



## **Examining Performance and Attitudes of TESOL Preservice Teachers and their English Learners in a Service-Learning Project**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Service-learning has increasingly been implemented to enhance teacher education coursework in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). Service-learning engages preservice teachers in activities or projects that benefit a particular community of stakeholders with ties to English as an additional language learning while simultaneously improving preservice teachers' skills, typically in the form of increased opportunities to practice and reflect on teaching, cultural issues, materials development, and/or advocacy. This article reports on a service-learning project that brought together preservice TESOL teachers and English learners from a local, low-income elementary school in a literacy-focused after-school program. The dual goals of the program were to help improve the literacy skills and foster positive attitudes of young English learners, while simultaneously helping to develop the preservice teachers' professional skills as educators.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Traditionally, teacher education programs structured their curriculum as one that begins with building a theoretical foundation and culminates in a summative practicum experience, which may often provide the sole opportunity for preservice teachers to engage in interacting with actual learners. The reasoning behind this model of teacher education is that preservice teachers gain theoretical understanding of theory, which they subsequently apply to teaching (Meadows, 2013). However, with a paradigm shift that points to a much more recursive dynamic between theory and practice and pressure from program accreditation agencies to include authentic teaching experiences, experiential opportunities are increasingly integrated throughout teacher education coursework (Macknish et al., 2017). A particularly relevant and powerful way of doing so is through service-learning.

Service-learning (SL), also referred to as *academic service-learning* or *community-engaged learning*, is commonly viewed as a reciprocal experience, in which – in teacher education contexts – preservice teachers respond to a need identified by the community partner while reinforcing their academic learning objectives in an authentic environment. Alongside this reciprocity, in-depth reflection is considered critical in effective SL coursework, as it is what distinguishes it from less reflective types of experiential learning such as field experiences or volunteering. Another critical component of SL is civic engagement inherent in most community-oriented work. Carney (2004) effectively reflects the importance of SL as a means of connecting the university and the community when he states:

Service learning encourages meaningful engagement between the academic work of university scholars (both professors and students) and the communities in which they live and work. It essentially challenges the long-held notion of the university as an “ivory tower,” far removed from the concerns of the real world and dedicated to the preservation of narrowly focused and discrete academic disciplines that are greedily protected. Most important, perhaps, service learning speaks to the duty of the democratic university to produce active and morally responsible citizens. (p. 270)

In the field of TESOL, SL continues to gain interest as a teaching and learning approach that benefits both preservice teachers and community partners (Cho & Gulley, 2016; Perren & Wurr, 2015; Rueckert, 2013). This trend is not surprising because when preservice TESOL teachers have opportunities to apply what they are learning by working with real students in authentic situations, it makes their learning experience relevant and meaningful (Angelova, 2001). Given the increased relevance and meaningfulness of the SL curriculum, TESOL programs look for ways to expand beyond including SL solely in a final teaching practicum [See Purmensky (2009) for a sample SL course on second language acquisition; see Cooper (2002); Smolen, Zhang, & Detwiler, (2013); Tomaš, Moger, Park, & Specht (2017) for SL methods and materials courses]. Indeed, preservice teachers can learn much from exposure to authentic teaching contexts throughout their TESOL program (Fogle & Heiselt, 2015; Moore, 2015).

The purpose of this paper is to examine a SL project in an undergraduate TESOL methods course and to describe how the experience influenced the development of both the preservice teachers and the English learners (ELs). We explain how preservice teachers in an undergraduate TESOL program designed and implemented a month-long, eight-session after-school literacy program for ELs in third and fourth grades at a local, low-income elementary school in the Midwestern USA. The dual goals of the program were to help improve the literacy skills and foster positive attitudes of young ELs toward literacy, while simultaneously to help develop the preservice teachers’ professional skills as educators. As such, preservice teachers were able to make a contribution in the community, while concomitantly pursuing their academic learning objectives.

In reporting the results of our study, we discuss the impacts of the program on the development of the preservice teachers and the ELs, as well as the benefits and challenges of conducting our SL experience. Our ultimate aim is to inspire teachers and teacher-educators to design and evaluate SL projects in their contexts and continue to build up the literature in this important area.

## Importance of Service-learning in Preparing Preservice Teachers to Work with ELs

Most of the research on SL in preservice teacher education is positive. For example, Carr, Eyring, and Gallego (2006) found significant differences in benefits for preservice teachers and alumni who had had SL experiences compared to those who had not. Overall, they found that the preservice teachers were positive about their SL experiences. Most benefits were reported in general educational theory and second language acquisition, while benefits in citizenship and civic responsibility were reported to a lesser extent (p. 66).

In another study, Blake and Graham (2009) studied 55 Spanish language and education students from a university in Appalachia who guided ELs in grades K-12 to produce short stories, art, and drama that reflected their heritage cultures. They found that the preservice teachers developed intercultural communication skills and EL instructional strategies, among other skills.

Angelova (2001) studied preservice teachers working in community agencies to help immigrants and refugees improve their English. She observed progress in the preservice teachers' academic development, interpersonal (social) skills, civic capacity, and occupational skills after the SL experience. Data from their reflection journals revealed that preservice teachers greatly valued "the ability to connect subject matter to the real world" and "the opportunity to apply the knowledge gained in class to real-life situations in their own community" (p. 191). As this was the first teaching experience of these preservice teachers, they appreciated being able to build their skills in the non-threatening atmosphere of the community agency. Angelova also found that immigrant English learners developed an increased sense of community connectedness and the preservice teachers revealed a "deeper understanding and appreciation of people with diverse backgrounds and life situations" (p. 192). Importantly, preservice teachers wrote about their SL "as a means for instilling attitudes and skills basic to their future adjustment to the profession and responsible citizenship" (p. 193), which gave them "a more realistic picture of the ESL work setting and the type of student population they will be teaching" (p. 193).

Fitts and Gross (2012) refer to *field experience* rather than *service-learning* and their preservice teachers come from multiple disciplines (not TESOL), yet their work is relevant to our study because it meets most of the criteria for SL in that it involves collaboration with a community partner with the dual purpose of meeting a community need and preservice teachers' need in an authentic environment. In their work, they examined research on the inclusion of field experience in teacher preparation programs and conclude that it is very important to problematize the over-simplistic views of diverse learners that preservice teachers sometimes have. They point out, for example, that field experiences give preservice teachers exposure to linguistically diverse learners and help them develop a positive attitude to working with ELs. A positive attitude, they claim, makes them see ELs as more capable of academic success, helps them set higher expectations, and enables them to display greater teaching effectiveness (p. 76). They also cite multiple studies revealing that working with ELs in field experiences helps preservice teachers develop greater empathy and cultural and linguistic sensitivity (p. 77). In their own study, Fitts and Gross (2012) investigated the knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes of preservice teachers towards ELs before, in mid-term, and after tutoring ELs in a ten-week field experience project. Data from surveys of preservice teachers' beliefs and attitudes about ELs and the impact of the tutoring on their cultural understandings found that overall "the participants developed more realistic and positive attitudes towards bilingual youth and gained greater insight

into the complexity of learning a second language (p. 90). Identifying as White, the preservice teachers also gained a more nuanced understanding of the Latino ELs' cultural identities and knowledge.

The presented studies show positive experiences of preservice teachers with SL practices. Academic and pedagogical development, better understanding of intercultural and community connectedness, second language acquisition, and improved understanding of educational theory are highlighted, while awareness of civic and citizenship responsibility is present, but not emphasized to the same degree.

To help prepare preservice teachers to work with ELs, we worked with our community partners to develop a SL project involving an after-school literacy program. Before describing our project in more detail, we discuss the benefits of after-school programs.

### **Benefits of After-school Programs on ELs**

After-school programs are a common form of SL, and research has shown that after-school programs provide multiple benefits for K-12 students. Durlak and Weissberg (2007), for example, found that positive interactions with adults and peers through structured after-school activities with challenging and engaging tasks that enable children to contribute and take initiative, develop personal talents, and apply new skills had beneficial effects. Their analysis of seventy-three after-school programs revealed that these programs can promote personal and social skills and improve feelings and attitudes, behavioral adjustment, and school performance. That said, they also found that the impact of after-school programs on academic performance was inconsistent. Importantly, they concluded that "programs that used evidence-based skill training approaches were consistently successful in producing multiple benefits for youth, while those that did not use such procedures were not successful in any outcome area" (p. 7).

A particular skill emphasized in Diversi and Mecham's (2005) study included assignment completion in an after-school homework and mentoring program for a population of Latino(a) eighth and ninth graders, many at risk with academic and behavioral problems. The purpose of the program was to empower the ELs with a sense of positive self-identity as multicultural individuals and the notion that school was a viable and meaningful option for their future through relationships with university student mentors. Though the researchers cannot claim that the ELs' Latino identity was completely enhanced to include a desire to pursue formal education, they did see positive effects of the relationships built, regardless of the cultural identity of the mentor. This parallels Fitts and Gross' (2012) findings on the development of positive relationships between Latino tutees and White tutors. Benefits that Diversi and Mecham (2004) found included a reduction in problem behavior and an improvement in GPA due to a focus on individual needs and an increase in assignment completion.

Given the described value of SL collaborations in these examples for both preservice teachers and K-12 students in after-school programs, university and K-12 educators ought to consider engaging their respective populations of learners in SL. Models established in various communities can help scaffold the process for educators new to the field or reinvigorate those who are not satisfied with their current pedagogy. It is our hope that our article can serve as a model or a springboard (to action) for others. In what follows we describe our context and project design and share findings relevant to the impact on our preservice teachers and the English learners with whom they worked over the course of a month-long after-school program.

## OUR CONTEXT AND PROJECT DESIGN

The undergraduate TESOL program at our university attracts students who plan to teach in K-12 schools, community agencies, and overseas contexts. They arrive in the TESOL methods course having completed some foundational courses in linguistics and second language acquisition, but typically, they have little or no teaching experience and limited understanding of EL proficiency levels and needs. Not far from the university is a low-income elementary school with a considerable number of ELs, many of whom struggle with their literacy skills and have limited opportunities to participate in extracurricular activities. Our partnership was born two years ago when the school's ESL instructional coach identified the EL need to try to improve the ELs' literacy skills and reinforce positive attitudes towards learning through motivating activities. With our commitment to SL pedagogy, the dual goals of the project were to help improve the literacy skills and reinforce positive attitudes of young ELs, while simultaneously helping to develop the preservice teachers' professional skills as educators. To this end, together we worked on ways to develop an after-school literacy program as a SL project in the TESOL methods course.

Aligned with the tenets of SL pedagogy, the academic learning objectives of our course were integrated with the community service experience. Specifically, our SL objectives, categorized in four growth areas, included:

### Personal Growth:

- Increase confidence in teaching English
- Demonstrate success in handling increased responsibility
- Increase sense of personal efficacy
- Critically reflect on practice
- View service as a positive learning experience

### Career Development:

- Develop understanding of professional opportunities in TESOL
- Develop specific job skills
- Gain greater confidence in career choice

### Social Development:

- Increase interpersonal skills
- Increase awareness of and support for diversity
- Improve ability to effectively advocate for ELs
- Develop interest in future community participation

### Academic/Cognitive Development:

- Develop problem solving/critical thinking skills
- Improve ability to transfer course knowledge to new situations
- Demonstrate links between theory and practice

The after-school program provides an opportunity for preservice teachers to achieve these objectives in an authentic context by designing and implementing engaging learning activities for ELs.

Working in advance with our partners in the school, we scheduled the TESOL methods class to coincide with the after-school time slot. Together we identified the target group of ELs and defined their language needs. During the semester for which data was collected, 17 third and fourth grade ELs participated. They were younger than those in the Diversi and Mecham (2011) study, but there were similarities in that three-quarters of our population of ELs included Hispanic students and several struggled with academic and behavioral problems. The diverse EL profile enhanced the experience of the preservice teachers. Fourteen preservice teachers in our undergraduate TESOL methods course participated, twelve female and two male. All were American of varied ethnicities.

Our community partner suggested the program theme of *community* as it would align with work being done in the grade four subject classes. The program consisted of eight sessions over four weeks in mid-semester, after the preservice teachers had had a few weeks of course instruction in lesson planning, teaching approaches, methods, techniques, and materials development.

Informed by the Common Core State Standards and with the needs of the ELs in mind, the preservice teachers worked in pairs to plan their lessons. They began by designing learning objectives, such as: *ELs will be able to read and interpret informational texts, distinguish fact from opinion, support opinions with reasons, organize information in a logical manner, write a short persuasive text.* During the program, the pairs delivered their lessons, while the rest observed their peers' teaching and helped scaffold learning during planned individual and group activities. This arrangement met two aims. First, it exposed preservice teachers to different teaching models, thus broadening their repertoire of teaching strategies and techniques. Second, it enabled the preservice teachers to address the learning needs of different ELs. Lessons typically included brief, interactive presentations of vocabulary, content and skills, reinforced by games and songs, followed by group or paired practice activities using graphic organizers, sentence frames, and opportunities to illustrate work. Lessons concluded with written reflections or oral sharing of student work to consolidate learning. At the end of the program, a collection of student work samples, illustrations, and photos was compiled and bound as a book for each EL and preservice teacher.

To determine the impact of the program on the ELs, we conducted identical pre- and post-program tests on vocabulary and writing, as well as a pre- and post-program survey on their attitudes toward writing. Work samples and written reflections were also collected to provide evidence-based data for examination. To determine the impact of the program on the preservice teachers, they submitted written and multimodal reflections on the experience. Final coursework assignments and oral feedback from post-lesson debriefings also provided evidence of the impact of the field experience on preservice teachers' development.

### **IMPACT OF THE AFTER-SCHOOL PROGRAM ON THE ELS**

Evidence of the impact of the after-school program on ELs was studied in two areas: changes in literacy performance and changes in attitude toward writing. Data were collected from pre- and post-program test scores, pre- and post-program survey responses, as well as observation feedback, and submitted student work.

## Performance

The test consisted of questions starting with labeling pictures with vocabulary related to the theme of community (e.g. “This is a doctor’s office”), and increasing in complexity of responses required (e.g. “\_\_\_\_\_ is my favorite place because \_\_\_\_\_” and “Your friend from another country is coming to visit you. Choose 2 places you want to show your friend. Write why these places are interesting and what you will do there. I want to take my friend to....”).

Tests were scored independently by two raters and inter-rater reliability was established at 80%. Scores from pre-and post-program tests were compared to identify impacts that the after-school program may have had on the EL’s writing. Two of the 17 ELs were absent for either the pre- or post-program tests, so they were not included in the analysis. Table 1 shows the raw test scores, which indicate considerable improvement in results by the end of the after-school program. Note that EL4 did not answer a question on the post-program test about her desired future job, claiming she had not decided what she wanted to be; hence, this question was not counted.

**Table 1.** Pre- And Post-program Test Scores

English Learner (EL)	Pre-Program Test /46	Pre-Program Test %	Post-Program Test /46	Post-Program Test %
EL1	22	48	40	87
EL2	10	22	26	56
EL3	25	54	43	93
EL4	23	50	31/44 *	70
EL5	28	61	37	80
EL6	17	37	25	54
EL7	31	67	31	67
EL8	16	35	22	47
EL9	26	57	35	76
EL10	15	33	22	47
EL11	11	23	24	56
EL12	13	28	20	43
EL13	28	61	35	76
EL14	28	61	40	87
EL15	24	52	34	74

\* The EL did not answer a question because of unknown content not language.

To determine the significance of the results, we ran a T-test analysis. We did this once with the partial score from EL4, who purposefully chose not to answer one of the questions and once without including EL4's score. T-test results confirmed a significant increase in test scores as shown in Table 2. These results are quite remarkable considering that the after-school program ran for only eight sessions over four weeks. That said, we acknowledge the fact that conducting identical pre- and post-program tests may have resulted in task familiarity. However, the pre-test was not corrected with the ELs or returned to them, and given the open-ended nature of the written responses, and the month-long time gap, we are confident that reliability was increased.

**Table 2.** T-Test Analysis of Pre- and Post-program Test Scores

Paired Samples Correlations				
		N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 Without EL4	post-test & pre-test	14	.776	.001
Pair 2 With EL4	post-test & pre-test	15	.760	.001

There was a range of language ability amongst the ELs, so comparisons of pre- and post-program tests showed varying strengths and weaknesses. Selected examples of improvements are presented below.

One EL, who did not feel able to attempt to write any response for the extended writing in the pre-test was able to write a full complex sentence showing a claim and reason on the post-test: *"I want to show my friend the zoo because he get to see all the animales so he can see all the graff"*[sic].

In another example, one EL made a systematic error writing the word "want" six times in the pre-test. And, although seven sentences were written, all them were simple sentences without support:

*[I want to take my friend to] "my school. I whant take my friend to my dad's work. I whant to take my friend to my home. I whant to take my friend to park. I whant to play with my friend. I whant to talk about Ypsilanti's people like to do. I whant my friend learn thing in the U.S."* [sic].

In the post-test, this error was corrected three of the six times, indicating increased awareness of complex sentences, even showing support for the claims:

*"I want to take my friend to the park. I want to tell my friend about Ypsilanti. I want to take my friend to gym, because Ypsilanti's gym is fun. I whant to play with my friend because I'm didn't play with him last year. I whant talk to my friend because I whatn ask my friend when I did not in my country what he like to do"* [sic].

Evidence that ELs were learning content and vocabulary from reading lessons emerged in various written activities, for example:

*“I believe that homeless needs socks so they dont get cold. The fact is we need to donate socks to homeless people. The homeless are at greater risk of infection and even amputations. In my opinion socks are important to homeless people”* [sic].

In this example, the number of non-systematic errors demonstrates that the EL was not simply copying verbatim from the text, but had actually internalized the content.

These are just three representative examples of the improved performance by the ELs. There were many more.

### Attitude Survey

To determine any changes in ELs’ attitudes towards writing and their perceived writing ability, they responded to a survey (see Table 3) administered at the beginning and again at the end of the program. Fifteen questions were asked and responses were marked on a Likert scale indicating *always*, *sometimes*, or *never*. Suggested options were given in question 14, but space was also allocated for ELs to write in their own preferred free time activities if desired.

Despite the significant improvement in test scores, EL attitudes towards writing and confidence in writing seemed to decline somewhat as indicated in Table 3. For example, the number of ELs who always thought writing was fun (Q1) dropped from five to two; those who always thought they were good writers (Q6) dropped from nine to three; and those who always thought writing was important (Q8) dropped from seven to six. When, in Q14, ELs were asked about their preferred free time activities, those who chose reading dropped from 7 to 4, and those who chose writing dropped from 8 to 2. The exception to these declines was Q3 where the number of ELs who always thought writing was *not* important decreased from six to three.

**Table 3.** Comparison of Pre- and Post-program Survey Responses

Question Number	Survey Question	PRE always	POST always	PRE some-times	POST some-times	PRE never	POST never
Q1	I think writing is fun	5	2	9	9	1	4
Q2	I can write better with help.	8	6	3	6	3	2
Q3	I think writing is not important.	6	3	5	7	2	3
Q4	I can write a sentence.	13	7	1	4	0	3
Q5	I think writing is too hard.	4	2	6	6	4	6
Q6	I think I am a good writer	9	3	2	6	3	5
Q7	I can write a paragraph.	7	6	5	5	2	3

Q8	I think writing is important.	7	6	4	4	2	3
Q9	I think that my teacher likes what I write.	6	8	7	5	0	0
Q10	I think writing is boring.	4	5	8	6	0	1
Q11	I think writing is easy.	7	4	6	6	1	4
Q12	I think I am a weak writer.	1	4	5	4	8	6
Q13	I can write several paragraphs.	5	4	6	5	3	5
Q14	In my free time, I like to:						
	read	7	4	4	3	3	7
	draw/color	9	8	4	4	1	2
	write	8	2	2	5	4	7
	play sports	7	8	3	3	4	3
	play computer games	11	8	3	5	0	1
	watch TV	9	10	5	3	0	1
	play with friends	12	7	1	4	0	2
Q15	Can you write in another language?	YES PRE: 8 POST: 9			NO PRE: 6 POST: 5		

These survey results are puzzling because generally, ELs were engaged in the reading and writing activities, they typically participated actively and enthusiastically, and seemed excited to work with the preservice teachers as indicated by their smiles, hugs, and general good humor. While it might be unrealistic to expect a dramatic improvement in attitude over just one month, seeing this negative trend was disheartening. On further examination, there are several possibilities that might explain the survey results. One possibility is that, the ELs' attitudes in this study were simply affected by fatigue. The after-school literacy program was offered at the end of a long school day -- after seven hours of regular school classes, and one hour of computer time, offered as another after-school program to fill the gap between the school dismissal and the after-school literacy program. Afterwards, the ELs had up to a 30-minute bus ride home, thus making it an almost ten-hour day for these ELs.

Another possible explanation for the decline in attitudes is that at the end of the program, ELs became more critically aware of their writing abilities and related gaps in those abilities. For example, after working on expanding their vocabulary, finding support for their opinions and correcting their errors, the ELs may have realized that their literacy skills were not as strong as they had previously thought. Our community partner suggested that yet another possibility for the declining attitudes was that the survey questions may have been confusing for some of the

ELs. For example, during the test, one EL asked, “what is a paragraph?” and it is possible that others struggled with the vocabulary, too. Also, Q3 was structured as a negative question, which may have caused some difficulty. In addition, the fact that responses to the last question (Q15) did not remain consistent, suggests that there may have been some misunderstanding because it is unlikely that writing skills in another language would change in one month. Finally, it is also possible that the students’ attitudes declined because the novelty of working with young people from the university had worn off, so the ELs may have been less enthusiastic about responding to the survey at the end.

To gain more insight into these unexpected results, we simplified the survey questions and administered it again for the ELs who participated in the subsequent semester’s after-school program. Results no longer showed a decline in ELs’ attitudes towards writing; indeed, attitudes remained relatively consistent over the four weeks of the after-school program. Further evidence of the ELs’ attitudes emerged in their written reflections about the program, a few examples of which are presented below.

*“I like the afterschool program an I learn about the homeless an why socks are so important and I learn who when why what where” [sic].*

*“In the ELL class, we learn about the Community place. Where the sock can help people. We learn some things when you grow up. We learn where sentence whant What, Where, Who, Whnat, When. We read, write, speak and learn. In the ELL class, we can play some things, is funny. And we read Thanksgiving pasage. It is funny to go to ELL class” [sic].*

*“My favorite part we did is when we did the name tags [sic]. I also liked the ball game.”*

*“What I liked about the after-school program is being with all the teachers....Being with my friends and doing lexia.”*

*“I love going to ELL it’s so fun. I got to meet new people and learning new things and I am sad it’s ending. ELL was so fun.”*

*“My favorite part is talking to [university] students, like Mr. A.”*

*“The class is nice and even funny. Some time tha get wiyold. And aks good qschin”[sic].*

*“Ms. V. taught us how to be poulite by said thankful and how be good. Ms. M. she like to help me with my work she tell’s me what to do stuff wright she is awesome. Mr. D. dose cool backfip he is awesome at doing it” [sic].*

Notably, the first three ELs’ comments above refer explicitly to activities and content learned, while the last five comments refer to interpersonal connections made between the ELs and the preservice teachers. This suggests that, similar to the studies analyzed by Durlak and Weissberg (2007), relationship building is an important aspect of learning for the ELs.

## IMPACT OF THE PROGRAM ON PRESERVICE TEACHERS' DEVELOPMENT

The success of the SL project in terms of preservice teacher development surpassed our expectations. The following description summarizes a lesson that preservice teachers planned and implemented around the theme of 'community.' In one particular lesson, the preservice teachers used sock puppets to present a text about how homeless people are members of the community. Using graphic organizers, ELs selected information from the text to support claims about why it is important for homeless people to have warm socks. Then they wrote a text to persuade people to donate socks to the homeless. ELs were excited to demonstrate their learning by sharing their texts orally using the sock puppets. As one observer remarked, *That girl (EL) self corrected the error she made while she was presenting!* Another observer remarked about the good use of the target structure ('in order to') by the ELs.

To make this lesson more meaningful, the preservice teachers sought permission from parents to take photos of the ELs and post them along with their texts at a local coffee shop that was running a charity sock drive. As follow-up, one Sunday, these preservice teachers conducted a sock puppet-making workshop at the coffee shop for children in the community. This demonstrated community engagement at multiple levels between the university, local elementary school, and local business. It also provides evidence of the transformative nature of the SL for these two preservice teachers in that they demonstrated a sense of civic engagement beyond our expectations.

Evidence of preservice teacher development came in the form of oral and written comments shared in post-lesson and post-program briefings and from written and multimodal reflection assignments. Comments consistently indicated the preservice teachers' positive attitudes toward the SL project. Even when lessons did not go as effectively as they would have liked, their comments showed that they were able to learn from the experience. For example:

*I learned a lot from creating and presenting this lesson. But, the most important thing I learned... is the ability to be flexible. Even though you may have everything planned out, not everything is going to go according to your plan. We were moved to another room, the students didn't have desks, and [we] went completely off script, but we did pretty good [sic] with what was thrown at us. I am glad I have experienced this before becoming a teacher because now I will not be surprised when it happens to me when I have a teaching job.*

The reflection assignment required an explanation of specific observed learning events with links to theory and beliefs developed over the duration of the program. The reflections did not explicitly target the SL objectives, and, given the differing reflection focus for individual preservice teachers, quantifying the matches would be considered unreliable. In other words, simply because a preservice teacher's comments did not align with a particular objective, does not mean they did not develop in that area. Consequently, in our analysis, we identified a match if a word or phrase in at least one reflection comment aligned to the wording of an objective. Findings revealed that reflection comments covered all four broad areas: personal growth, career development, social development, and academic/cognitive development.

**Table 4.** Alignment to SL Objectives that Emerged in Preservice Teachers' Reflections

<b>SL Objectives Categorized by four Growth Areas</b>	<b>Referred to in Reflection</b>
Personal Growth	
• Increase confidence in teaching English	Yes
• Demonstrate success in handling increased responsibility	No
• Increase sense of personal efficacy	No
• Critically reflect on practice	Yes
• View service as a positive learning experience	Yes
Career Development	
• Develop understanding of professional opportunities in TESOL	No
• Develop specific job skills	No
• Gain greater confidence in career choice	Yes
Social Development	
• Increase interpersonal skills	No
• Increase awareness of & support for diversity	Yes
• Improve ability to effectively advocate for ELs	Yes
• Develop interest in future community participation	No
Academic/Cognitive Development	
• Develop problem solving/critical thinking skills	Yes
• Improve ability to transfer course knowledge to new situations	Yes
• Demonstrate links between theory and practice	Yes

To demonstrate how the preservice teachers reflected on these areas, we present selected reflection comments below aligned with relevant objectives (in bold). It is noted that some of the comments align with more than one objective.

### **Personal Growth**

The most frequent comments made in both formal and informal reflections related to **increased confidence in teaching English**. A typical example was: *We feel more excited and prepared to step into the ESOL classroom as teachers*. In another example, one preservice teacher wrote:

*This collaborative teaching experience we had at X School was not only incredibly fun, but fundamental in our education! This opportunity gave us the insight and the confidence to go from simple students ready to learn, to prospective teachers ready to teach.*

One preservice teacher referred to EL growth along with her own growth when she commented: *So far this has been a wonderful experience and I look forward to the rest of the time we are there to see the students' growth in writing, and to see my growth as a teacher.*

Many of the preservice teachers **critically reflected on their practice** by examining where improvements could be made. For example, one wrote:

*[The teachers] briefly explained the new vocabulary words, but it seemed rushed and the students did not seem to absorb the content from the example sentences, such as when I was working with [one EL] and had to re-explain some of the vocabulary. If they were to do the lesson again, I think they could include some word-learning methods...like illustrating vocabulary words, or having students ask questions about words.*

All of the preservice teachers **viewed service as a positive learning experience** and made brief, as well as more extended comments on this, for example, *Working at Xxx School was an amazing experience. Thank you!*; and:

*This program has helped me see how important it is to work with students one on one when possible... The student can feel comfortable and safe to ask questions. The relationship between the student and the teacher is important because depending on how positive the relationship is, the more enthusiastic the student will be to learn. Also it was amazing to see how the lesson plans worked in the classroom. With the lesson plan in place the teacher can see more realistically how to work with the students to meet the standards.*

### **Career Development**

Fewer of the reflection comments related to **greater confidence in career choice**, but there were a few examples, such as:

*Coming from a secondary ed. background in science, I had almost no experience in teaching students of this age. However, my background in coaching helped a tremendous amount and it surprised me with how easy teaching this age was. This experience opened my eyes to the possibilities of teaching young ESL student, and how fun and rewarding it can be.*

### **Social Development**

Giving the preservice teachers experience working collaboratively with peers and with actual ELs enabled them to **increase their awareness of, and support for diversity**. Reflections on this included, *When we think of students we'll have in the future, we must broaden our view of what a student should be and how we teach them*, and:

*Participating in this afterschool program has presented many learning opportunities for me. I am especially glad to be able to work one-on-one with students and learn a lot about them and the different learning styles that can take place in any classroom. This opportunity has given me the chance to work in a teaching setting for the first time and has provided me a lot of insight about EL classrooms.*

Only one reflection referred to **improving ability to effectively advocate for ELs**, *It gave us a chance to promote student learning and to learn more about ESOL ourselves.*

Notably, the ELs seemed to focus more of their reflection comments on the personalities and social relationships they had built with the preservice teachers, while the preservice teachers focused less on this area in their submitted reflections. This is likely due to the academic expectations for the reflection assignments because in oral debriefings after the lessons, the preservice teachers made multiple comments about the ELs and their social relationships with them.

### **Academic/Cognitive Development**

In terms of **developing problem solving/critical thinking skills**, one preservice teacher reflected on how she overcame specific problems and how this will affect her future teaching:

*The students I worked with did not particularly enjoy the writing involved, but settled for it when they began thinking about the places they enjoy most. In the future, I will definitely lean towards activities that engage the students based on their likes/dislikes, and personal experiences. I feel like the students are more willing to write about themselves, than impersonal content....Another thing I realized over the course of these lessons is how motivation works in elementary students. In the future, I would make my lesson much more student-centered. I observed that once the students begin sharing, they are likely to continue, if they are allowed. I did not count on many volunteers, when I first began planning, so I did not maintain too many opportunities for them. But the students seemed to enjoy interaction more than independent work, with especially passionate sharing sessions.*

We were happy to see that preservice teachers were able to draw on their course knowledge when planning and implementing lessons. The following reflection comments show that they **improved their ability to transfer course knowledge to new situations**:

*This program was a great experience for a better understanding of how a real classroom functions. It helps to show that educators need to be flexible and willing to change things in order to teach; I'm thankful for these experiences that have allowed me to apply my classroom knowledge in real situations.*

and:

*From [this] lesson, I learned how effective and fun using illustration can be. While [preservice teacher] was drawing a picture of a strange bear the kids had come up with, it was not only funny, but it hammered down the meaning of the 'MadLib' that the kids created. It also made it clear that 'Madlibs' are supposed to be a little bit goofy and strange. I think the kids started to intuit this part of the game after [preservice teacher] started to draw. In my future teaching, I will try and think of ways to integrate visual learning into my lessons. That could come in the form of graphically organized handouts, visual power point presentations, or any number of activities. Vision is a sense that can add a lot of power for many students.*

Linked to the ability to transfer knowledge and skills from the coursework to practice was the **demonstration of links between theory and practice** and this was made explicit in the

reflections. For example, *Being given the opportunity to apply knowledge from the theory we learn is what connected everything together and made it real.* The preservice teachers also cited scholars in relevant comments, like:

*This was a pivotal learning moment for me because I was very concerned before the lesson that this would be too difficult for them to comprehend. But like many of the preservice teachers, I realized by setting expectations high it gives you something to build towards... as in Krashen's I+1 model.*

Another wrote:

*Group work is cited as an example of the Interaction principle of the Scaffolding-Interaction-Noticing framework by Shapiro, Farrelly, & Tomaš (2014), which states "tasks that require interaction among students tend to promote language development, as well as content learning". Group work made the ELs more enthusiastic even if the results were a little more chaotic and unorganized, so it's important to find a balance between being eager and producing measurable results.*

As indicated, the preservice teachers made reflection comments that explicitly aligned with all broad areas (personal growth, career development, social development and academic/cognitive development) of the SL objectives; however, six specific objectives were not explicitly mentioned, namely:

- Demonstrate success in handling increased responsibility
- Increase sense of personal efficacy
- Increase interpersonal skills
- Develop understanding of professional opportunities in TESOL
- Develop specific job skills
- Develop interest in future community participation

While reflection comments did not explicitly address these objectives, evidence of the preservice teachers' ability to 'handle increased responsibility,' 'increase their sense of personal efficacy,' 'increase interpersonal skills,' and 'develop specific job skills' was observed by the university faculty and community partner based on the successful planning and implementation of the program. Evidence of **increased responsibility** included the creation of lesson plans and organization with a teaching partner, full attendance and engagement, and the professional demeanor of the preservice teachers. **Interest in future community participation** was clearly illustrated by the follow-up puppet-making workshop in the coffee shop, and at least one preservice teacher subsequently became involved as a volunteer tutor for Upward Bound at the local high school, as well as 826 Michigan's drop-in writing program for youth. A salient example of **developing understanding of professional opportunities in TESOL** occurred when two preservice teachers travelled to the state capital to attend a TESOL symposium.

These results are similar to those in the literature, in that gains were made in preservice teachers' academic and pedagogical development, with particular emphasis on increased levels of confidence in teaching. This is significant especially as most preservice teachers started the course with no teaching experience. We also saw some increased awareness of civic

responsibility and community connectedness, though this was not evident in all preservice teachers. Less salient in our findings were increased levels of intercultural connectedness as found in some studies; however, what did emerge in our case, was an increased awareness of what EL language proficiency levels look like.

## **CHALLENGES AND CHANGES TO THE SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECT**

Several logistical issues posed challenges to the developers of this program. For example, setting project dates with the community partner has been somewhat difficult as our academic calendars do not exactly align. This was not an insurmountable problem, but adjustments have to be made each semester to the methods course schedule to ensure sufficient instructional time and to prepare preservice teachers for the SL project.

As SL is an integral part of the methods course, we needed the after-school program to take place during the scheduled methods class time. This involved moving the course time slot within the TESOL program to coincide with the end of the school day at the elementary school. A complication arose later, however, when the school district had to change their school start and end times due to availability of buses. This meant our program would not start until two hours after school dismissal. To solve this problem, a computer program, led by the schoolteachers was set up to fill the gap. This works administratively, but makes a very long day for the ELs whose increased fatigue may have had an impact on their attitudes as discussed previously.

Over the two years of our SL collaboration, we have made several changes to the after-school program format. For example, lesson structures have been tried and modified to meet logistical and pedagogical concerns. Originally, we set up multiple activity centers with two or three preservice teachers in charge of planning and teaching at one center and ELs would rotate around the centers. When it was found that the time at each center was too limited, the number of centers was reduced. Even then, it was a rush to finish in time to consolidate learning at the end. Subsequently, we tried a whole class format with two or three teachers in charge of the whole lesson and the others scaffolding during the activities. In the most recent semester, with almost as many teachers as ELs, it was decided to allocate some teachers as observers only, so that ELs would not feel overwhelmed by the number of adults.

From the partners' perspective, organizing facilities and buses has been somewhat problematic - but achievable – as they must coordinate with the needs of other extra-curricular activities going on simultaneously in the school.

For teacher educators and community partners new to development of SL programs, we recommend reading an article by Perren (2013) who discusses steps for creating SL partnerships.

## **Limitations**

We acknowledge that eight sessions is not enough time to guarantee any (sustained) improvements in EL performance or motivation to learn, and we understand that any evident gains may be a result of a combination of factors, including the day-to-day efforts and commitment of the community teachers. Similarly, the preservice teachers continue to develop their skills knowledge and attitudes about ESL teaching and learning.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In addressing the dual goals of our SL project, our model proved successful. The ELs' literacy levels showed significant improvement when the pre- and post-program tests were compared. ELs' attitudes toward writing, though disheartening at first glance, appeared to remain consistent throughout the program when further investigation was done with a simpler survey tool. The ELs appeared engaged throughout the program and their reflections highlighted enjoyable program content, and, paralleling findings of Diversi and Mecham's (2005) and Fitts and Gross (2012), the ELS developed positive relationships built with the preservice teachers.

Regarding the preservice teachers' development, this community experience was very effective. The program created meaningful opportunities for them to apply what they had learned in their course and to successfully negotiate and overcome challenges as they worked together to develop and deliver their lessons. Reflections by the preservice teachers demonstrated critical insight and showed that they had met their SL objectives, making gains in the areas of personal growth, career development, social development and academic/cognitive development. Perhaps future research could set reflection prompts that target the SL objectives more explicitly and analyze gains in a more systematic way. Similar to Carr et al.'s (2006) findings, most development seemed to be in the area of academic and personal growth, with less in the area of career and social development. That said, the creation and implementation of the community sock puppet-making workshop and involvement in other community service activities after the SL project had ended is clear evidence of developing civic responsibility. All of the preservice teachers indicated -- implicitly or explicitly -- the superiority of a SL methods course over a traditional, campus-based model.

Because of the gains for the preservice teachers, as well as for the community ELs, we advocate that preservice TESOL programs should incorporate SL experiences -- prior to the final practicum -- in order to foster meaningful engagement between academic work and the community.

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