growth across the country, many states and districts do not have a unified vision as to how to approach EL education (Tung, 2013). According to the U.S. Department of Education, at least 32 states have an EL teacher shortage (Mitchell, 2018). Additionally, schools are failing to properly train teachers who work in EL classrooms (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2017).

Diversity of ELLs. ELLs are an extremely heterogeneous group. Approximately 3.8 million ELLs are native Spanish speakers, but these students also have home languages that include Chinese (Mandarin and Cantonese), Arabic, Vietnamese, and many others (Sanchez, 2017). Differing by more than just home languages, ELLs have varying socioeconomic statuses, races and ethnicities, levels of previous schooling, proficiencies in their native languages, and parents' education levels (Wright, 2010). Over 77 percent of ELLs are identified as Hispanic, 10 percent are Asian, and nearly 4 percent are Black (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019). This diverse group of learners includes newly arrived immigrants or refugees as well as students who have been in EL services for more than 6 years (Short and Boyson, 2012).

A commonly held misconception is that all ELLs are foreign-born English learners, while in fact most ELLs are U.S.-born citizens. A Migration Policy Institute analysis of U.S. Census data found that 82 percent of prekindergarten to 5th grade ELLs are U.S.-born and 65 percent of 6th to 12th grade ELLs are U.S.-born (Zong and Batalova, 2015). Whether a second-generation immigrant or a newcomer who has been in the U.S.

less than two years, all ELLs face unique challenges compared to their English proficient peers (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2016).

In addition to varying home languages and time spent in the country, ELLs have differing experiences with formal education. In the last 15 years, there has been a large influx to the U.S. of recent immigrants with limited or interrupted formal education. Students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFEs) are ELLs who have experienced interrupted education due to war, civil unrest, migration, or other factors. These students have not had the opportunity to participate in schooling or have had limited education. In addition to language and culture shifts, SLIFEs have to adjust to the individualist nature of the U.S. education system and switch to text-based learning as opposed to learning via spoken word like many students experienced in their home countries (DeCapua and Marshall, 2010). In the field of EL, both newcomers and SLIFEs require additional support as they adjust to a new culture, language, and the Western-style model of education.

Trauma and poverty. All students in U.S. schools may experience trauma, chronic stress, violence, and poverty. ELLs are at greater risk of experiencing these realities than their English proficient peers. They are more likely to be in poverty and attend under-resourced schools (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2017). Nearly 60 percent of all ELLs are low-income, living in families with an income that is at or below 185 percent of the federal poverty line (Grantmakers for Education, 2013). This rate is nearly twice that of their non-ELL peers (Wright, 2010). Many ELLs are refugees, having fled war, extreme poverty, or violence. Some are undocumented, or have undocumented family members. Over 4 million U.S.-born

children have at least one undocumented parent, and experience high levels of stress, poverty, isolation, and fear (Yoshikawa and Kalil, 2011). About 50 percent of ELLs are from families with parents who do not have a high school diploma. One-quarter of ELLs are from households with parents who have less than a 9th-grade education (Wright, 2010).

The majority of ELLs are low-income and ethnic minorities. In *Foundations for Teaching English Language Learners*, Wright (2010) describes the failure of the education system in educating our at-risk populations by saying:

Historically, the U.S. education system has done an inadequate job in providing equitable educational opportunities to poor and minority students...there continues to be a wide gap in academic achievement between poor, minority, and ELL students and middle-to-upper class White students. (p.10)

Adolescent ELLs undergo typical mental, physical, and emotional challenges associated with growing up, in addition to experiencing possible trauma and stress from their specific past circumstances (Hos, 2016). Schools, therefore, can be influential in assisting these students acclimate and feel supported.

EL Education Policies

The 1982 *Plyler v. Doe* Supreme Court ruling ensured states cannot deny students access to a free public education based on students' immigration status (*Plyler vs. Doe*, 1982). Despite this, the question of how to best provide a quality education to immigrant youth remains. While the United States has always had language diversity, not until 1968 with the passing of Title VII, or the Bilingual Education Act, did the federal government create and fund legislation to support ELLs. Before this, ELLs were placed in mainstream

classrooms with no language support (Wright, 2010). Through its many revisions over 30 years, the Bilingual Education Act recognized the importance of bilingualism as well as bilingual education.

More recent federal policies, like the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) effective from 2002-2015 and replacing the Bilingual Education Act, specified all states are required to help ELLs become English proficient. NCLB made a dramatic shift away from bilingual education with an extreme focus on teaching ELLs English as quickly as possible. It held ELLs to the same standards as their English-fluent peers creating great pressure for schools to have students with limited English proficiency pass standardized tests (Chen, 2019). Federal pressure for accountability came with little financial support (Sanchez, 2017). NCLB made it possible for more schools to access financial support, but funding became spread more thinly (Wright, 2010). While NCLB was replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015 resulting in states being able to develop their own growth measurements as a tool for newcomers instead of standardized tests, progress for ELLs is still expected (García Mathewson, 2016). Despite accountability policies like these, a wide gap in achievement exists between ELLs and English proficient students (Wright, 2010).

Academic Struggles for Older English Language Learners

No matter where ELLs attend school, many of these students are struggling academically. While this group of students is the fastest growing population in our school systems, they have struggled to succeed compared to non-ELLs (Short and Boyson, 2012). Equated to the overall national high school graduation rate of 82 percent, only 63

percent of ELLs in the United States graduate from high school. ELLs lag in academics and are often stuck in non-credit-bearing EL classes (Sanchez, 2017).

Newcomer ELL high school students, also referred to as *late-entry* students, have an even greater challenge than immigrants who come to the country at a younger age. These students must become English proficient to pass high stakes tests, learn the culture, and catch up to their native-born non-ELL peers in rigorous content areas before graduation. Also, many older ELLs experience role-reversal as they learn English faster than their parents. They become translators and interpreters, childcare providers, and wage-earners. Given the additional stress ELLs face, high school dropout rates are much higher for immigrants and students with limited English proficiency (Morse, 2005). A distinct relationship exists between the age a child migrates and attaining a high school diploma. According to a Canadian study, students who migrate after age nine face a growing threat of not graduating from high school. The chance of not graduating from high school increases with every year past this age with a sharp uptick after age 14 and 15 (Corak, 2011).

As this chapter has illustrated, our nation's ELLs face great challenges even before entering the classroom. That being said, effective instruction, high expectations, and engaging school climates assist in fostering ELLs' motivation to learn and commitment to academic success (August, 2018). The following section will address promising strategies in EL education.

English Language Instruction Best Practices

Language acquisition is divided into two categories: first-language acquisition, a universal process one can witness as babies begin to imitate sounds and eventually

produce words, and second-language acquisition or learning an additional language. Second-language acquisition learners go through several stages before reaching advanced fluency in an additional language. This process takes an average of five to seven years. It is important to note, however, for students with limited first language literacy, it can take 7 to ten years to reach advanced fluency in a second language (González, 2008). In a typical EL classroom, students vary in first language literacy, in addition to the many other factors that make this group of learners so diverse.

While the education of ELLs has been a formalized part of the U.S. Education system for decades, how states and districts accomplish this is varied ranging from all-English instruction to bilingual education. The research investigating effective EL program models, though widespread, is also unclear and politically charged. According to Goldenberg (2010), it is even difficult to decipher in what type of instructional environment ELLs are enrolled across the country due to reporting inconsistencies and varying reporting definitions. Every state documents having ELLs in their student population, but no state uses a consistent EL program model (Goldenberg, 2010). Even with unreliable national data, a recent study showed the quality of instruction, curriculum, and school supports are more important determinants of ELLs' success than program model (Goldenberg, 2013). Despite inconsistencies in policy, program models, and research, there is overlap in numerous EL best practices cited by researchers, EL experts, and educators. For this research paper as it relates to service-learning, this chapter will highlight and summarize five best practices based on WIDA's *Guiding Principles of Language Development*. These include (1) teaching in language-rich

environments (2) engaging with the community (3) using home language and culture as a resource, (4) providing social-emotional supports, and (5) building student ownership.

Teaching in language-rich environments. According to the WIDA’s *Guiding Principles of Language Development* (2019), “Multilingual learners use and develop language through activities which intentionally integrate multiple modalities, including oral, written, visual, and kinesthetic modes of communication” (p.1). While EL classrooms provide learners with safe environments to practice English, it might not be enough to master a language. Ernst and Richard (1995) state,

...since children learn their first language not by practicing structured drills, trying to get a sentence right, or communing with a book, but by using language as a means to communicate with real people and in real situations. The same applies to students who are learning a second language. (p. 326)

Depending on EL program models, ELLs may be isolated from native English speakers and have limited authentic interaction and oral practice with a native speaker other than a classroom teacher. According to Gass and Selinker (2001), classroom environments may lack opportunities for oral fluency practice and oral feedback. Service-learning can assist in filling this gap.

Learning language both in formal and informal environments is essential to building proficiency. Second language learners require language-rich environments in which the learner can organically practice language and construct grammar through input (Douglas, 2017). Studies suggest classrooms contribute to second language acquisition by learning linguistic features. Real-world experiences, such as those that result from

service-learning activities, contribute to second language acquisition by improving communicative skills (Dudley, 2007).

Research investigating second language acquisition through service-learning in study abroad courses suggests students require meaningful practice of language forms (new grammar, vocabulary) to move from controlled processing of these forms to automatic fluency. Service-learning is a successful method of providing language learners these structured linguistic out-of-classroom opportunities. A study by Askildson, et. al. (2013), found qualitative and quantitative evidence supporting linguistic gains and the ability to use language in sociocultural meaningful contexts in ELLs who participated in an 8-week service learning program. Similar to Askildson, et. al., Elwell and Bean (2001) found gains in their ELL students' language skills after a 12-week service-learning project. Elwell and Bean monitored a diverse group of 28 migrant ELLs at varying English language proficiencies as they worked through the novel *Of Mice and Men*. The class simultaneously learned about local migrants and conducted a student-led service-learning project. Learners' vocabulary acquisition, discussion skills, and oral expression skills improved. The students showed noticeable improvement in all four modalities (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in a matter of weeks, surpassing the researchers' expectations (Elwell & Bean, 2001).

As this research shows, incorporating service-learning into the EL curriculum provides the opportunity for genuine interactions and language practice through the four modalities. When carried out effectively, service-learning delivers students with language development opportunities. Through the service-learning cycle including in-classroom

lessons, service project planning, out-of-classroom interactions, and reflection, students experience a variety of teaching practices that aid in second language acquisition.

Service-learning is an effective method to engage students in practicing the four language modalities. It is also an effective tool to build cultural understanding and enhance student motivation. The following section will address how service-learning fits within additional EL best practice teaching methods, including engaging with the community, using home language and culture as a resource, providing social-emotional supports, and building student ownership.

Engaging with the community. Learning a new language is a social endeavor and requires activities that involve the community (Dudley, 2007). As the previous chapter illustrated, service-learning provides space for authentic interactions in the community which promotes language development beyond what is often available in a typical EL classroom. The reciprocal relationship of this pedagogy allows students to learn from the community at the same time the students are performing a service. This interaction promotes students' understanding of their role in the larger community (Jacoby, 1996).

Cross-cultural understanding and connectedness is critical to the success of ELLs. According to WIDA's *Guiding Principles of Language Development* (2019), "Multilingual learners' language development and learning occur over time through meaningful engagement in activities that are valued in their homes, schools and communities" (p.1). Earlier, this chapter addressed the challenges ELLs face including linguistic challenges and community alienation. These struggles can impede academic learning. In the research review, *Immigrant Children and Youth in the USA: Facilitating*

Equity of Opportunity at School, Adelman and Taylor (2015) outline best practices for meeting the needs of ELLs. Two of these principles involve the community. According to Adelman and Taylor (2015), a key learning support is to "...develop greater community connection and support from a wide range of entities to better address barriers to learning, promote child and youth development, and establish a sense of community that supports learning and focuses on hope for the future" (p.335).

Service-learning provides students with opportunities to engage the community in meaningful ways. Research by Elwell and Bean (2001) demonstrates this. They witnessed their students seeing themselves as valuable members of society after the *Of Mice and Men* service-learning project. One student wrote after completing their service-learning project about migrant workers, "participating in this project made me feel part of the community because I was so involved in the subject that I felt that I was part of it..." (Elwell & Bean, 2001, p.58). Work by Russell (2007) shows the community and personal impact service-learning can make in secondary students. After completing a year-long service-learning project within her EL classroom, she found her students were more connected to other students within the school. Additionally, they felt more appreciated and connected within the community-at-large. After the conclusion of the project, many of her students continued to work within the community and initiated service projects on their own (Russell, 2007). The feeling of connectedness to the community resulted in greater school engagement.

Late-entry ELLs are at greater risk of academic failures. As this chapter addressed previously, high school-aged ELLs must learn language skills and make core academic progress in a relatively short amount of time. On top of this, these students must begin to

make post-secondary plans. Engaging in the community through service-learning provides ELLs with connections to professionals and career opportunities. Through community-connected learning activities, students are exposed to a variety of careers and professionals. Service-learning activities can contribute to future planning and career development. It benefits secondary ELLs by establishing diverse long-lasting partnerships in the community.

Using home language and culture as a resource. While ELLs face difficult challenges, they also bring great opportunities to schools. Looking at these students as a resource, schools can utilize their students' previous knowledge and global perspectives to further their learning as well as the learning of the entire school. WIDA's *Guiding Principles of Language Development* (2019) states, "Multilingual learners' languages and cultures are valuable resources to be leveraged for schooling and classroom life; leveraging these assets and challenging biases help develop multilingual learners' independence and encourage their agency in learning" (p. 1).

When ELLs' culture and language are not recognized, they are at a disadvantage. Students are at risk of feeling alienated and depressed. According to Wright (2010), schools should "help ELLs create new, positive sociocultural identities that can help them negotiate the dynamic new world they are living, rather than encourage students to assimilate to mainstream norms" (p.17). The work of Richard Ruiz (1984) highlights the need to recognize students' home languages and cultures as resources that can be used to assist students' English language acquisition as well as academic content. Designing EL curriculum through the lens of "language-as-a-resource" results in greatest success.

Studies show bilingual speakers have lower high school dropout rates (Miller & Endo, 2004). While strong bilingual program models that develop both students' home and additional language align most closely with the *language-as-resource* philosophy, all schools can incorporate students' experiences, languages, and cultures into the curriculum. One suggestion by Miller and Endo (2004) in *Understanding and Meeting the Needs of ESL Students* is to "reduce the cultural load." Meaning, EL classrooms should feel like home to their students. Through getting to know their students, educators can incorporate students' cultures into lesson planning and activities. Similarly, Miller and Endo suggest teachers demonstrate to their students that native languages are also valued in the classroom and community (Miller & Endo, 2004).

Service-learning aligns with the goals of acknowledging, utilizing, and celebrating students' home language and culture. Research by Lowther Pereira (2015) concerning Spanish heritage language learners and identity found service-learning cultivated a sense of *language-as-resource* when service-learning study participants were able to learn about themselves through the process of connecting with the community. While Lowther Pereira's research focused on Spanish heritage language development at the community college level, the work of Russell (2007) discussed earlier in this chapter provides a superb example of how the asset-based best practice works well through the service-learning pedagogy for younger ELLs as well. As a secondary ELL teacher in central Nebraska, Russell regularly embeds service-learning into her curriculum allowing students the opportunity to develop programs. During one semester, Russell's students decided to create a Spanish/English phrasebook to distribute for community use (Russell, 2007). By combining students' home language and knowledge with the EL curriculum,

students have the opportunity to become the teacher. Russell's students felt empowered and their motivation to learn improved (Russell, 2007). Service-learning is an empowering venue to show students the widespread benefits of their home language and culture.

Providing social-emotional supports. Positive well-being results in greater academic success, school connectedness, and motivation. It also reduces at-risk behaviors, such as drug use and violence. (U.S. Department of Education, Office of English Language Acquisition, 2016). Research suggests providing students with social-emotional learning (SEL) opportunities supports and improves academic performance. WIDA's *Guiding Principles of Language Development* (2019) addresses this by emphasizing, "Multilingual learners' language, social-emotional, and cognitive development are inter-related processes that contribute to their success in school and beyond" (p.1).

As this chapter addressed earlier, immigrants and refugees experience challenges related to a new culture. With limited access to services and fewer established networks compared to their non-ELL peers, they are one of the most at-risk subgroups. In *Teaching More Than English: Connecting ESL Students to Their Community Through Service Learning*, Russell notes language and cultural differences often make her ELL students feel alienated. They tend to avoid interacting with non-ELL students (Russell, 2007). Students who feel especially vulnerable will have a hard time learning, as the brain "downshifts" when they feel threatened or afraid. Embedding social-emotional supports into teaching is key because educators' effectiveness is impacted by students' emotions (Christinson, 2002). Schools can assist immigrants in developing social support

networks. The largest gains are made when social-emotional supports and SEL are embedded into the classroom. According to Suarez-Orozco, Pimentel, and Martin (2009), “successful adaptations among immigrant students appear to be linked to the quality of relationships that they forge in their school setting.”

While research about SEL in education is still relatively new, with the first publication to describe its implications being in 1997 (Elias et al., 1997), research on this topic has grown enormously over the last twenty years. Though SEL and service-learning are independent fields, the drivers of these educational philosophies are similar. Both fields involve healthy youth development, empathy, and civic engagement. Service-learning can play an important part in building social-emotional supports and school connectedness. Research indicates students gain social-emotional skills through service-learning. Askildson, et. al. (2013) denoted this when writing, “Students experience growth by stepping beyond their comfort zones as they encounter people and realities well beyond what they may have experienced prior to that time” (p. 405). Similarly, Russell argues service-learning allows students to address their concerns and connect with themselves through the vital reflection component. She asserts ELL students are not usually asked to do this higher-level learning, missing an opportunity for continued knowledge building, self-reflection, as well as language practice (Russell, 2007). Hawkins (2007), a SEL researcher, believes social-emotional skills are achieved best when put into practice in real-life situations, like service-learning. He asserts that when students are engaged in meaningful activities, they are more likely to develop strong connections to their school and behaviors that promote academic achievement (Hawkins, 1997).

Building student ownership. Closely connected to social-emotional skills, motivation is a predictor of academic success. It also plays a key role in learning a new language. Having overcome major obstacles to come to the U.S., newcomers are often resilient and eager to receive an education (Tung, 2013). While many academics and experts agree first-generation immigrants tend to work hard to excel in school, motivation fluctuates (Hood, 2003). It is challenging to keep students highly motivated, especially those experiencing linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic barriers (Karaoglu, 2008). For this reason, Karaoglu (2008) argues, “Learners need quality instruction, input, interaction, and opportunities for meaningful output, not only to make academic progress, but also to maintain motivation for language learning.”

In *Applications of Brain-Based Research for Second Language Teaching and Learning* (1999), Christison writes,

Facts and skills that are taught in isolation and not connected to something meaningful cannot be remembered without considerable practice and rehearsal...Second language classroom activities that are meaningful create an ideal learning opportunity for second language students to learn more information in a shorter time, with less effort. (p.2)

Research shows service-learning improves student motivation. Service-learning encompasses a philosophy of student empowerment. In fact, McLeod (2017) concluded that service-learning is one of the best methods to achieve strong student engagement and ownership in learning. A study by Pellettieri (2011) found service-learning promoted integrative motivation for learning a language and encouraged linguistic self-confidence. Similarly, Grim (2010) found students took responsibility in learning after involvement in

service-learning. While these studies measured oral language development in college-level foreign language learners, studies with the EL field have found similar results.

Russell (2007) reported that participants were highly motivated to learn because students were engaged in the project. Her students requested additional English materials beyond what she had originally embedded into the curriculum to continue their learning.

When students are given the chance to plan their learning, it is not hard to see why motivation, and in turn learning, is elevated. Allowing secondary ELL students to invest in and take ownership of their learning is especially important to maintain motivation and encourage their continued success. McLeod (2017) advocates for more educators to use service-learning when she wrote, “Service Learning gives learners the opportunity to use their English skills in a new and creative way by exploring issues in their communities, but without diluting or degrading the academic quality of the program” (p. 27).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings demonstrate the benefits of embedding service-learning into the EL curriculum. Rather than diluting the rigor of a class, service-learning intensifies the level of interest in academics increasing student investment and motivation in learning. While more research is needed to investigate what linguistic and academic gains secondary ELLs make when involved in service-learning, the benefits of this pedagogy across all content areas, and the evidence of the success of this teaching tool for ELLs at the post-secondary level, show the usefulness and effectiveness of this tool for ELLs in middle and high school.

This research will go into practice with Chapter 3. The following chapter will delve deeper into the practical project surrounding the question: *how does service-learning promote academic success and language acquisition for secondary ELLs?* Using insight gathered through the literature review, I will create a toolkit for EL educators to begin using service-learning as an effective teaching tool in the EL classroom. By pairing best practice EL instruction methods discussed in this chapter with elements of quality service-learning, I will create a guide and 8-lesson unit to support real-world teachers in exploring how effective this teaching tool can be for their students. This project, from curriculum framework to project design and audience, will be outlined in detail in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

Project Description

Introduction

The goal of this project is to investigate the research question, *How does service-learning promote academic success and language acquisition in secondary ELLs?*

Chapter 2 reviewed the current literature on service-learning and its benefits. Through the examination of this literature, I established a solid reasoning for creating a toolkit, complete with an educator's guide and curriculum, for use within the secondary EL classroom.

Chapter 3 will begin with an overview of the audience and setting for which my project is intended, including the district in which I initially will be applying the guide and curriculum, and the students for whom I will be designing lessons. Following this, the chapter will outline the project, starting with an overview to provide the reader with a basic description of what the project will look like. Following this will be the curriculum framework that describes the research-based educational methods the project is based upon. The final sections of this chapter will address a timeline for project completion as well as information about the presentation of this capstone.

Audience and Setting

The intended audience for this project includes EL educators who teach within the high school setting and their ELL students in grades 9 through 12. While service-learning has proven benefits for all students, for this paper and due to its focus on language development, this toolkit is meant to be applied in the stand-alone EL classroom. The curriculum is appropriate for all ELLs. Newcomers through students with expanding

language proficiencies, WIDA levels 1 through 4, can access this content and language. EL students in grades 9 through 12, ages 14 through 21, are the focus because they are most at-risk in terms of school dropout rates (Corak, 2011). Additionally, they can benefit from the opportunities to create professional relationships with community members through their service-learning projects that could have positive impacts on their post-secondary goals. Additionally, high school students have greater independence and the ability to travel within the community. The project is created for small class sizes of 20 or fewer students to allow for the greatest ease of organizing outings within the community. This will also allow for 1:1 relationships with community members during service projects to optimize language exchange.

The initial setting of this project will be a high school in rural Minnesota with a city population of roughly 24,000. The community is home to growing East African and Hispanic populations. Approximately 60 percent of students in the public school system qualify for free and/or reduced lunch, a major indicator of poverty. Just over 23 percent of the district's students qualify for EL services. At the high school level, 14.2 percent are ELL. Within this student group, 46.8 percent are not making progress toward their learning targets (Minnesota Department of Education, 2020).

This community draws immigrants due to employment opportunities in local industries, including a meatpacking plant. While many efforts are being made to bridge cultural divides between the local community (largely white) and the immigrant community (largely non-white) within this small town, a portion of this local community is apprehensive and resistant to the city's changing demographics. As evidence of this, a significant number of families have chosen to not send their children to the public schools

in the community and instead open enroll them in neighboring districts with fewer immigrants and student-of-color. Despite this, the local school district has taken on a leadership role in overcoming racial divides and welcoming all students. The vision of this district is “To be a trusted community resource, providing life-long learning opportunities in a safe, nurturing environment” (Faribault Public Schools, n.d.). The district’s proactive approach, paired with the continuing need in the community for cross-cultural relationship-building opportunities, makes this an appropriate setting for the project.

Curriculum Overview

The final result of this capstone project will be a toolkit for service-learning within the EL classroom. This will include an educator’s guide as well as an adaptable curriculum covering 8 separate lessons. While service-learning is a teaching tool used across the United States, it is not often applied in the high school EL classroom. The idea of incorporating service-learning might seem overwhelming and almost impossible to implement due to limited resources and already challenging academic expectations. The purpose of the guidebook is to make this teaching means manageable by supporting teachers as they begin to explore the service-learning pedagogy and help educators envision how it will enhance learning in their classrooms. The educator’s guide will introduce EL classroom teachers to the idea of service-learning and its potential benefits in language development, motivation, and engagement. This guide will also explain how service-learning and the attached curriculum can be adapted to meet the needs of every community and every classroom. Also included in the guidebook will be the basics of how to set up out-of-classroom partnerships for service-learning activities. The guide will

cover additional necessities when taking students out of school, such as parental permission, travel, and ideas for writing small grants to cover possible expenses.

Following the educator's guide, the toolkit will include an 8-lesson unit, lasting approximately 15 to 19 class periods. Each lesson will be adaptable for grade levels and students' WIDA levels. The lessons are designed to be either taught back-to-back or sporadically throughout a semester. The lessons will mirror student-centered approaches to learning with the five key steps of service learning, including: 1) investigate 2) plan 3) act 4) reflect and 5) demonstrate (Berger Kaye, 2010). All lessons, aside from the day(s) in which students will leave the classroom for a service-learning project, will be taught in the classroom setting. The beginning lesson will introduce students to the concept of service-learning providing students with examples and visuals. The following lesson allows students to begin choosing a focus and thinking about what community issues are important to them. Because of the individualized nature of service-learning, and to create as much student ownership as possible, the lessons will allow for student input and decision-making (McLeod, 2017). Lesson three requires students to conduct research about their topics through articles and an interview with a community expert. Students will then begin to plan their project in Lesson four of the unit. Finally, in lesson five, students will enter the community and carry out their projects. This unit is meant to guide students through the creation of an individualized service-learning project. Therefore, depending on the nature of the students' project(s), these community outreach days might occur during two or more sessions in the community. This project can be extended, or continue after the school day if appropriate, to allow for even greater community building. Following day five of the unit, students will return to the classroom for the

remaining 3 lessons of the curriculum covering reflection, demonstration, and celebration.

Each lesson will cover the four language domains: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. The lessons will be delivered via small groups and can be adapted easily depending on the language level. The curriculum is focused on two of WIDA's development standards, including 1) social and instructional language and 2) language of language arts (WIDA, 2014). These language standards should be expanded and incorporated into the lesson planning if the service-learning topic fits into the areas of science and/or mathematics. The service-learning lessons will utilize the best practice strategies covered in the literature review in Chapter 2. These best practices include 1) teaching in language-rich environments 2) engaging with the community 3) using home language and culture as a resource 4) providing social-emotional supports and 5) building student ownership (WIDA, 2019).

As Chapter 2 illuminated, service-learning is a means to build student motivation and ownership of learning. These elements correspond with academic gains. Throughout this unit, students will be in charge of their learning. Teachers will act as a facilitator as they walk their students through the service-learning model. Student choice is essential to build class investment. While the goal of language development will be shared every time this curriculum is enacted, the project will not look the same one semester to the next. Students are the drivers of their learning and youth voice is critical (Berger Kaye, 2010).

In summary, the service-learning toolkit will provide both educators and students with the tools to engage the community while experiencing academic benefits. By briefly introducing the concept of service-learning, its benefits, and a framework to begin within

the EL classroom, the educator's guide will empower teachers to begin using service-learning as a powerful pedagogy. The 8-lesson unit plan will focus on WIDA's developmental standards and embed the best practices reviewed in Chapter 2. For a total of 15 to 19 class periods, students will work through the service-learning model of investigation, planning, acting, reflecting, and demonstrating.

Curriculum Framework

The framework for this curriculum follows the backward by design model and is based on the work by Wiggins and McTighe in *Understanding by Design (UbD)* (2005). According to Wiggins and McTighe (2005), "Our lessons, units, and courses should be logically inferred from the results sought, not derived from the methods, books, and activities with which we are most comfortable. Curriculum should lay out the most effective ways of achieving specific results" (p. 14). By focusing on learning, instead of teaching, the backward by design model allows for greater coherence among desired results and better student performance. In terms of this curriculum, language development is a major part of the learning goal. Service-learning will serve as a means to deliver the best practice strategies outlined in Chapter 2. *UbD* is well-known throughout the teaching field. Using this as a curriculum framework allows teachers to easily adapt the curriculum, with differentiated learning targets as the focus.

Timeline

The curriculum is meant to be delivered throughout a flexible timeline during one semester of school. Lessons can occur one to two times per week, or on a daily basis, covering a total of 3 to 4 weeks. Because of challenges associated with regularly leaving the school's campus, including the cost of transportation and missing instruction from

other classes, the curriculum includes only one to three community-based education days. Ideally, this service-project could continue more regularly during after school hours. The timeline and curriculum can be adapted if appropriate for specific classrooms and projects. While the timeline is flexible, the day(s) in which the students complete their service-learning project in the community must be carefully planned. The curriculum is easily adaptable and no service project will be the same. For this reason, EL teachers could use this curriculum multiple semesters even with student overlap.

Presentation of the Project

This project will be presented in the professional context through a PowerPoint presentation at the local school board. The presentation will include a brief history of service-learning, its benefits, and an introduction about the steps of enacting the curriculum within the EL classroom. The guide and curriculum will also be available in a printed version for EL educators interested in exploring or initiating the service-learning pedagogy in their classroom.

Summary

Using the *UbD* framework, the curriculum focuses on language development through the means of service-learning. This project answers the question of how to promote academic success and language acquisition in secondary ELLs through a service-learning curriculum. This project has the opportunity to bring excitement, student motivation, and ownership of learning into the EL classroom all while building community relationships.

In summary, this chapter covered the audience and setting, curriculum overview, curriculum framework, timeline, and presentation of this project. As described above, the toolkit provides an educator's guide and curriculum for the EL classroom.

The following chapter is a conclusion to the journey of investigating service-learning in the EL classroom. It will describe the process of creating the guide and 8-lesson unit. In addition, it will touch on research that had the greatest bearing on the final project and explore the project's implications and limitations. Finally, Chapter 4 will close with a look to the future with the next steps for this capstone project.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusion

Overview

This project explored the question: *how does service-learning promote academic success and language acquisition in secondary ELLs?* Having completed the process of developing a capstone project, I will highlight my key areas of learning in this final chapter. These areas of learning pertain to differing roles I have taken on through this capstone process of being both a researcher and a writer. Additionally, I will reflect on my literature review and how it impacted the development of this work, highlighting what research was most influential in the creation of my project. Next, I will discuss implications of this project and how this project adds to the conversation of EL instruction best practices, as well my project's limitations and feasibility. Finally, my capstone project will conclude with a look to the future and what next steps I foresee.

Different Roles of the Capstone Process

In this section, I address the roles I took on throughout the process of completing my capstone project. These roles include being a researcher and a writer. Both of these experiences resulted in greater understanding of my field, but it required me to expand my thinking and practice. Having had a considerable hiatus between receiving my initial teaching licensure and completing my final coursework to receive my Master in Arts of Teaching degree, it took a small adjustment to look through the lens of being a researcher once again. When initially beginning the process of exploring capstone topics, it was difficult for me to narrow-in on a research question. While I knew I wanted to explore a topic related to secondary ELLs and tools to improve their overall academic success,

many of my initial questions were too broad and lacked a clear path of how I would accomplish a project. However, as soon as I landed on my current research question, I felt at-ease because it combined my experience working with youth before getting my teaching license with my current teaching area. Exploring this topic was both exciting and rewarding. It was a pleasure to invest time and energy into a project that would, intern, improve my teaching. While I participate in regular professional development opportunities and carefully plan and reflect on my daily teaching, having this time set aside to explore my craft was a unique experience. Researching best practice techniques in the EL classroom took me along numerous paths that did not necessarily relate to my capstone, but would end up proving beneficial to my overall current classroom teaching.

Just as adapting to the researcher role took an adjustment, so did the process of becoming a writer. Although I explored my topic thoroughly in the researching phase, this process of writing was difficult for two reasons. First, it is very personal and I was not anticipating to include so much of “me” in my project. Secondly, I questioned my expertise and knowledge level. Did I do enough research and did I know enough to connect ideas and make claims? With the help of classmates, peers, instructors, and by continuously referring back to my research, I recognized my experience and knowledge in this subject area were valuable. Being a writer, just like my role as researcher, was both rewarding and time-consuming. Through these experiences, I realized the importance of life-long learning. While I might not have the opportunity to invest in creating this intensive research and writing-focused environment again in the near future, it will serve as a constant reminder about the importance of intentionally seeking out new literature, best practices, and effective teaching resources.

Revisiting the Literature Review

In revisiting Chapter 2, the literature review, I see the majority of the research was helpful in creating my final project. It proved extremely advantageous to explore the background of ELLs in the United States, as well as the many academic and social challenges this population faces. This background set the stage for how in-need effective teaching tools are. For instance, while the United States has been formally educating ELLs for decades, the quality and type of EL instruction we provide varies greatly throughout the U.S. It is difficult to determine in what type of instructional environment ELLs are enrolled across the country due to reporting inconsistencies and varying reporting definitions (Goldenberg, 201). That being said, quality of instruction, curriculum, and school supports are more important determinants of ELLs' success than program model (Goldenberg, 2013). Understanding this need for quality instruction and school supports inspired me to create a service-learning unit as my capstone project.

Similarly, researching best practices of EL instruction was influential in my decision to create a service-learning unit for ELs. These strategies for effective teaching from WIDA including teaching in language-rich environments, engaging with the community, using home language and culture as a resource, providing social-emotional supports, and building student ownership, overlapped with the benefits of service-learning to a degree that was surprising.

While investigating quality EL instruction and best practices was critical to the success of my project, the research that influenced my capstone project the most were the case studies of ELLs becoming motivated by and investing in service-learning projects. While service-learning projects are relatively common in schools through the U.S., the

majority of these programs are planned for non-ELL students. A service-learning pedagogy focusing specifically on ELLs and their English language acquisition and academic improvement is not as common. Because of this, two specific studies stood out to me. These studies include research done by Elwell & Bean (2001) and Russell (2007). Elwell and Bean (2001) found gains in their ELL students' language skills after a 12-week service-learning project. While this study focuses on adult ELLs, their findings were significant enough to encourage me to begin studying ELLs and service-learning at the secondary school level. Elwell and Bean (2001) monitored a diverse group of 28 ELLs with varying English language proficiencies as the students read the novel *Of Mice and Men* and conducted a service-learning project related to migrant workers. The researchers found improvements in learners' vocabulary acquisition, discussion skills, and oral expression skills. The students showed noticeable improvement in all four modalities (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) in a matter of weeks (Elwell & Bean, 2001). Additionally, the researchers observed increase community connectedness. Through the project, students began to view themselves as valuable members of society (Elwell & Bean, 2001). Similarly, Russell, a secondary educator in rural Nebraska regularly embeds service-learning into her EL instruction. Russell noticed gains in students' community connectedness through this pedagogy. After completing a year-long service-learning project within her students, students were more connected to other students within the school, felt more appreciated, and more connected within the community-at-large. The feeling of connectedness to the community resulted in greater school engagement (Russell, 2007). These two case studies illustrate the importance of providing students with real-world experiences to practice formal and informal language.

ELLs deserve opportunities to explore issues in their communities, just as their non-ELLs peers receive, with undiluted quality instruction.

Implications

Service-learning is a teaching tool that will impact areas beyond the classroom. That is the nature of the service-learning pedagogy. It is designed in a way to promote community connectedness while supporting students' academics. There are numerous implications that can be drawn from a multi-faceted community project, such as service-learning. In the literature review, I discussed the multifaceted benefits of embedding a service-learning project into a classroom. If resources are not an issue and there is ample support within the classroom, school, and community, this service-learning curriculum will accomplish the targets addressed in the literature review, including: greater student motivation, an increased understanding of the world, improved language skills, community and school connectedness, and life skill development. In reality, there will be challenges. I will tackle many of these challenges in the next section about limitations. Despite these limitations and having the understanding that this curriculum will not go perfectly, utilizing the service-learning pedagogy in the EL classroom is still worthwhile. This unit will give ELLs the opportunity to make decisions. It will provide ELLs with exciting and rewarding experiences that are not often given to ELLs. Finally, it will provide students with informal and formal language practice and build cross-cultural bridges in the community. In this way, students will make gains through resiliency, decision-making, and confidence. Educators will find innovative methods leading to quality instruction. And, the community will experience the direct results of the students' work.

Limitations

It is my belief that the service-learning pedagogy can be done in any classroom setting at varying levels. That being said, planning for a service-learning project is time-consuming. Ensuring lessons are both language-focused and student-driven is no small feat. This curriculum has numerous moving points. For instance, community members need to be contacted, out-of-classroom trips need to be arranged and occur, and the final celebratory day should be planned. These arrangements are all on top of the language-focused instructional goals. These components happen all within a relatively short timeline. In addition to planning limitations, additional factors impacting feasibility of this project include staffing, funding, transportation, and school policies. As all teachers know, unexpected things can occur both inside the classroom and while in the community even when there has been sufficient planning.

While there are many limitations to implementing a service-learning project in the EL classroom, meaningful learning often happens when one takes risks. This guide and curriculum provides the framework to initiating a service-learning project within an EL classroom. It is meant to be adapted to fit the needs of each classroom and community. While it serves as a jumping off point for educators in exploring this enticing pedagogy, starting small is an option. Perfection is not expected. There are many creative ways to amend project-based and community teaching methods to fit the needs of a specific community. Educators are excellent adapters. With creative planning and problem-solving, implementing a version of service-learning in any EL classroom is possible.

Planning for the Future

My intent is for this project to be used in the setting described in Chapter 3. My original aim was to begin using this curriculum during the Spring of 2021 giving me the opportunity to report on my experiences of teaching this curriculum. Two barriers stopped this from happening. First, I am currently working with elementary ELLs. I would anticipate positive outcomes in teaching a service-learning curriculum to elementary ELLs, but because younger students require even greater support in the planning process, this unit would not be appropriate for younger ELLs in its current form. Secondly, when I started my capstone project in January of 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic was not nearly as great of public health concern in the United States. Shortly after this, it was clear our entire education system would be radically altered by COVID-19. Because it was not feasible for me to implement the project in 2021, I plan to pilot this guide and 8-lesson unit in a secondary EL classroom when it becomes possible to safely and comfortably bring students into the community. I will be the preliminary educator to introduce students to this unit. I expect there will be kinks and modifications needed and this will give me time to smooth many of these out before sharing it with others. Following this, it is my goal this project can be shared with other EL teachers and incorporated into many EL classrooms throughout the district and beyond. With each cycle of this unit, educators will become stronger guides. Students will expand their understanding of the community and they will take more initiative in their learning. Looking forward, I hope this curriculum will encourage EL educators, as well as school administrators, to explore the language benefits and social benefits of out-of-classroom learning for ELLs. ELLs are often omitted from academic experiences that extend

beyond the school day or offer enriching hands-on learning. Yet, these students are often most in-need of such opportunities.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this project explored the question: *how does service-learning promote academic success and language acquisition in secondary ELLs?* Embedding service-learning into the EL classroom will take school and community support, funding, and time. It is a big endeavor. Yet, research shows ELLs are in great need of quality instruction. Service-learning can be one tool to provide this. In developing my curriculum, the research most-used were real-life case studies. I most utilized research describing instances of service-learning improving student motivation and resulting in language gains across all four modalities. Implications of applying service-learning in the EL classroom include greater community connectedness, gains in both academic and social language, and improved decision-making abilities. This chapter highlights obvious limitations to implementing a service-learning project. Funding, staffing confines, and time are major challenges. Flexibility and adaptably are necessities to overcome such challenges, understanding perfection is not expected. In planning for the future, I address the next steps for my final project: from piloting it in an EL classroom to sharing it with other educators in hopes others will also explore the language and social benefits of incorporating community-based learning into the EL classroom.

Research shows ELLs benefit from a number of best practices in teaching, including: teaching in language-rich environments, engaging with the community, using home language and culture as a resource, providing social-emotional supports, and building student ownership. Incorporating these best practices through the teaching tool

of service-learning is seamless. Service-learning has been proven to support students' academic and nonacademic learning. In addition, research shows providing ELLs with service-learning opportunities allows for a unique experience that results in language gains. Utilizing the service-learning pedagogy in the EL classroom is a concept that is filled with potential. My hope is that this guide and curriculum will serve as a stepping stone to those educators who want to explore the benefits of this exciting teaching tool.

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