

**ADULT ESL STUDENTS AND SERVICE-LEARNING:
VOICES, EXPERIENCES, AND PERSPECTIVES**

A Dissertation

by

SHARON L. BIPPUS

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies of
Texas A&M University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

August 2011

Major Subject: Curriculum and Instruction

Adult ESL Students and Service-learning: Voices, Experiences, and Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Adult ESL Students and Service-learning: Voices, Experiences, and Perspectives.

(August 2011)

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Service-learning is the merging of academic work with real-life community service activities that encourages students to reflect and think critically about their experiences. Although service-learning has been used in various disciplines, it has not been used extensively with English language learners. However, it offers ESL (English as a Second Language) students the possibility of expanding their potentials beyond the four walls of the classroom. This multiple-case study examined the unique perspectives of six adult ESL students from five different countries. Data collection consisted of the students' written work (journals, reflections papers, and projects) and semi-structured interviews.

By offering ESL students opportunities to provide a service to others in authentic English-speaking environments, these students gained communicative competence and developed confidence in themselves. Although the participants were nervous about working in the community initially, they overcame their anxiety by using various

strategies and realized that they do have the ability to communicate successfully with English speakers in the “real world,” and they possess valuable skills that they can offer to the community. Additional benefits to the students included increasing their knowledge of American culture and history, developing a higher level of motivation, and forming connections to other human beings. Challenges included overcoming fear and feelings of incompetence and sustaining the same levels of confidence and fluency, once the service-learning project and the semester were over.

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the many ESL students who have touched my life over the years, in particular Diana, Dolores, Gloria, IK, Lily, and Marystella. I am inspired by your diligence, your dedication, and your ability to succeed despite the many obstacles you often have to overcome.

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NOMENCLATURE

EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	English as a Second Language
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages
TESOL	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Overview of Service-learning

Service-learning is the merging of academic work with real-life community service activities that encourages students to reflect and think critically about their experiences. For example, architecture students could volunteer for Habitat for Humanity, or sociology students studying poverty could work at a homeless shelter. The possibilities are endless as long as the volunteer experience is related to the coursework, the learners engage in reflection as a pedagogical component of the course, and there is an element of reciprocity between learners and those served in the community. Berman (2006) stated, “Service learning is in-context learning that connects specific educational goals with meaningful community service. Service learning projects include a dual focus: the goals of academic learning and the goals of authentic volunteer projects” (p. xxi). Both service and learning must be emphasized so that each component plays an equal role. Indeed, this reciprocal relationship is indicated by the hyphen that often links the two words together (Jacoby as cited in Elwell & Bean, 2001, p. 48).

The two essential elements of service-learning are reflection and reciprocity. Students must be allowed opportunities to reflect upon the experiences they are having in the community and to determine how these experiences relate to their academic work.

This dissertation follows the style of *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*.

These reflections can vary from class discussions to journal writing to presentations. Reciprocity refers to the fact that both parties, the student and the receiver of the service, benefit from the service being provided. Pak (2007) expanded on this idea: “The underlying concept of reciprocity in service-learning highlights its democratic and communal process where every party involved is both teacher/learner and server/served” (p. 36). Reflection and reciprocity ensure that service-learning is not merely volunteer work or community service. By reflecting on their experiences, students will hopefully gain a deeper insight into their actions which will allow them to make connections between theory and practice, thus making learning more meaningful. Students are not simply putting in hours at a volunteer site in order to “do their time.” The reciprocal nature of service-learning gives students “...a chance to develop a greater sense of agency and become more accountable as democratic participants in the dynamic interactions that help build society” (Glicker, 2006, p. 40). This feeling of autonomy will hopefully give students a greater appreciation for what they are capable of doing.

The benefits to mainstream students who participate in service-learning projects are varied: improved communication skills, an increased sense of civic responsibility, and a greater appreciation of diversity (Berman, 2006; Jacoby, 1996). Additionally, these students often incur a boost to their sense of self-esteem (Berman, 2006; Prentice & Garcia, 2000). Involvement in service-learning projects can also develop students’ higher order thinking skills such as analysis and synthesis (Elwell & Bean, 2001; Jacoby, 1996). Furthermore, after engaging in service-learning classes, the hope is that individuals will remain life-long volunteers who actively participate in their

communities (Prentice & Garcia, 2000). However, to date service-learning has not been utilized with ESL (English as a Second Language) students to the extent that it has been used in the mainstream educational setting even though it offers the potential to address a problem unique to language learners in that they are searching for opportunities to engage with proficient speakers of English in authentic settings. Overfield (2007) asserted:

Service-learning pedagogy relies on the use of language to mediate and create.

While language mediation exists in all learning environments, service-learning pedagogy creates opportunities for learners to participate in a variety of markedly different cultural contexts, and it recognizes and brings to the fore the

transformation of the learner as she participates in these contexts. (pp. 65-66)

Service-learning offers ESL students the possibility of expanding their potentials beyond the four walls of the classroom.

Statement of the Problem

A common complaint among my more advanced community college ESL students is that they want to practice speaking English with native speakers in order to become involved in their communities. However, ESL students often encounter difficulties integrating into American society (Hillyard, Reppen & Vasquez, 2007, Marlow, 2007; Mullaney, 1999; Russell, 2007; Steinke, 2009; Warschauer & Cook, 1999), and thus, feel unable to reach their goals. Hale and Whittig (2006) used the term *disempowered* to describe English language learners who feel incompetent due to their status as non-native speakers living in a new culture. When they can no longer use their

native languages in the new society, they can lose confidence in themselves and may feel incapable of performing tasks that were once routine. They want to be active participants in their communities but feel that their language skills prevent them from doing so.

Springer and Collins (2008) asserted that many language learners are eager to participate in personal and professional activities after having achieved a certain comfort level in the newly acquired language. Based on the comments I have heard from my own students, I know this to be true.

My ESL students, many of whom held professional titles such as doctor, engineer, architect, and journalist, in their home countries confirm this belief. They express their frustration with their perceived lack of progress in learning English and long to engage in meaningful conversations in authentic settings which will in turn enable them to obtain personal goals such as finding employment or communicating with their children's teachers. Minor (2002) stressed, "It is well established in the field of language learning that to learn a language well, learners need contexts that are real and meaningful" (p. 11). In fact, this is one of the premises of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is widely used in the field of ESL today (Brown, 2001; Hiep, 2007; Nunan, 1999; Omaggio Hadley, 1993; Savignon, 1987). However, creating and maintaining an authentic atmosphere in the ESL classroom can sometimes be challenging (Boyle & Overfield, 1999). Therefore, ESL teachers should search for ways to provide their students with authentic interaction that will hopefully increase their level of fluency and confidence when communicating in English. Service-learning has the potential to fulfill the students' needs.

Purpose of the Study

In reviewing the literature, a limited number of service-learning studies that involve ESL students as providers of the service are available even though this methodology has been used successfully with mainstream students and is grounded in the well-known theories of preeminent educational philosophers (Elwell & Bean, 2001; Grassi, Hanley, & Liston, 2004; Minor, 2002). In order to address this gap in the literature, the purpose of the current study is to investigate the perspectives of adult ESL students who participate as the givers of a service in a semester-long community college ESL course.

Research Questions

In the course of this investigation, the following research question serves as the focus of the inquiry central to this study:

- What perspectives are held by adult ESL students who have participated in service-learning programs as the providers of a service in an English-speaking environment for at least one semester?

Within this overarching question, more specific questions emerge:

- What are the perceived benefits of participating in a service-learning course for ESL students?
- In particular, how has participating in a service-learning course impacted the ESL students' ability to communicate outside the classroom?
- What are the perceived disadvantages of participating in a service-learning course for ESL students?

- What common characteristics, if any, are evident in the students who willingly participate in a service-learning program?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature Search

Service-learning as a methodology is supported by prominent theorists, and information about service-learning in general is readily available. However, finding published information about the use of service-learning as a tool to promote language acquisition in the field of ESL remains difficult. In order to determine the amount of information that currently exists in the field of ESL and service-learning, reviews of several databases were conducted. A search in ERIC (EBSCO) in September, 2009 listed a mere 16 articles containing the keywords “service learning” and “ESL.” More importantly, only four of these 16 articles clearly indicate that the ESL students were acting as the providers of service in a service-learning program. An additional search with the keywords “ESOL” (English for Speakers of Other Languages) and “service learning” located only five articles. Only one of these articles focused on ESL students as providers of a service in a service-learning program. In contrast, 2,856 articles about service-learning in general were available. A further search of the Texas A&M University library revealed even fewer books that met the criteria of “service learning” and “ESL.” Only one book published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) is available; however, it focuses solely on writing across the curriculum and not speaking. Furthermore, the organization NCTE focuses on promoting the teaching of English and language arts, not ESL. Another search substituting “ESOL” for “ESL”

located an additional book, but the service-learning project featured in this book describes how pre-service teachers can mentor ESL students.

An identical search in March of 2011 did not reveal any additional publications relevant to this study. Although two new articles were listed on ERIC (EBSCO) containing the keywords “service learning” and “ESL, neither of them pertained to ESL students providing a service in a service-learning context. Interestingly, while publications related to this study remained unchanged in a year and a half, the number of articles about service-learning in general had increased from 2,856 to 3,347, an increase of 491 articles.

A review of the *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, the only peer-reviewed journal for service-learning which began publication in 1994, revealed only four articles that referenced ESL as of September, 2009. Of these four articles, one details a Spanish service-learning program, two make references to tutoring ESL students as an option to completing community service, and the only mention of ESL in the fourth article is in a title in the Works Cited page. A search with the keyword “ESOL” found two articles. Neither of these articles details ESL students as being providers of a service either. To give a comparison, a search for issues about service-learning related to sociology returned 86 hits, psychology had 100, and citizenship had 131. A subsequent search in March of 2011 did not yield any new pertinent information. Two new articles reference ESL, but neither of them describes ESL students as providers of a service whereas articles referencing sociology, psychology, and citizenship increased to 95, 108, and 140 respectively.

Likewise, Learn and Serve America's National Service-Learning Clearinghouse only lists two dissertations that involve ESL and service learning on a search that included the years 1999 to 2006. The first, Wurr's (2001) dissertation entitled *The Impact and Effects of Service-Learning on Native and Non-Native English-Speaking College Composition Students*, describes a mixed method study. Guided by the research question, "In what ways does participation in service-learning impact student learning?" (p. 96), his qualitative data focused on issues such as motivation and social orientation while his quantitative data involved the analysis of student writing. Wurr concluded that ESL students were positively influenced by their participation in a service-learning program because they had opportunities to "learn from the community linguistically and culturally" (p. 181). The second dissertation, Grassi's (2004) *Service-Learning: An Innovative Approach to Instruction for Second Language Learners*, details the effects of a service-learning program that involved English language learners at a middle school. Teachers who participated in this program tended to ask the ESL students higher-level questions and encouraged more student participation compared to mainstream classrooms.

A further search for dissertations in the ProQuest database in September, 2009 revealed four dissertations that matched the search criteria of "service learning" and "ESL." A search substituting "ESOL" for "ESL" did not yield any results. One of the four dissertations located was the aforementioned dissertation by Wurr (2001) who stated, "...examples of service-learning with ESL students has [*sic*] only recently begun to appear in the literature" (p. 43). Of those recent publications, Wurr stated, "What most

of these initial reports tend to emphasize, above and beyond the personal and affective benefits already noted in the L1 literature, is the added authentic sociocultural dimensions of language learning that service-learning brings to language studies” (p. 43). The other three dissertations were not directly related to the present study; one involved ESL students as the recipients of a tutoring service, another described teachers’ perspectives, and the fourth detailed a language exchange between English-speaking university students and members of the Spanish-speaking community.

Thus, information about service-learning and ESL is not available in abundance. In addition, the educators who have used service-learning with ESL students have noticed the lack of information in this area. Grassi, Hanley, and Liston (2004) stated that by 1997, 72% of the students who had participated in service-learning projects were White, English-speaking students. Furthermore, Grassi et al. (2004) found that ESL students were more likely to be recipients of a service-learning project rather than providers. Hale and Whittig (2006) and Steinke (2009) concurred. When ESL students merely receive services such as tutoring, their ability to provide services is often overlooked. Thus, these individuals lose a valuable opportunity of empowering themselves by realizing that they can perform a needed service in their community. Warschauer and Cook (1999) asked the rhetorical questions themselves, “What do ESL students, who lack language skills and are newcomers to a community, have to offer in service? How can ESL students overcome language barriers to engage in reciprocal interaction and planning?” (p. 33). Perhaps other ESL instructors have experienced similar feelings which could explain the lack of research in this area.

Elwell and Bean (2001) maintained that while service-learning is becoming more popular in mainstream educational settings, it has only been used “sporadically” with ESL college-level learners. Heuser (1999) agreed, declaring that the “paucity” of available literature is due to the fact that the concept of using service-learning with ESL students is a rather new idea. Even within more recent years, Glicker (2006) stated that service-learning “...is less commonly used in adult ESL classes” (p. 40). Whittig and Hale (2007) also observed: “...a dearth of research on service-learning in an ESL context” (p. 382). Therefore, while a limited number of researchers have shown interest in this field, the need for further research exists.

Service-learning and Language Acquisition

Even within the field of language acquisition in general, service-learning is not widespread. Hale (1999) stated, “A missing link yet to be extensively explored is the application of service-learning to the foreign- or second-language curriculum” (p. 9). Overfield (2007) concurred by stating, “The development of service-learning pedagogy for foreign language learners is a relatively recent phenomenon that coincides with a shift over the past 20 years in second language acquisition research” (p. 58). As with ESL, the use of service-learning in Spanish classes is not prevalent. Hellebrandt and Varona (1999) found “...that service-learning has found only limited acceptance in the field of teaching Spanish language and literature” (p. 3). Indeed, Zlotkowski (as cited in Wurr & Hellebrandt, 2007), the series editor of the American Association for Higher Education’s Series on Service-Learning in the Disciplines, referred to *Construyendo*

Puentes (Building Bridges): Concepts and Models for Service-Learning in Spanish as “ground breaking” when it was published in 1999 (p. xv).

However, Spanish instructors who have utilized service-learning projects in their classes have documented some encouraging results. Pak (2007) maintained that service-learning promoted “learner autonomy” amongst his Spanish students because they forged strong relationships with the community, their classmates, and their teacher (p. 50). As mentioned previously, one of the main features of service-learning, reciprocity, reinforces the notion that each participant in a service-learning program “...is both teacher/learner and server/served” (Pak, 2007, p. 36). Tilley-Lubbs (2007) also recognized how student/teacher roles were redefined in the context of service-learning. One of the university students learning Spanish in her study commented:

...it transcended the world of classrooms, standardized testing, levels and degrees of performance, the usually stale and dry relationship between student and teacher, and replaced it all with a living adventure that can not be categorized or evaluated with a check in a box. (p. 318)

Indeed, service-learning used as a methodology in a language classroom seems to change the more traditional roles of teacher and student.

Grabois (2007), another Spanish instructor, commented on the increase in confidence that his students felt when speaking Spanish as a result of participating in service-learning programs; students must understand that “...language learning is a process that students need to engage in rather than as something that is done to them”

(p.180). Learning a language is not a passive activity, and service-learning allows language students to take a more active role in their own learning.

Service-learning with ESL Students as Part of a Larger Group

Within the field of ESL, one of the earliest articles describing the use of service-learning with ESL students dates back to the mid-1990s. Yoder, Retish, and Wade (1996) described a service-learning program that was used with 24 7th and 8th graders; six of these students had learning disabilities and six were enrolled in ESL. These students performed their community service either at a nearby elementary school or retirement home, and the authors reported increases in the students' self-esteem and self-knowledge. Although one-fourth of the students who participated in this program were English language learners, unfortunately no specific data is given as to their individual successes or challenges.

Crossman and Kite (2007) also included ESL students as part of a larger study, but again, the results are not specific to ESL students. They examined 326 reflective reports written by MBA candidates who participated in service-learning projects. Working as consultants for non-profit agencies, these MBA students' service-learning projects included writing grants, newsletters, and brochures; creating web sites; and doing market research. Of these 326 reflective reports, which were collected over a period of five years, Crossman and Kite (2007) state that "more than 80%" were written by international students (p. 147). Of that 80%, "approximately 60%" were ESL students (p. 147). However, the authors did not make clear exactly how many ESL students participated aside from the vague percentages offered above. In addition, they did not

always discriminate between the results reported by ESL students, international students, and native English-speaking students. For example, they declared, “Many students reported improved self-confidence about speaking and presenting. Students commented on improved skills related to meetings, clarity of expression, writing/editing/compiling/presenting information, and persuasion” (p. 159). Therefore, glean information specific to ESL students from comments such as this is not possible.

Hutchinson’s (2007) research into the effects of service-learning on basic writers also involved ESL students as part of a larger group. While she was more specific with the exact number of ESL students involved (5 out of 16 students), the final results are calculated by using percentages relating to the 14 students who successfully completed the project. Thus, although 71% of the students believed that volunteering with organizations such as America Reads and the American Cancer Society had helped improve their research and writing skills, it cannot be determined how many of these students were ESL students.

Short-Term Service-learning Projects

Another issue that is common in articles detailing service-learning and ESL is the short-term nature of the service-learning projects; those discussed here lasted from two days to six weeks. Heuser (1999) described a short-term service-learning project designed for Japanese students enrolled in a special program at an American university. These students were simultaneously attending a sociology course in addition to their ESL class. Heuser, the sociology professor who taught in the program, reported that the

Japanese students increase in confidence allowed them to further develop their language skills as a result of becoming more involved in the community. However, she admitted that the short-term nature of their service-learning project, only two days over one weekend, might be problematic. Increasing the number of hours the students spend in the community could allow for a more meaningful learning experience.

Minor (2002) also mentioned the importance of meaningful activities as he described the service-learning projects he began using with his university-level ESL students in 2000. Eleven students who represented seven different countries enrolled in the eight-week course, which focused on U.S. culture. The students worked on a construction project with Habitat for Humanity, helped residents at a retirement community, and prepared and served food in a soup kitchen, just to name a few of the activities. At the same time, they were reading about issues such as affordable housing, the plight of the elderly, and homelessness in their ESL classes. At the end of the course, the students wrote reflection papers about their experiences. The students responded very positively to the experiences, and the only negative comments that Minor received related to the type of service performed and the number of volunteer activities. By working at a variety of locations, some students felt they did not have enough time to establish significant relationships with the recipients of their service. Furthermore, they preferred visiting locations where they were able to practice speaking English as a part of their service. Thus, we see the importance of Dewey's (1938/1997) philosophy of experience which contributes to the theoretical background of service-learning; each experience should relate to the next one, and making human connections is important.

Elwell and Bean (2001) described a short-term service-learning project that was used with a diverse group of ESL students in an intermediate-level reading course at a community college in California. These 28 students (10 males and 18 females) represented 14 different countries. Their project began as Elwell's class was reading *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck. In addition to reading the novel, the students were researching related themes such as the Great Depression and the treatment of migrant workers in California. At the same time, their college began participating in a food and clothing drive that was organized in response to a freeze that severely hurt the citrus crop in California, thus causing great distress to thousands of migrant farm workers. Seeing how her students' academic work could be related to the collection drive, Elwell began her service-learning project by chance. As the students began collecting items, their motivation and enthusiasm increased and their tardiness to class decreased. In the end, the group of ESL students had collected more supplies than the rest of the college. The students made connections between their academic work and their community service, and Elwell observed improvement in the students' speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills. The students themselves offered very positive evaluations about participating in a service-learning project.

Cummings (2009) used a short-term service-learning project of approximately three to four weeks with the students in her college-level Intensive English Program. These students researched Greg Mortenson, author of *Three Cups of Tea*, and his Pennies for Peace program which uses donations to build schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The ESL students solicited donations on their campus by making oral

presentations about the program and eventually wrote letters to Mortenson himself. The students' comments indicated that they enjoyed the project and found it beneficial. One South Korean student wrote, "This activity was a little bit challenging for me. Even though we practiced what we had to say, it was totally different from practicing. It was real" (p. 47). Another student from South Korea stated, "This experience let me have confidence, and as I repeated the story...I felt that my English was getting more fluent" (p. 47). Even though service-learning projects such as this and the ones described above were short-term in nature, some positive results were observed which indicate that service-learning may offer ESL students a viable means of improving their language skills.

Service-learning, ESL, and Writing

Whereas some service-learning projects seek to develop a combination of language skills, others focus on one skill in particular, and of these, writing seems to be the most popular. As discussed previously, both Wurr (2001) and Hutchinson (2007) researched topics related to ESL, service-learning, and writing. Warschauer and Cook's (1999) service-learning project for ESL students at a community college in Hawaii entailed the incorporation of technology into a writing class. The majority of the ESL students were Asian, and many were "terrified" of participating in a service-learning project because they felt their English skills were not good enough. These students created newsletters, brochures, and web pages for local organizations. In addition, some students also tutored school children in technology and other subjects. These tasks benefited the students in several ways. They were writing for a real audience, and they

also learned marketable skills such as desktop publishing and web page design. Some students were also able to overcome feelings of isolation by having a direct link to the community.

Glicker (2006) described a non-credit writing course for adult ESL students entitled “Writing for Academic Success.” In addition to studying topics such as time management, computer skills, and learning styles, students who enroll in this elective course serve as tutors for lower level ESL students and blog about their experiences. After completing this course, the goal is that the “...ESL learners successfully transition from the adult education program into credit classes that put the student on track to a new career or area of interest” (p. 45). The course aims to give the ESL students the tools to have a more fulfilling life by increasing their academic skills.

Whittig and Hale (2007) also explained how service-learning was used to enhance a writing course for ESL students at Boise State University. Wondering how to distinguish a new first-year composition class designed specifically for ESL students, Whittig decided to include a service-learning component that would provide real-world experiences and audiences for her students. The ESL students were allowed to select the sites where they wanted to perform their service hours and chose locations such as a mid-high school and a refugee agency. The two students described in this case study overcame their fears and became more confident as they participated in the challenging real-world opportunities offered to them through their service-learning assignments. One of the students asserted, “We can overcome everything through our passion, even

language barriers” (Whittig and Hale, 2007, p.392). Whittig and Hale note that this kind of confidence is imperative for students to achieve academic success.

Related Articles

Phipps (2006) documented a service-learning project in which sociology students partnered with ESL students in order to interview them and “apply their newly learned sociological terms” (p. 49). Although the ESL students were not necessarily providing a service because the sociology students were interviewing them as “subjects” for their research, the ESL students nevertheless expressed initial anxiety at the beginning of the project and increased confidence when conversing with proficient English speakers at the end of the project.

Other studies involved ESL students who volunteered in their English-speaking communities. Two fairly recent studies (Hillyard, Reppen, & Vasquez, 2007; Springer & Collins, 2008) documented the results of incorporating volunteer experiences with ESL classes. Although the researchers of both articles clearly indicated that the students were not participating in traditional service-learning programs, both teams noted interesting results related to community service and language learning. Hillyard et al. (2007) described a “multi-experience class” at a university intensive English program (p. 127). In this hybrid class, exposing ESL students to authentic English is the primary purpose of the course, not service. ESL students volunteered at locations of their choosing while maintaining communication with their classmates and teachers via electronic discussions and face-to-face meetings every three weeks. Based on students’ verbal and written

feedback, Hillyard et al. (2007) reported that the students who volunteered not only increased their proficiency levels but gained confidence as well.

Springer and Collins (2008) investigated how two ESL students attended to tasks in the language classroom versus in a volunteer setting. By analyzing audio recordings and written assignments of both students, Springer and Collins (2008) determined that the students tended to analyze language without worrying about completing a task in the language classroom, whereas completion of the task was paramount in the volunteer setting. The students assumed different roles depending on the context; in the classroom they were language learners even though the teacher was trying to engage them in communicative activities, and at the volunteer site they were language users. The implication is that students might benefit both from analytical activities in order to increase their accuracy and volunteer activities in order to improve their fluency.

Another article documented the use of service-learning, not with ESL students per se, but with international graduate students from Taiwan and South Korea (Sallee & Harris, 2007). These students were enrolled in a teacher education program in the United States and were in training to become ESL/EFL teachers. These students had the option of arranging a student teaching position on their own or participating in their university's established service-learning program. By participating in the service-learning program, the students' experience was enhanced by working in schools that had large numbers of ESL students, performing a variety of services in the classroom, and responding to weekly reflection questions that focused on cultural differences. The service-learning component of their program aimed to assist them in gaining insight into American

culture and educational institutions. Although their language ability was not the focus of the study, the differences the students noted in Western versus Eastern culture could be of interest to ESL practitioners. The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews at the end of the program and also analyzed the students' journal entries to uncover "...a tension between a loyalty to their personal experiences and professional training in their countries of origin and an attraction to many of the markedly different approaches they observed in American classrooms" such as active classroom participation and student-centered classrooms (p. 47).

Growing Interest in ESL and Service-learning

In recent years, some language scholars have been paying more attention to the topic of ESL and service-learning. In 2006 the California/Nevada affiliate of TESOL (Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages), CATESOL, published their fall journal which featured articles on ESL and service-learning. In one of the articles, Levesque (2006) explained the service-learning program for ESL students at San Jose City College. Between 1997 and 2005, 25 ESL instructors have provided opportunities for their ESL students to become involved in the local community. During this time period, 24 percent of their ESL students participated in some form of service-learning. The most popular site for completing service-learning hours has been Project SHINE (Students Helping in the Naturalization of Elders). Second in popularity are locations such as the Math Lab and the Disabled Students Program because they are conveniently located on campus, thus eliminating the need for additional transportation. Many ESL students also elect to serve at local schools, in particular elementary schools: "Many love

children and this experience has helped them explore a possible career in teaching” (Levesque, 2006, p. 32). One ESL instructor said of the program, “It provides excellent opportunities for ESL students to *use* English in real and useful ways. It provides some variety for them so that they’re not just using ‘classroom’ English” (Levesque, 2006, p. 27). Braunstein (2006) discussed the use of service-learning in an intensive English program in California. Similar to Levesque’s experience, the two most popular sites for performing community service for ESL students have been working with seniors at retirement homes and with children in after-school programs. Braunstein listed the benefits of this program as exposure to authentic language, an increase in confidence, and an enhanced understanding of the culture.

In addition, several articles and newsletters that describe ESL service-learning programs can be found online (Gallow, 2008; Greenberg, 2008; Russell, 2007; Steinke, 2009; Zhabko, 2006). Although this information may simply be descriptive in nature, it is hopefully indicative of a growing interest in ESL service-learning.

Need for Further Research

Eyring (2006), TESOL professor and Chair of the Department of Modern Languages and Literatures at California State University, Fullerton stated, “A recurrent theme at recent service-learning research conferences is the need for more rigorous studies of service-learning in specific disciplines. This is even more true in the ESL/TESL field” (p. 22). She acknowledged that plentiful research exists on the topic of service-learning, but she specifically called for more publications in the area of service-learning and ESL: “However, much less has been published on the value of service-

learning in specific disciplines such as ESL/TESL. Higher-quality case studies need to be published along with replicable experimental studies” (p. 22). In addition, Whittig and Hale (2007) have noticed “...little focus on student voice, experience, and perspective” in the research that does exist (p. 382). This study contributes to the field by responding to both Eyring’s and Whittig & Hale’s calls as it is a case study that highlights the ESL students’ perspectives of participating in a service-learning program. Eyer (2002) also addressed the need for more qualitative studies in the larger service-learning arena:

It would also be a valuable contribution for researchers to move away from large-scale surveys where the experience cannot be clearly observed or controlled to smaller scale studies in which the central features of service-learning, including such elements as reciprocity, reflection, sequencing of learning activities, interaction with diverse others, and so forth, can be managed and clearly observed. (pp. 8-9)

Exploring the use of service-learning in the ESL classroom appears to play into a trend that is currently expanding and is deserving of further research. While other studies concerning ESL and service-learning have instead focused on ESL students’ writing abilities (Glicker, 2006; Hutchinson, 2007; Whittig and Hale, 2007, Warschauer & Cook, 1999, Wurr, 2001) or have included ESL students as part of a larger group that also included native English speakers and/or students with special needs (Crossman & Kite, 2007; Hutchinson, 2007; Wurr, 2001; Yoder, Retish & Wade, 1996), my study involves only ESL students and focuses more on their speaking skills. Also, the students

who participated in my study had an extended time period in which they worked within the community as opposed to ESL students who only participated in weekend projects (Heuser, 1999) or projects of durations that lasted less than one semester (Cummings, 2009; Elwell & Bean, 2001; Minor, 2002; Yoder, Retish & Wade, 1996). This study contributes to the fields of both ESL and service-learning by focusing on the unique voices, experiences, and perspectives of ESL students who provided a service to their communities.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework of Service-learning

The theoretical framework that is most often used to support service-learning originated with John Dewey decades ago (Berman, 2006; Cone & Harris, 1996; Elwell & Bean, 2001; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Hale, 1999; Minor, 2002; Rocheleau, 2004; Stewart, 2007; Taylor, 2007). Dewey believed that knowledge is attained by the experience and reflection that one undertakes while dealing with real-world issues. In *Experience and Education*, Dewey (1938/1997) explained how knowledge is acquired by expounding on his philosophy of experience which is comprised of the principles of continuity and interaction. These two tenets lay the foundation for modern-day service-learning.

The principle of continuity implies that experiences should be related to each other and lead fluidly from one situation to the next. In terms of service-learning, knowledge gained in an academic setting can help a student in a real-life environment and vice-versa. For ESL students, the grammar, pronunciation and other areas of linguistics they learn in the classroom can be put to use in the real world, and linguistic points of confusion that they encounter in the real world can be clarified in the ESL classroom. The second component of Dewey's philosophy of experience, the principle of interaction, refers to the exchanges a student has with the people in his or her environment. While students can have worthwhile interactions with books or other materials, social experiences are paramount. People are, in general, social creatures, and

Dewey emphasized that education is basically a social process. In support of Dewey's philosophy, Rocheleau (2004) stated, "Students should solve problems as groups rather than just as individuals, thereby once again learning the context of real situations and being prepared to enter the social world and face problems in which solutions require cooperation with others" (p. 7). In fact, Minor's (2002) ESL students who participated in service-learning projects commented that they preferred the projects that required sustained human contact. Heuser (1999) came to the same conclusion which indicates that both interaction and continuity are necessary for human growth and learning.

Another educational philosopher whose works are cited as theoretical support for service-learning is Paulo Freire (Cone & Harris, 1996; Eyster & Giles, 1999; Hale, 1999; Jacobs & Farrell, 2001; Rocheleau, 2004; Stewart, 2007). In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1970/2003) criticized the "banking model" in education: "Education thus becomes an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor. Instead of communicating, the teacher issues communiqués and makes deposits which the students patiently receive, memorize, and repeat" (p. 72). In this situation, the teacher is all-knowing and the students are the empty vessels that need to be filled with whatever information the teacher deems important. In order to avoid this form of dehumanization, Freire advocates principles that are consistent with the concept of service-learning and in some cases are reminiscent of Dewey's beliefs. Freire believed that educators must encourage critical thinking through community involvement. As students become more capable of critical thought and gain confidence, their level of involvement in the community increases. However, action must be accompanied by

serious reflection in order to be effective. Students must be challenged to think for themselves and address important issues in the world in which they live. This idea is reflected in service-learning, “Service-learning practitioners tend to come down on the side of transformational learning, supporting education that raises fundamental questions and empowers students to do something about them” (Eyler & Giles, 1999, p. 132). By becoming involved in the community, students should question inequities and search for ways to create solutions.

Modern day curriculum theorists such as Eisner and Noddings also advocate principles that support service-learning and prepare individuals to live in a democratic society. As previously stated, much of the theory that supports service-learning originated with John Dewey, and both Eisner and Noddings were strongly influenced by Dewey’s beliefs (Eisner, 1998, 2005; Noddings, 1999, 2007). In fact, Eisner (2003/2004) actually called for schools to begin using service-learning in order to promote democratic beliefs:

Schooling should be about more than individual achievement intended to serve one’s own personal ambitions. Providing payback to the community makes sense, not only as a form of appropriate socialization, but also as a moral virtue.

Service learning moves in this direction. (p. 9)

Noddings (1999) would agree with this statement because she is a strong believer in promoting democratic values: “Are students best prepared for democratic life by absorbing a rigorous body of carefully prescribed material, or must they have actual

experience with democratic processes?” (p. 580). Noddings would look favorably on students working in the community in order to improve their skills.

Another area in which Eisner’s and Noddings’ works support service-learning is their belief in self-reflection. Reflection is a component of service-learning that differentiates it from merely doing volunteer work. Students must participate in a type of community service that emphasizes their area of study and then reflect on the ways that academic study is related to real-life experiences. Noddings (2008) specifically mentioned reflection as one of the necessary elements of thinking, “Thinking involves planning, ordering, creating structural outlines, deciding what is important, and reflecting on one’s own activity” (p. 12). Eisner (1998) talked about reflection in terms of writing, “As almost all academics know, writing forces you to reflect in an organized and focused way on what it is you want to say. Words written confront you and give you the opportunity to think again” (p. 57). In fact, journal writing is the most common form of reflection used in service-learning courses (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Levesque, 2006). It is by reflecting that students are able to make connections between theory and reality. This is another area that Noddings recognized as important to student growth. Students seek connections to the subjects they study, to their real lives, and to existential questions (Noddings, 1996). More recently, Noddings (2008) commented, “The key is to give students opportunities to think and to make an effort to connect one subject area to other subject areas in the curriculum and to everyday life” (p. 11). Having time to reflect and make connections is necessary for human growth, and this is one of the benefits of participating in service-learning.

Another benefit of participating in a service-learning project is that students enhance their critical thinking skills (Elwell & Bean, 2001; Jacoby, 1996). Eisner (2003/2004) declared that schools must give students opportunities to improve their critical thinking skills. Noddings (1999) also argued along this line, “When liberal discussion is used to promote inquiry, critical thinking, reflective commitment, and personal autonomy, students are likely to feel more in control of their own schooling” (p. 583). Students need to be challenged to think in order to prepare them for life after school.

Theoretical Framework of Language Acquisition

While theorists such as Noddings, Eisner, Freire, and Dewey support the principles of service-learning in general, the work of Vygotsky is more often used as theoretical support for service-learning programs that emphasize language acquisition (Boyle & Overfield, 1999; Grabois, 2007; Mullaney, 1999; Overfield, 2007; Stewart, 2007), for it was he who developed the theory of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky (1978) defined the ZPD as “...the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Although Vygotsky based this theory on a child’s first language development, it is also used to explain second language acquisition (Grabois, 2007; Mullaney, 1999; Richard-Amato, 2003; Stewart, 2007). Indeed, the authors of the afterword in Vygotsky’s (1978) *Mind in Society* emphasized

that even though much of Vygotsky's research focused on children:

...to view this great Russian psychologist as primarily a student of child development would be an error; he emphasized the study of development because he believed it to be the primary theoretical and methodological means necessary to unravel complex human processes... (John-Steiner & Soubberman, 1978, p. 128).

Vygotsky firmly believed that learning was a social process and advanced the idea that communication was crucial to human growth.

According to the ZPD, the language learner's current knowledge base is defined as his or her *actual* level. With the help of "more capable peers" such as a teacher or a proficient speaker, the language learner is exposed to a *potential* level to which he or she can rise. Mullaney (1999) loosely defined this as "...the area in which learning takes place" (p. 55). In describing the service-learning project in which her Spanish students participated, Mullaney (1999) made the connection to the ZPD:

What is interesting about this idea is the implication that what individuals can do today with the collaboration of a more capable peer, they can do competently alone tomorrow. Consequently, the potential developmental level of the learner becomes the next actual developmental level as a result of the expansion of cognitive abilities that comes from the learner's interaction with others. The new structures and vocabulary our students learned in collaboration with and under the guidance of their conversational partners represented acquired structures that they would be able to use independently in the future. (p. 55)

In the context of service-learning, the community partners who receive the service can act as the ESL students' "more capable peers" and provide a rich source of language input in a real-life environment. Grabois (2007) also referenced the ZPD when discussing the role service-learning played with his Spanish students, "While engaged in service-learning, students are able to progress organically within their own ZPDs according to the interactive needs of each context" (p. 177). Thus, service-learning is compatible with Vygotsky's ZPD. Furthermore, it also fits within more recent language theories such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Savignon, 1987), the Interaction Hypothesis (Lightbown & Spada, 2006), and the Pushed Output Hypothesis (Ellis, 2004, p. 129).

The theoretical foundation of CLT, which is considered to be the "generally accepted norm in the field" of ESL education today (Brown, 2001, p. 42), is based upon the idea of communicative competence, which Savignon (as cited in Savignon, 1987) defined as "...the ability to negotiate meaning – to successfully combine a knowledge of linguistic, sociolinguistic, and discourse rules in communicative interactions" (p. 235). One of the major proponents of CLT, Savignon (1987) declared that CLT "...requires the involvement of learners in the dynamic and interactive process of communication. A communicative classroom allows learners to experience language as well as to analyze it" (p. 237). She described a communicative curriculum as having five components. The first component, language arts, refers to language analysis and includes structured activities such as spelling tests and dictation exercises in addition to language games and crossword puzzles. The second component, language for a purpose, involves using the

target language for real communicative purposes. Personal language use, the third factor, deals with discovering values. Students should learn about respect and self-expression by getting to know their classmates and teacher. The fourth element, theater arts, includes activities such as role play and simulation. These types of activities will allow students to practice for experiences they might encounter in real life. Finally, the last component is entitled beyond the classroom. Savignon (1987) asserted, “The strength of a foreign or second-language curriculum depends ultimately on the extent to which it reaches out to the world around it” (p. 240). While this component includes field trips and guest speakers, it could also entail the use of realia such as newspapers and radio programs.

In fact, the need for truly authentic communicative experiences for language learners may be absolutely vital in order to acquire a new language. Ellis (2004) stated, “There may be limits regarding what most learners are capable of achieving in a classroom no matter what the conditions” (p. 55). Language learners need conversation partners who provide comprehensible input that scaffolds the desired language level, who allow the learner to negotiate meaning when confusion arises, and who offer ample opportunities for the learner to produce sustained speech in the target language (Ellis, 2004). Long’s Interaction Hypothesis states that modified interaction, which consists of components such as elaboration, gestures, paraphrasing, clarification checks, and comprehension checks, promotes language acquisition (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

Related to this theory is Swain’s Pushed Output Hypothesis. When learners are forced to produce speech that is “precise or sociolinguistically acceptable” (known as

“pushed output”), they must consider their current knowledge of the target language (Ellis, 2004, p. 129). Initially, the language learners recognize that a difference exists between what they want to say and what they are actually capable of saying. When they “notice-the-gap” between desired speech and actual speech, they are forced to make hypotheses about the target language which will hopefully lead to language acquisition.

The multitude of theories presented here indicates the complexities involved in learning a new language. However, in the discussion of using service-learning to promote language acquisition for ESL students, relationships among the various theories can be identified. While the description of CLT may vary slightly in different texts, there exists a commonality in the various definitions. Savignon (1987) stated that all CLT classrooms should “...have one feature in common: they involve the whole learner in the experience of language as a network of relations between people, things, and events” (pp. 235-236). This is reminiscent of Dewey’s principle of interaction. Students do not learn solely from books; they need to interact with the people in their environment. This applies to the Interaction Hypothesis and the Pushed Output Hypothesis as well. ESL students’ learning should not be limited only to what is immediately available in the classroom.

In addition, CLT activities inspire learners because they are meaningful and either prepare learners for or involve learners in actual situations. Thus, Dewey’s principle of continuity is also compatible with the framework of CLT. ESL students can be provided with direct instruction in such areas as grammar, pronunciation, and content in the classroom (Savignon’s language arts component) and be able to put those skills

into practice at the community service site. Engaging with proficient speakers in the community, or in Vygotsky's words "more capable peers," offers ESL students opportunities for sustained speech which is a necessary component of the Interaction Hypothesis. While conversing with proficient English speakers, ESL students also have the opportunity to test hypotheses about the target language, which is related to the Pushed Output Hypothesis. ESL students can also be given the opportunity to role play situations in a safe classroom environment (Savignon's theater arts component) before they are required to perform them in an authentic setting. The concepts that the students learn in the classroom are put into use in real life environments, and students can discuss and evaluate their real-world experiences in the classroom through self-reflection activities which is a concept that is advocated by service-learning practitioners, educational philosophers such as Dewey, Freire, Eisner, and Noddings, and language theorists. Through self-reflection, language learners will test their hypotheses about language learning and begin to make strides as more capable, confident speakers in the target language.

Research Design

Because the purpose of this study was to examine the perspectives of adult ESL students who participated as the providers of a service in a service-learning course, qualitative data was collected. More specifically, I conducted a multiple-case study that focused on six ESL students who participated in a service-learning project either at a retirement community or at a public library or who participated in both projects. Yin (2006) stated that "compared to other methods, the strength of the case study method is

its ability to examine, in-depth, a ‘case’ within its ‘real-life’ context” (p. 111). Merriam (1998) offered a more detailed description:

The case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon.

Anchored in real-life situations, the case study results in a rich and holistic account of a phenomenon. It offers insights and illuminates meanings that expand its readers’ experiences. (p. 41)

In addition, this method is commonly used in the field of education today.

Within the scope of qualitative research, the case study is widespread (Merriam, 1998; Meyer, 2001). In fact, “this type of research has illuminated educational practice for nearly thirty years” (Merriam, 1998, p. 26). It is a methodology that allows for highly descriptive, in-depth knowledge of a particular phenomenon (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Merriam, 1998; Meyer, 2001). In fact, Noddings (1996) recommended the use of stories as case studies and stated, “Student stories can provide powerful inducements to reflect on our own practices” (para. 28). Listening to students’ voices can allow teachers to better accommodate students’ needs in the hopes of providing a better education. One thing I have noticed that is missing in the scant literature that is available on service-learning and ESL is the absence of student voices. Hearing the students’ unique voices in a case study will add another dimension to the existent literature.

Furthermore, Shumer (2002) maintained that qualitative research is ideally suited

to the investigation of service-learning because the two share numerous characteristics:

Both are about improving the human condition. Both espouse listening to and respecting those studied. Both believe that learning involves listening to, observing, and having dialogue with community members. Both assume that primary learning occurs through a process of reflecting on activities, observations, and interviews. Both assume the researcher (student) is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis and that she/he must be actively engaged in the process. And both assume the learning results in some form of social change and/or action, which provides direct feedback on the quality of the service. In short, service-learning and naturalistic/qualitative research engage in common purposes and similar practices. (p. 186)

Therefore, conducting a multiple-case study seems to be the best choice to investigate the perspectives held by ESL students after participating in a service-learning course.

Research Methodology

In making the decision to use a multiple-case study to research the experiences of adult ESL students who engaged in service-learning programs, it was also necessary to determine the method in which the participants' individual stories will be told. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted, "Experience happens narratively. Narrative inquiry is a form of narrative experience. Therefore, educational experience should be studied narratively" (p. 19). Narrative inquiry involves the researcher and the participants collaborating together while exploring a three-dimensional space – the dimensions of temporality, sociality, and place. Temporality refers to the participant's past, present,

and future. The story of the person in question is multifaceted; a narrative inquirer knows that "...a particular person had a certain kind of history, associated with particular present behaviors or actions that might seem to be projecting in particular ways into the future" (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). No person exists in a vacuum, and a person's past, present, and future are all part of his or her individual story. A narrative inquirer should focus on *becoming* instead of *being*; people, places, and things "...have a narrative history and are moving forward" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 145). Sociality includes both a person's inner thoughts and feelings as well as the people and things in his or her outer environment. Both of these combine to form a context that is particular to an individual. Place carries importance because different locations such as home, school, and community can impact an individual in different ways.

These three dimensions, temporality, sociality, and place, can be applied to the present study. All ESL students come to any given language class with a variety of backgrounds shaped by, among other things, their cultures, their ages, and their educations. While each ESL student may have similar goals in that each wants to learn English in order to further his or her education or career, each student can also have vastly different individual ambitions and dreams for the future (temporality). Their backgrounds have informed their personalities and thoughts, yet they have all ended up in the same classroom and are left to deal with a new culture, new classmates, a new teacher, and in the case of a service-learning course, a new community service site (sociality). They carry memories and experiences from their home countries as they try

to adjust to life in a brand new country (place). These three areas help describe who a person is and the story he or she has lived. While these aspects of narrative inquiry help to shape the stories of my participants, there are further aspects of narrative inquiry that relate to this study and strongly influenced my decision to use this particular methodology.

Narrative inquiry shares a theoretical foundation similar to what I have already outlined for service-learning. Influenced by the works of John Dewey, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) aligned narrative inquiry with Dewey's philosophy of experience, "With this sense of Dewey's foundational place in our thinking about narrative inquiry, our terms are *personal* and *social* (interaction); *past*, *present*, and *future* (continuity); combined with the notion of *place* (situation)" (p. 50). This commonality demonstrates that the concepts associated with service-learning and narrative inquiry share a relationship that is grounded in a well-known theory.

Moreover, both Eisner and Noddings support the notion of storytelling that is central to narrative inquiry. While not related to service-learning per se, storytelling is pertinent to the two service-learning projects that are described in this study. In one of the service-learning classes, the participants/ESL students visited a retirement home and interviewed their elderly partners about their lives. The ESL students were then responsible for writing the life stories of their senior partners. In the second class, the ESL students read stories to children in a local library. In addition to reading stories, one of the students' major assignments in the class was to write an original children's book.

Eisner and Noddings both see the relevance of storytelling in education. Eisner (1998) argued, “We now have a growing interest in narrative and in storied approaches to experience” (p. 125). He asserted that “...there are different ways to understand the world...” and “...different forms that make such understanding possible...” such as poetry, literature, and art (Eisner, 1998, p. 124). Stories are simply another form of making sense of experience. Noddings (1996) devoted an entire article to the importance of storytelling and affect. She advocated the use of storytelling to create interest in subjects that students might otherwise find boring, to promote interdisciplinary teaching, and to improve human relationships. Furthermore, she mentioned that case studies are a form of storytelling.

Moreover, the idea of storytelling also relates to the concept of reciprocity. In the context of service-learning, reciprocity refers to the relationships participants have with each other. They alternate roles of giver and receiver and of student and teacher. Gillard (1996) added to this role reversal when she wrote:

Whether we choose to explore the moments of our lives or the tales told us in childhood, the stories that live within us are our teachers. If we voice them, we are likely to live out the lessons they teach. (p. 103)

Stories become teachers in this paradigm, and we realize the great impact stories can have. Indeed, storytelling can make a profound difference in our lives:

Although some use stories as entertainment alone, tales are, in their oldest sense, a healing art. Some are called to this healing art; and the best, to my lights, are those who have lain with the story and found all its matching parts inside

themselves and at depth. In the best tellers I know, the stories grow out of their lives like roots grow a tree. The stories have grown them, grown them into who they are. (Estes as cited in Baldwin, 2005, p. 150)

As the roots connect the tree to the earth, stories connect human beings to each other. Lipman (2003) stated, "Storytelling is valuable, in large measure, because it can't be done well without overt relationships. It tends to make relationships visible. That's one of the reasons we love it, and one of the reasons we need it" (para. 13). Not only is storytelling a vital aspect of our lives, it is a common thread that links various cultures together: "From the corner chair in an American living room, to the cook-fire in an African village, story conveys what it is to be human and gives humanity its voice" (Baldwin, 2005, p. xii). Thus, ESL students who come from a variety of different countries can relate to this very human activity of storytelling. As mentioned previously, one of the missing pieces in the existing literature on service-learning is the absence of ESL students' voices. Narrative inquiry offers an opportunity to tell the students' unique stories by using their own words and experiences in an effort to broaden the range of materials available about service-learning. Through narrative inquiry, ESL students can find the means to voice their own stories.

In addition, narrative inquiry requires that the researcher and the participants share a close relationship. Connelly and Clandinin (2006) stated, "The more focused on living the study, the more likely intense, intimate relations will develop among researchers and participants" (p. 482). The researcher must be invested in the

participants' lives in order to share the experience and be able to later express their stories.

In this study, the participants were all former students of mine. While this can create a certain bias, which will be discussed in an upcoming section, it also allows for a more intimate telling of the participants' stories. ESL students in particular can feel uncomfortable when having to speak with new acquaintances in English; therefore, a detached researcher may not have been privy to the details and emotions that I was able to capture in this study. These students were required to keep journals throughout the semester and make weekly entries. Weekly reflection sessions were also conducted in the format of class discussions in order to allow the students the opportunity to share their experiences. At the end of the semester, each student was also required to submit a final reflection paper. Occasions such as these where students shared their feelings were an opportune time to determine intended participants for this study.

Furthermore, students and teachers often assume new roles in the service-learning context. Stewart (2007) stated, "Relationships between me and my students have deepened as they see me more involved in their learning process and in improving the lives of community members" (p. 102). This is another area in which I see congruity between service-learning and narrative inquiry. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) insisted that "relationship is at the heart of thinking narratively. Relationship is key to what it is that narrative inquirers do" (p. 189). Thus, without close relationships, it would be difficult to conduct the research.

In fact, Yin (2006) warned that one critical component of conducting a case study is selecting the appropriate candidate by screening:

The case selection or screening goal is to avoid the scenario whereby, after having started the actual case study, the selected case turns out not to be viable or to represent an instance of something other than what you had intended to study. (p. 115)

Therefore, by carefully observing the students in my classes I was able to select the most suitable candidates. Such purposeful selection is not uncommon when conducting case studies. Merriam (1998) stated:

Sample selection in qualitative research is usually (but not always) nonrandom, purposeful, and small, as opposed to the larger, more random sampling of quantitative research. Finally, the investigator in qualitative research spends a substantial amount of time in the natural setting of the study, often in intense contact with participants. (p. 8)

Patton (1990) asserted that:

The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich cases* for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term *purposeful* sampling. (p. 169)

Furthermore, within the context of purposeful sampling, various types of strategies exist which aid the researcher in selecting the information-rich cases. In this case, two of these strategies were utilized: maximum variation and critical case sampling.

Maximum variation sampling was chosen because “any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared aspects or impacts of a program” (Patton, 1990, p. 172). Thus, the six ESL students who were chosen as participants in this study represent five different countries: Colombia, Mexico, South Korea, Venezuela, and Vietnam. Of the two participants who are from South Korea, one is male and the other female. In addition, the participants’ ages range from 19 to 45. Furthermore, two of the participants only participated in the service-learning program at the retirement home; two of the participants only participated in the service-learning program at the children’s library; and the remaining two participated in both programs.

Critical case sampling was also utilized. Patton (1990) defined critical cases as “...those that can make a point quite dramatically or are, for some reason, particularly important in the scheme of things” (p. 174). The participants in this study were considered critical cases because they showed considerable interest in their service-learning projects and were able to provide detailed and thoughtful commentary on the advantages and disadvantages of participating in the service-learning projects.

Participants and Settings

The six participants in this study were all community college ESL students who willingly enrolled in an elective service-learning class designed especially for high intermediate and advanced ESL students or for students who had previously completed the ESL program but wanted to continue their study of the English language. Students in the high intermediate level had either completed the intermediate level classes of

reading, writing, and oral communication or had passed the ESL COMPASS with a minimum composite score of 246. This composite score consisted of a minimum reading score of 80, a minimum grammar score of 84, and a minimum listening score of 82. The six students who were invited to participate in this study received information sheets approved by the IRB which informed them of their rights as potential participants.

Two distinct types of service-learning courses were offered within a period of two years, from the spring semester of 2008 to the spring semester of 2010. The first service-learning course involved the ESL students visiting a retirement home on a weekly basis. Each student was paired with a resident of the retirement community and was responsible for interviewing the resident about his or her life. At the end of the semester, the ESL students presented their senior partners with a written biography. In addition to receiving this memento which could be shared with family and friends, the senior partners also received companionship on a weekly basis and had the opportunity to reminisce about their lives. In return, the ESL students had the opportunity to practice their English in an authentic environment in addition to learning about the culture and history of the United States. This course was originally piloted in the spring of 2008 with encouraging results that prompted the current study. This course was repeated in the spring of 2009 and the spring of 2010.

The second type of service-learning course was offered in the fall of 2009. The focus of this course involved working with children at a public library. Working in small groups of three to four, the ESL students took turns conducting weekly storytelling sessions for pre-school aged children and their parents. The ESL students were

responsible for picking a theme, such as animals or numbers, and finding age-appropriate stories, songs, and activities to present to the children. After the storytelling session, the ESL students then introduced a craft for the children to make and supervised this activity. The ESL students who were not presenting Story Time that week assisted by passing out flyers before Story Time and encouraging parents to bring their children, collecting tickets at the door as families entered the storytelling session, and had the opportunity to talk to parents during craft time. This service-learning project allowed the ESL students to practice their English in an authentic setting working as the “teachers” during Story Time. The recipients of the service, both the attending children and their accompanying parents or guardians, received a fun, educational opportunity that was also free of charge.

These two locations, a retirement community and a children’s library, were selected because they both provided relatively non-threatening opportunities for ESL students to practice their listening and speaking skills in real-life environments. In both courses, the ESL students visited either the retirement community or the children’s library as a class with me, their ESL teacher. Attending as a group helped ease their initial anxiety about working in the community. The students knew their teacher and classmates were present to help as needed if questions or problems arose.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection for this study consisted of the participants’ written work from the service-learning classes and interviews conducted after the participants had completed the classes in question. All of the students who enrolled in either of the two service-

learning courses were required to complete various written assignments that captured their thoughts and feelings at the same time as they were experiencing them. They made weekly journal entries about their experiences in the class and at the community service site, and at the end of the semester students wrote reflection papers that summarized their experiences over the semester. In addition, students who enrolled in the course in which they visited the retirement community sometimes made revealing comments in the biographies that they prepared for their senior partners. As the instructor of the service-learning courses, I observed the students in the classroom and at the community service sites. I had weekly share sessions with my students so that students could express difficulties and successes related to their service-learning experiences, and I kept my own journal to record my personal observations.

In addition to using this written data, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the participants in August, 2010. (A copy of the interview protocol can be found in Appendix A.) Before the interviews were conducted, the participants were informed of their rights and assured that their privacy would be maintained as per IRB regulations. The interviews were conducted at a time and location that was convenient for each individual participant. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. Each participant was given the opportunity to read his or her transcript in order to approve it or make any clarifications. Finally, all of the data was analyzed and coded in order to determine the common themes that emerged from the participants' responses.

While dedicated qualitative data analysis software does exist, several researchers have concluded that word processing programs such as Microsoft Word can be used to

successfully analyze qualitative data (La Pelle, 2004; Merriam, 1998; Saldaña, 2009). In fact, La Pelle (2004) outlined a seven-step process that details how to use the table function of Microsoft Word in order to accomplish this task. I used a modified version of that process. The first step entails creating a four-column table in which to record the transcribed interview. The name of the speaker is written in first column. The second column is for the code that describes the data in that row. The third column contains the comments from the interview. The fourth column should be numbered so that if the table is sorted later, it can be reordered in the original sequence.

The second step involves creating the theme codebook in order to track the unique codes the researcher has created (La Pelle, 2004; Saldaña, 2009). However, Saldaña (2009) emphasized that regardless of the technological choices a researcher makes, coding is not a simple task: “Rarely will anyone get coding right the first time” (p. 10). Coding is a cyclical task, and researchers will have to review their first attempt at coding the data at least once to ensure that all codes and categories are accurate. I found this to be true. As I reviewed my data, it was necessary to update the codebook several times.

Furthermore, while coding the transcribed interview, if a participant’s comments can be coded with more than one code, the comments should be copied into the subsequent row and given the same sequence number; however, the copied comments are italicized to indicate that they have been copied. Finally, after typing the appropriate codes in the second column of the table, the table can be sorted to group similarly coded items together for easier analysis.

Bias and Limitations

While it is hoped that the results of this multiple-case study will assist ESL teachers in the search for meaningful instructional methods that encourage their students to leave the safe environment of the ESL classroom and venture into real-world contexts, limitations are unavoidable. Selection bias could be considered a matter of concern because only students who willingly enrolled in a service-learning course participated in this study. Additionally, the participants in this study were all educated adults. Five of the six had already attained a professional level of education in their home countries, and the sixth participant is preparing to begin her studies at the university level. Furthermore, a potential danger exists when a researcher is also a participant who is closely involved with the subjects of the study. Therefore, measures were taken in order to ensure the quality of this study.

The vanguards of qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) contended that the trustworthiness of qualitative studies can be addressed by adhering to four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility is the study's truth value or, as defined by Lincoln and Guba (1985), "...the naturalist's substitute for the conventionalist's internal validity..." (p. 296). Transferability refers to the applicability of the findings in other contexts. Dependability indicates that the findings are consistent and could be replicated to a certain extent considering that reality is ever changing. Finally, confirmability indicates that the findings are as objective as is humanly possible.

To ensure credibility, Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommended prolonged engagement (which provides scope), persistent observation (which provides depth), and triangulation (which can include the use of various sources, methods, investigators, and theories). Transferability is achieved by providing “the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as a possibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 316).

Dependability relies on maintaining an audit trail. Confirmability comprises techniques such as maintaining an audit trail, triangulation, and keeping a journal.

More recently, Merriam (1998) suggested that the researcher should offer his or her positionality, triangulate data, and leave an audit trail to show that results are “dependable” or “consistent” (instead of the quantitative term “reliable”). Strategies also exist to address validity: triangulation, member checks, long-term observation, peer examination, and declaring one’s positionality (Merriam, 1998). Obviously, some overlap occurs within these two categories; however, that should help to ensure that the results are dependable and valid.

Yin (2006) listed seven common sources that are used in triangulation: documents, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, physical artifacts, and focus groups. The data collected for this study included students’ written work (weekly journal entries, reflection papers, and projects), personal observations both in the classroom and at the service-learning volunteer sites, and semi-structured interviews. Even advocates of narrative inquiry, which encourages a strong researcher/participant relationship, believe that “[f]ield notes, photographs, students’

written work, teachers' planning notes are all field texts that help us step out into cool observation of events remembered with a loving glow" (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 83).

In addition, Yin (2009) recommended having more than one observer – “whether of the formal or the casual variety” (p. 111). Therefore, I have included commentary from the children's librarian who worked with my students and from an ESL instructor who was privy to information about the service-learning classes because she knew some of the students enrolled in the classes, and she also substituted for me in the service-learning class that visited the retirement community.

In this study, I have attempted to depict an accurate portrayal of the participants' perspectives by using their exact words whenever possible. This provides for the thick description that Lincoln and Guba advocate as well as a measure of confirmability. By using numerous sources (participants' journals, reflection papers, projects, additional observers, and my personal journal), I have triangulated the available data. The participants conducted member checks of data pertaining to them, thus allowing them the opportunity to approve or correct information. Because of the relationships I built with the participants as their former teacher, I had opportunities to observe them both long term and in-depth. In the end, the integrity of the researcher is of the utmost importance because the researcher is the instrument of data collection and analysis (Merriam, 1998). I have attempted to maintain the highest standards and follow research guidelines to the best of my ability.

Researcher Positionality

Merriam (1998) maintained that a researcher enhances the internal validity and dependability of any given study by disclosing his or her positionality. Therefore, I would be remiss if I did not reveal information about my background and beliefs. I began this dissertation with 17 years of experience working with English language learners, first as a volunteer ESL tutor then as an ESL instructor who has experience both in the United States and abroad. I taught ESL in Texas public schools, mostly at the high school level, for nine and a half years and have been teaching ESL in higher education for the past five years. During this time, I also taught in intensive English summer programs in Slovakia and China and served for two years in the Peace Corps as an EFL teacher trainer.

My current interest in service-learning began when I started teaching ESL to adults at a community college. As mentioned previously, many of the adults with whom I have worked have expressed a strong desire to practice speaking with native English speakers. They feel frustrated with their perceived slow progress with the English language and their lack of ability to communicate with ease. I understand their frustration because I have felt similar emotions when taking Spanish classes in Mexico. I could understand my Spanish teachers with very little difficulty and was able to communicate effectively in the classroom. However, once I left the confines of the school, I reverted into a child with only very basic communication skills. I longed to communicate with the local population, but as a stranger in a new land, I felt I did not have the connections to participate in their society. Therefore, when my adult ESL

students began expressing their feelings, I immediately understood their concerns and felt compelled to find a way to help them feel more comfortable in the local community.

I realize that by using former students in my research, this could create a potential bias. However, the students who participated in this study were no longer in my class when I interviewed them, and they were under no pressure to produce certain comments out of fear of receiving an unsatisfactory grade. To the contrary, I was able to select participants who were the most candid with their thoughts when they were my students and who were able to talk to me freely since I had already built a rapport with them. As a researcher, I recognize that I am ethically bound to present a truthful and accurate picture of the participants' perspectives of service-learning.

Summary

In closing, let us consider one last example to see the importance of the case study. In the following quotation, Eisner (1998) was actually discussing art. However, if we consider his description a metaphor for case studies, we can see that even by studying one, it can represent the whole:

To draw a tree or the particular compartment of a seated figure, the artist must not only notice that the object to be drawn is a tree or a figure, but a *particular* tree or figure. To do this, the artist must avoid the premature classification that is typically fostered by schooling and instead remain open to the particular features and overall conformations of individual forms. No tree, no oak tree, no young oak tree is the same as any other young oak tree. The task the artist faces is to experience individual features of *this* tree, of *this* person, and to create a form

that succeeds in revealing the essential and unique features of the object seen. In the process of revealing what is individual, the work also – ironically – becomes what Arnheim (1990) calls a canonical image through which the features portrayed through the visual rendering of a distilled particular can be used as a generalizable image to locate similar features found elsewhere. In this process the image becomes a concrete universal, a means through which perception is sensitized so that it can locate like qualities. (p. 63)

This quotation resonates with me because it reminds me of one of the students who participated in this study. Gloria was enrolled in the service-learning course that visited the retirement community, and she always gave 100% on every assignment regardless of how big or small it was. One of our in-class assignments required the students to draw a pictorial representation of the various stages of life. While most students drew simple stick figures of babies, children going to school, young adults going to university, adults getting married, etc., Gloria's illustration depicted a series of trees to represent the life cycle. (See Appendix C.) I was so impressed with her originality and the way she explained her picture, that I made a copy to keep for myself. Now, two years later, as I write this dissertation, I grasp the significance that her seemingly innocent picture holds for me. Narrative inquiry often emphasizes the use of metaphor to make a point: "Our species thinks in metaphors and learns through stories," (Bateson as cited in Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 8). Because a "tree" has now "spoken" to me twice regarding this project, I must agree that metaphor is a powerful tool, and narrative inquiry seems to be a powerful means to share students' stories.

CHAPTER IV

PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

The six participants in this study share common characteristics in that they are all English language learners who studied at the same community college and willingly enrolled themselves in a service-learning course. Two of the participants completed their service-learning hours by writing biographies for senior citizens living in a retirement home; two of the participants performed storytelling sessions in a children’s library; and finally, two of the participants participated in both the project at the retirement home and the project in the children’s library. In addition, through testing or course advancement, their language proficiencies were all at the high intermediate level or above as determined by the college’s placement chart. However, the participants differ in nationality, age, and background. In this chapter I will first give a description of each of the six participants in order to illustrate their backgrounds. In addition, a summary of the participants can be found in Table 4.1 for easy reference. Finally, I will focus on the participants’ perspectives concerning their experiences in a service-learning course. In some cases, pseudonyms have been used to protect the privacy of certain individuals.

Table 4.1 Summary of Participants

Name	Age	Sex	Country	Service-learning program
Diana	43	F	Mexico	Both
Dolores	31	F	Venezuela	Children’s Library
Gloria	45	F	Colombia	Retirement Home
IK	45	M	South Korea	Retirement Home
Lily	19	F	Vietnam	Children’s Library
Marystella	37	F	South Korea	Both

Introduction to the Participants

Diana

I first met Diana in the fall of 2007 when she was a student in my reading and oral communication classes. I remember her as a shy student, always polite and cooperative, but never willingly offering verbal answers unless specifically called upon. In the spring of 2009 she enrolled in my service-learning course in which we visited the retirement home, and in the following semester she enrolled in the service-learning course in which we visited the children's library. More than any other student with whom I have worked in my service-learning courses, Diana showed the most remarkable transformation as far as losing her inhibitions and becoming a more confident English speaker.

Born in Mexico 43 years ago, Diana came to the United States in 2004 with her children to join her husband who had been working here for two years. Upon arriving in Texas, she had almost no knowledge of the English language; she had never studied English in Mexico. She began taking ESL classes in 2006; however, as the mother of three children and the primary caretaker of her aging, infirm parents who live with her family, her enrollment in ESL classes has been sporadic.

Diana earned a degree in accounting in Mexico and worked at a bank before having children. As a college student, she volunteered by collecting items to raise money to help the poor. She also remembers volunteering as a child both in school by helping her teachers and at church collecting money for the poor.

She plans to remain in the United States forever "because there are more opportunities for jobs and a better future for our children." Although her time is limited

now because of family obligations, she hopes to one day return to the university. Diana said, “My dream is to have conversations with any person in English, and I would like to become a nurse because I want to work in a clinic or hospital to help people that are sick.”

Dolores

Dolores, 31, and her nuclear family, which consists of a husband and two children, came to the United States in 2004 in order to escape the political turmoil that is now prevalent in her native Venezuela. She has a strong family base in the U.S., living only minutes away from her parents, her sister, her brother-in-law, nieces and a nephew.

Although Dolores had already studied English in Venezuela, she quickly realized that she needed additional coursework after arriving in the U.S. When Dolores enrolled in the service-learning course, she had already completed the ESL program and was taking academic coursework; however, she felt the need to continue practicing her English as well. She had been considering earning her teaching credentials; therefore, she elected to participate in the service-learning class that volunteered in the children’s library.

Dolores holds a bachelor’s degree in architecture and worked for one year in that field before coming to the United States, and she is currently finishing her associate’s degree in interior design. She said that she never volunteered in Venezuela because volunteer service is not typical there. She plans to live in the United States indefinitely and hopes to earn a master’s degree in the future.

Gloria

Gloria is a 45-year-old Colombian woman who has been in the United States since 2002. She accompanied her husband to a university in Oklahoma where he was working on his master's degree in petroleum engineering. Their original plan was to stay in the United States for two years and return back to Colombia after he graduated. However, her husband then decided to extend his studies to earn a PhD, and he eventually found employment in Texas where they now live.

By following her husband to the United States, Gloria gave up her prospects of becoming an architect in Colombia. She had just earned her bachelor's degree in architecture when her small family moved to the U.S. With only a spousal visa, limited English language skills, and a young child to take care of, Gloria's opportunities were severely limited in Oklahoma. Although her spousal visa did not allow her to study or work, she eventually found some free English classes at a volunteer agency. When her family moved to Texas in 2006, she began taking formal English classes at a community college. Now a master's student planning to earn her degree in architecture in 2011, Gloria is not afraid of hard work.

Indeed, her background is filled with stories of diligence and determination. Before studying architecture, Gloria received her nursing degree and worked as a nurse for eight years. During this time, she volunteered with the Red Cross to create a training program for high school students even though volunteer work is not as prevalent in Colombia as it is in the United States. Prior to that, as a university student, Gloria assumed a leadership role acting as the student representative to present issues to

administration. Gloria's current goal is to be able to function effortlessly in English. She said, "I would like to be part of this society, and if I want to do, one part is learn the language to be part of this society. If I don't have this thing, I don't live here." In the future, Gloria hopes to put her architecture skills to use by developing housing for the poor in Colombia.

IK

IK, 45, left his home in South Korea and came to the United States in 2008 so that he and his two sons could learn English. He has an interesting background in that he has experience both in business and more spiritual matters. He has a bachelor's degree in accounting and business management, and in South Korea he worked for a trading company and also taught martial arts. Originally, he planned to return to his homeland in 2013, but now he is considering earning a master's degree in Oriental medicine in the United States, so he may postpone his departure.

While learning English is more of a personal goal for IK because he likes to learn about other countries and cultures, he believes that being able to speak fluent English is "essential" for his children. Without good English skills, they may not be able to find a good job in South Korea or get promoted to higher positions within a company.

IK stated that he had never volunteered before in South Korea, but after participating in the service-learning course he volunteers at his children's school when he has time. IK participated in the service-learning course in which we visited the retirement home because he feels very comfortable talking with older people.

Lily

Lily, from Vietnam, is still young enough to state her official age in half-years. During her interview, she told me she is 19 and a half and admits to still being taken care of by her parents even though she lives half a world away from them. Her father sent her to live in the United States because he believes she can receive the best education here. She was in 11th grade when she arrived in 2007, and initially she lived with an aunt and uncle. She graduated from a high school in Houston, and now she lives with a roommate as she attends college. Her father may decide to send her two younger sisters to live with her later so that they can also be educated in the U.S. If this happens, Lily knows that she will be responsible for their well-being.

Because she is still young, Lily remains uncertain about her future. She does not know if she will stay in the United States or return to her homeland one day. Right now she is focusing on her goal of obtaining a degree in nursing. As far as learning English is concerned, Lily stated, “I want to speak fluently English and I want to understand EVERYTHING in the news. And on the radio, too, because sometimes, and the movies, too, because sometimes I see a lot of people, they understand, they speak something, like, funny and they laughing.” Lily wants to understand every joke and laugh with others.

Prior to enrolling in the service-learning class that visited the children’s library, Lily did have some volunteer experience in Vietnam. She described the summer between 9th and 10th grade when she traveled for a week “to the countryside to grow some trees...and clean the trash” with other students. They lived with farmers, and the

experience was shocking to these young people because they discovered that the village did not have running water, electricity, and of course, no computers for chatting. Lily also tried volunteering in a hospital one time in high school but did not find the experience very rewarding because they only had her filing papers.

Marystella

Marystella, 37, earned a bachelor's degree in education in her native South Korea and is qualified to teach German or English. However, she never worked as a language teacher, and when I told her we should have been practicing German together, she laughed and told me, "Never try. Don't try," insisting that she had forgotten everything she had learned about German. Instead of teaching after graduation, she worked as a secretary for three or four years before quitting to have a baby.

Marystella was excited to come to the United States in 2008 when her husband, who works for a large Korean company, signed a four-year contract to work here. She wanted to study English here and also believed that living in the U.S. would be good for her daughter.

Although she said it is not common to volunteer in South Korea, she did work as a volunteer teacher at her church for two years. Therefore, when she arrived in the United States, she agreed to volunteer in her daughter's school: "When I came here two years ago, I volunteered. I was very brave. I volunteered and I didn't know they want me to speak in English in front of the student[s]." She described it as an "unforgettable memory" and never volunteered for that type of job again.

Participants' Personalities and Backgrounds

When asked to describe their personalities, Diana, Dolores, and IK indicated that their personalities remain constant regardless of what language they are speaking. All three described themselves as having more introverted personalities. Gloria, too, classified herself as an introvert in general, but she becomes much more nervous when communicating in English. Lily and Marystella, on the other hand, claim to be very talkative in their native languages but become shy and nervous when speaking in English. All six of the participants see themselves as being shy, nervous, or timid when communicating in English. Table 4.2 lists words that the participants chose to describe their personalities in their native language and English.

Table 4.2 Participants' Descriptions of Themselves

Participant	Description of self in native language	Description of self in English
Diana	Timid, quiet, friendly, caring	Same
Dolores	Not talkative, not extroverted, introverted, shy, timid	Same
Gloria	Caring, friendly, helpful, not loud, introvert, shy, timid, sometimes talkative	Similar to native language but very nervous in English
IK	Not extroverted, not talkative, caring, friendly, helpful, introvert, quiet, a little bit shy	Same
Lily	Loud, outgoing, talkative	Really shy, friendly, nervous, really quiet
Marystella	Not that shy, talkative, friendly	Very nervous, very timid

Indeed, during their interviews or in their written work, all of the participants

mentioned feeling scared or nervous about talking in English. Diana stated:

Yeah, because I remember two semesters ago, I couldn't speak nothing. That was embarrassing [to] speak because I felt I have a lot of mistakes. How I can speak that people can understand me? Yeah, that was scary. I felt scary, nervous.

Dolores felt anxious about working in the children's library, "I have never worked with children, yet I am very excited to do it and at the same time nervous and a little scare of what is coming." IK, too, was apprehensive about his service-learning project: "When I arrived at the retirement home, I was very nervous." Lily was so scared after attending the orientation in the children's library that she thought about dropping the course:

I was too scared when we just came to the children's library and watched the example for our performance. I wanted to change classes. I thought about it a lot. I wanted to change to a regular class, which is just like another writing essays, doing tests.

Marystella also voiced her fears: "...if I have to speak in English, I'm very nervous, so I don't speak very well." Gloria also admitted to feeling scared, "Nervous, yes, when I talking in English I am very nervous." Gloria in particular was able to express the extent of her fear when meeting her senior partner on her first day at the retirement home, "I felt very nervous, stupid and unsure... While Ronnie was answering all the questions that I asked, I was sweating. I felt all my clothes getting wet, but I did not take off my jacket because it seemed inappropriate." Gloria further expounds on this feeling of anxiety in

her writing:

Before my visit to the retirement home, I felt very anxious. It was a new challenge for me. I hoped this experience would give me more self-confidence. The big problem is my limitation to communicate in English. I love to work with the community, and it will be a good way to improve my English. Probably in my classes, I feel more secure because I am a student. I can ask questions and make mistakes with grammar and pronunciation, but outside class in the real world it is like you do not have a license to make mistakes.

Feelings of inadequacy such as this are also illustrated in other participants' apparent need for perfectionism.

IK at first denied being a perfectionist when I asked him in the interview:

In my younger days, I tried to be perfectionist, but right now, I'm not. I don't even try to be perfectionist, but at that time [when he was meeting with his senior partner at the retirement home] I think I should have tried to be better to get story, so I should have recorded about that.

IK further commented on this theme when he sent me an email the day after our interview to clarify a few points, one of them being perfectionism. He wrote, "Actually, I don't like making mistakes to other people rather than being a perfectionist. This kind of personality makes me hesitate doing something. I don't act and speak out until I make sure what I try to do." Furthermore, after IK had the opportunity to read the transcript of his interview, he sent another email to me in which he expressed dismay at his English, "I read your transcript. Oh my god! Some of them [his comments] were really messed up

as you pick out [I had asked him to clarify a few remarks]. When I can say perfectly what I mean?” In his attempt to prove that he is not a perfectionist, he appears to show signs of perfectionism.

Interestingly, while Dolores never classified herself as a perfectionist per se, she used the word “perfect” to describe how she felt she and her classmates should conduct themselves while in the library conducting the storytelling sessions in addition to using the word “perfect” to describe her reading ability in English as compared to her less than perfect listening ability.

Diana fully admitted to being a perfectionist during our interview, but at some point in her study of the English language she came to realize that we all learn from our mistakes:

All, all the language was embarrassing [referring to trying to speak English in the U.S.], but then I realized that my classmates were like me, speak like me, sometimes good, sometimes bad, not good pronunciation, and mix past, present, why I not? Then I realized that is the way to learn. If you have mistake, you can fix and learn. It’s the way.

However, even though Diana knows this in practice, her nervousness at speaking in English is evident. She admitted to being “very nervous” at the beginning of our interview even though I had known her for three years at that point, and at the end of our interview, her clearly audible sigh was so loud that I recorded it in the transcription as a “huge sigh of relief!”

Related to this fear and anxiety is the limited contact with the English-speaking world that all of the participants mentioned. For some of the participants, they make opportunities to listen to English through the media, but do not have opportunities to speak. Gloria, IK, and Lily mentioned listening to English via the television, movies, or radio, but primarily speak their native languages at home. Diana stated that she could go for up to two weeks without speaking English when not enrolled in classes because her elderly parents whom she cares for do not speak any English and watch TV in Spanish, “Rarely I speak English, only when it’s necessary.” Dolores also has both nuclear and extended family in the area, and thus, speaks mostly Spanish. Interestingly, both Diana and Dolores plan to make the United States their permanent homes. Marystella as well has strong links to the local Korean community and spends her free time with her husband’s co-workers and their families and also attends church in Korean. The only place where the six participants are exposed to English for an extended time is on campus.

Nevertheless, they all believe in the importance of learning English and have goals that necessitate the ability to communicate well in English. Both Diana and Lily aspire to become nurses one day. Dolores hopes to eventually earn a master’s degree and also stated, “I want to be completely bilingual.” IK also intends to earn an advanced degree in Oriental medicine in the United States, while Gloria is currently enrolled in a master’s program for architecture. When Marystella’s husband was transferred to the United States, she thought, “I just imagine if I come to here, I can speak in English very

fluently.” Upon returning to Korea in the future, she hopes to either teach English to children or open an English library.

The Participants’ Perspectives on Service-learning

Before enrolling in a service-learning class, only two of the participants had any knowledge of service-learning. The class had been recommended to Marystella by another Korean student who had taken the very first service-learning class I offered in the spring of 2008, which coincidentally was the same class in which Gloria had participated. IK had also been referred by a Korean friend. However, the exact meaning of service-learning was still unclear to both of them. Before she experienced the class firsthand Marystella believed, “It would be good to practice English, so it’s very interesting, very active, so OK, I try. And I didn’t know much about it.” IK offered a similar comment:

I was interested in communicate with older people, American old people, so I didn’t any knowledge about service-learning before I came to class, but I was very interested in to communicate with American people because I need to chances to contact with them.

Both of them were initially drawn to the course that visited the retirement home, and Marystella took the course where we visited the children’s library the following semester. Dolores, who was Marystella’s classmate in the children’s library course, expanded on her answer to the question, “What did you know about service-learning

before taking a service-learning course?”

I wasn't used to it. I didn't know much about it. I didn't know that word until I registered for that class because if I would have known, probably I would have taken different classes with that type because I really like it, the system of that class.

Obviously, there is a lack of knowledge about service-learning within the ESL community.

After participating in one or both of the service-learning courses, three of the participants, Diana, Dolores, and Marystella, were able to give very precise definitions of service-learning. Diana declared, “I can learn and get experience, and at the same time I can give the best of myself to help that person.” Dolores stated, “I think service-learning is a way to learn, learn something by doing a voluntary service to the community.” And Marystella gave the following definition of what service-learning means: “Give the service and take the learn, I mean, take the education from the service.” Gloria's definition was somewhat more introspective, “I think it's a good way to share our thoughts, our feelings, and it's a very personal experience that gave you good gift for the life.” On the other hand, IK and Lily related service-learning to the very specific experiences they had in their classes. IK asserted:

Service-learning class gave me too many, a lot of benefits, the class gave me opportunity to learn American culture and American history while I have a meeting with American people. And through the classes, I could get, I could

understand the difference, the cultural difference with Korean culture, so that made me to learn a lot about American society.

Lily had some difficulty expressing herself:

Oh, I understand it in my language, but I don't know how to define it in English. Like story about something, you can use that help with other people, like when I was in your class, like reading books for the children is really exciting, and I love it. For real!

Although the definitions of service-learning varied, each participant indicated that something of value was elicited from participating.

Indeed, the participants articulated numerous benefits of participating in a service-learning program. In fact, each participant was specifically asked to comment on his or her biggest success in the service-learning program. Initially, Diana, who participated in both service-learning courses, stated in the interview:

Well, when I saw, when I start my first class I couldn't understand nothing. Then when I finish, was amazing, amazing for me because I could take conversation and understand more. Then since that, I can take a little more conversation, and little more, [correcting herself] little less, a little less nervous.

After having the opportunity to conduct a member check of the transcript of her interview, Diana added, "My biggest success in that class was that I could have conversation in English with other people because I practiced a lot everyday." For Diana, improving her listening and speaking skills was the most important factor.

Dolores found an opportunity to gain experience for a potential career:

OK, I really liked to share with the kids in the library because I was thinking on doing, or being a teacher, Pre-K teacher or kindergarten teacher, so that experience helped me a lot. And also, I really enjoyed doing the book that we did [the final project for the class was to write and illustrate an original children's book] and learning how to, how to do it, because it's not like, OK, I'm going to do this, but in that class we learned how to do it and what to put in it. I really liked the book that I did, and I discover, like, other thing I can do that I really enjoy besides my career or besides whatever I'm doing now.

In addition, she found an outlet to use her creative skills and produced a children's book of great quality that impressed her classmates, other teachers, and me.

Gloria found a way to break through the wall of silence that learning a new language and living in a new culture had imposed on her:

In the first meeting [with her senior partner at the retirement home] I know that it will be one of the most wonderful experience with the English language because I never thought that I can speak for one hour in English. But when I transcript my record and I saw the time on my machine, my record, my record machine, I said, "Oh, I can't believe I can speak with one hour. Oh, my God!" And it was like a prize for you, and it's a feeling of happy for your...[pausing to think] It's like when the teacher say "Good job" or "Good, you did very well!" It's like a gift for yourself, and you feel like a...[pausing to think] The problem, I think one of the biggest problem that the ESL people has, we lost the self-confidence and we

thought that we never speak and transcript our feelings in the other language. But ourselves, we, we put this wall in front of ourselves, but for me was like I broke this wall and I open myself for other place in the world.

She discovered that she could communicate with a complete stranger in English and felt her self-confidence increase as a result.

For Lily, service-learning gave her a way to connect with people in a way that she had not been able to do since leaving Vietnam:

The biggest success, biggest success, I, oh yeah! About the children. I talked to the children more and, like, I know how to make them laugh. And because if I'm not in the service-learning class, like in the community, the parents don't let me to go closer to the children. That's why. And not in Vietnam. When I see a little child, she's cute, something like that, I can go and pick her up and play with her, but not here.

Working with the children in the library gave Lily the opportunity for human connection.

Although Marystella participated in both the programs at the retirement home and the children's library, her biggest success was related specifically to her experience with her senior partner at the retirement home:

The big success for me is to, to, is that I can help, I can be a little help for this country, I mean, the people in [it]. I can be more confident in myself. And the book I made, that I made [the biography of her senior partner] was very special

for me and for him I think, so, yeah, it was so, it made me to be proud of myself, so, and sometimes I'm very surprised he understand what I'm talking about.

Marystella's answer provides a glimpse into the reciprocal nature of service-learning; both the giver and the receiver of the service benefit from the exchange.

IK's biggest success involved a combination of classroom activities and interviews with his senior partner. IK stated that classroom activities such as a U.S. history scavenger hunt, an Internet search for information about U.S. presidents, and warm-up activities that focused on quotations about age provided the background information necessary to understanding more about his senior partner. IK explained:

The activities made me understand the culture, American culture and history. The events, you know the search for the American society events. While I search that, I could understand the background, cultural background, historical background. That made my helpful to understand and that helped me to understanding and communicating with my partner. And when I interviewed with my partner, I could learn a lot of things, what he said, after the meeting, I tried to search at the Google what he said. In the process of that, I could get a lot of things, the background of American society and culture.

IK strategically used classroom activities and conversations he had with his partner to learn more.

The participants were also aware of the components of service-learning that set it apart from mere volunteer work: reciprocity and reflection. Diana said of her experience, "I like to help people and because at the same time, I learn. They help me, too." When I

asked Diana who had received more benefits, her senior partner or herself, her initial answer was: “I think I received more because I, her history was very interesting. I learn a lot about her life, her experience, her vocabularies, words... I think I learned more than Mary.” Diana provided a similar answer about her experience in the children’s library: “I learned a lot, a lot, too, because pass in front like a teacher for children. Then when I realized that they pay attention me was fabulous for me. Yeah. I realized that they understand me, about the story, yeah.” However, after conducting the member check of her transcribed interview, Diana changed her mind and related the following:

I think the benefits were for both because when Mary saw me she was very happy, and I felt that she wants to talk with me about her husband and her children. About the children they practiced numbers, vocabulary, seasons and at the same time I was practicing English, too.

After reflecting on the question, Diana realized that both the giver and the receiver of the service received benefits.

Dolores initially indicated that both she and the children in the library had benefited approximately the same amount; however, she quickly changed her answer: “Probably I received more than what I give because it’s not like I did everything because we had, we have a lot of people, students, there. Probably I received more, but I felt very comfortable with the experience.” Dolores realized that she was working as a member of a team comprised of three to four classmates who worked together to present story time each week.

Gloria also recognized the reciprocal nature of service-learning. She remembered that her senior partner was “like a child” on the day she presented his biography to him:

He was happy. I can't believe, it's like when you go to the park with the children, he almost he forgot that he need to use the cane, and he want to walk, he want to walk very fast, and I said, “Oh, my God!” And every person who passed for the hallway, he said, “Oh! See it! She write for me! See that I have everything. Here is my school. Here is my children.” He wants to show his book for everybody that crossed for his space and I saw him and I said, “Oh my God! I think it's the best gift for him.” Because not all the gifts are money, and for him this mean a lot because it's like his prize for his life because he can reflect about many things.

Gloria continued with this line of thought:

Yes, and he was happy. I never forgot how can, how, how was his actions, how he smile all the time. He was very happy this day, and was very good. It's good when you help, when you can do something good for other person even though you feel, when I start I was scared, and I thought that I can't speak with somebody in English. I say, “Oh, my God, it's a good prize for me, too.”

This memory is even more poignant because approximately a year after Gloria completed this project, she was notified that her senior partner had passed away. One of the senior's daughters found Gloria's name, phone number, and the biography among her father's possessions, and she phoned Gloria to tell her what happened. The daughter told Gloria that the family wanted to copy the biography for other family members and

add their own photographs. Gloria then realized that the biography she had written was not just a gift for her senior partner but “a gift for his family.” She stated, “I didn’t realize this job will be for the future.” Unfortunately, Gloria was not the only student to learn of the passing of one of our senior partners.

IK’s partner also passed away after the semester had ended, and I was informed of his death by the activity director who had organized our visits at the retirement home. I shared the news with IK via email since I did not have face-to-face contact with him at that time. When IK replied to my email, he wrote: “Above all, I’m so sad about Ken.” His additional comments indicate that he felt that he had received much more than he had given:

It was a great experience in my life. However, at that time I always felt sorry because I couldn’t understand all of what he told me. Moreover, I couldn’t include in the storybook enough. So, I was very sorry when I gave Ken the book. When I specifically asked IK during the interview who had received more, he simply stated, “I got more than I gave him.” He also said, “I got a lot of things from him. I said before I have many benefits.” These same thoughts are echoed in IK’s journal and final reflection paper. IK wrote, “Whenever I met him, he gave me plenty of photos and documents and explained about them very kindly. But I was very sorry because I couldn’t understand them by the shortage of background information and listening ability.” IK frequently seems to devalue his own contribution even though the biography he wrote for his senior partner was well-written and thoughtfully constructed. However, even though IK finds it difficult to admit to his gifts, he recognizes that listening to his

senior partner's story gave him "an opportunity to reflect on my life." During the interview, IK also mentioned feeling the presence of his family while visiting the retirement home:

Whenever I went there, I have my mother and my grandmother – she's almost 100 years old – and seven years ago my father passed away, so whenever I went there, I have time to think about my father and mother and grandmother, so I didn't feel strange in the community.

This experience made an emotional impact on IK that he feels was greater than the time and biography he gave to his senior partner.

Lily's experience in the children's library was quite different. When asked what she gave to the children and their parents, she replied, "Like, I can make them laugh. Make them feel like, happy laughing. I can make their children have a good time with us, and with the children learn some more things." She admitted receiving the same thing in return – laughter and learning from new experiences.

Marystella also shared what she gave and received. When asked about what she gave to her senior partner, she replied merely, "I was a listener." And about the children's library, "I think I provide the fun to children." However, when asked about what she received her answers were much more complex. She said about her senior partner:

While I was listening his story, it remind me to think about my life and my family's life. And think about the death and I was in the middle of my life, and so, it was very useful, it was very important time to think about, about life and

his life was very, very, very brave and very... He went through a lot of difficulties. He overcame everything, and so I saw, I saw, I can do that.

This idea is also apparent in Marystella's writing. She wrote in her final reflection paper about her senior partner:

It was very surprising for me to know that Bob could find a new way he liked and be an expert at the middle age. I am now almost at the middle age and I thought I am too old to try something new. Looking at myself, I just settle for the present and blame my circumstances and age for no progress. Bob told me where there is a will, there is a way. This is an old saying, but it is true. After I met Bob, I began to think about a life and looked back my life. I realized I should live well, so if one day my child or grandchild ask how my life was, I would like to answer my life was full of beautiful memories and there were no regrets in my life, just like Bob told me.

Marystella also learned a valuable lesson from working in the children's library as well.

She stated:

In the library I received a lot of, a lot of information about storytelling, so that was very nice. And I learned about something very important for my life, I mean, children, children don't recognize my, my pronunciation and my poor speaking. I mean, yeah, they just enjoy a lot, so I was very happy, yeah.

Even though the experiences at the retirement home and the library were very different, Marystella still took something of value away from both of them.

Connection to Storytelling

Although not a component of service-learning by any means, I realized only incidentally that storytelling played a significant role in both of the service-learning projects in which my students participated. This idea of storytelling seemed to resonate with IK, in particular. He used the words “story” and “storytelling” numerous times in his writing. In the summary of his senior partner’s biography, IK wrote, “While I was listening to the stories of his life, I was deeply impressed by him...His story is very interesting and I was excited whenever I heard it.” In an email that IK wrote to me after the semester was over, he compared his senior partner’s life to a riveting movie: “Whenever I heard of his story, I didn’t feel passing time. His storytelling was same as watching movie.” And again in his final reflection paper, IK illustrated the importance of story:

One day, he [IK’s senior partner] said to me that he enjoyed talking with me. I was very pleased at his saying and it encouraged me to make a good storybook. While I was listening to his story, I was surprised at his excellent memory and very impressed by his great life as an aircraft technician. His life was never ordinary. The story of his life gave me an opportunity to reflect on my life. Finally, I started to make a storybook of Ken. I thought over, wrote and edited repeatedly for more than twenty days. But I was not able to be satisfied with it. I was sorry to give it to Ken. However at the last day, Ken received it gratefully and looked it over and over. I deeply appreciated his kindness once more. I hope

he always stay his health. Even though the relationship was not long, it was a highly precious experience to me.

Simply by one person's telling of a story and a second person's documenting that story, "a highly precious experience" was created.

Diana, too, shared that she learned from "...the story of Mary, about her parents, her husband, her children, her job." In return, Diana felt that her senior partner was also interested in Diana's life story: "I say about my family, my children, my husband, and she liked that I speak about myself, my family, my country, yes. She was very interesting about my story, too." Diana compared the experience of working with her senior partner to reading stories in the children's library:

I learned a lot with her. With the children, too, because I need to read and prepare my class, practice with my classmates, speaking in front the public, ahhh! That was terrible for me in the time because I am not sure in my own language, in Spanish, ohhh! Was a problem, but that helped me a lot. Then, since that time I can take conversation with others people.

Diana discovered that being a storyteller in the library gave her a measure of confidence:

I learned a lot, a lot, too, because pass in front like a teacher for children. Then when I realized that they pay attention me was fabulous for me. Yeah. I realized that they understand me, about the story, yeah.

Whether sharing life stories with a conversation partner or reading storybooks to children in the library, Diana's self-esteem received a boost which gave her more confidence to communicate with others.

Gloria tried to explain how the sharing of a life story benefits both the speaker and the listener in describing the relationship she had with her senior partner:

But I think the both parts have the necessity. One part need to...listen the native, and the natives need one person who can listen and share stories. I think it's a good share for both parts. And this is a good example. Many of the members of his family don't know the story about him. Why? Because they are not here, or they don't have time to stay and many times with the family it's very hard to talk about [our histories].

Gloria saw the big picture. The service-learning project at the retirement home served many purposes. The language learner has exposure to the target language while the senior partner gets to tell his or her story which otherwise might remain untold in our hectic society.

Benefits of Service-learning

Although each of the participants expressed his or her unique views on their experiences with service-learning, commonalities emerged about certain benefits. One of the advantages expressed by all of the participants was that their level of confidence increased when speaking in English. During my interview with Diana, I shared with her my observations of her progress. At the end of her first service-learning class in which we had visited the retirement home, I had written the following message about Diana in my journal, and I read it out loud to her to get her reaction:

Diana has already signed up for the next service-learning class in the fall. During the final debriefing, I commented to Diana that her confidence had increased. I

could literally see it in her eyes. They were bright and shiny, and she was actively participating in the discussion. She wasn't trying to avoid eye contact, and when I complimented her, other students agreed.

Diana did indeed remember that moment and shared the following comment:

I remember that time when was my turn to talk, I felt more confidence in me because I practiced every day English like listening, speaking and writing. I could finally speak some words without problems, and also I felt proud of myself. I realized that I could speak like my classmates.

I then shared another excerpt from my journal with Diana in which I described the first time that Diana read a story to the children in the library:

Today, however, I think my favorite memory is of Diana, who was in my service-learning class last semester. Diana was the student I saw the most dramatic change in last semester. She did an excellent job reading her book.

There was expression in her voice. She added to the original story by asking the kids to count with her. It was awesome to see her in front of an audience. She was so, so shy last semester and now she is performing in front of an audience.

To me, it appeared that Diana was humbled by what I had written about her. She simply replied, "That is true. Thank you." But I had one more comment to share with her from my journal.

The second time Diana participated in story time at the library, she had missed several previous classes because her mother was seriously ill. Nevertheless, she showed up on the designated day and fulfilled her duties at story time. Her classmates had given

her the role of announcer since she did not have time to prepare a story or activity. I wrote, “Diana was awesome today. She was the announcer because she’s missed class because her mom was in the hospital. She was so, so nervous, but she was seriously almost flawless: her confidence, her accent. I’m so proud of her.” Diana’s modesty was apparent in her answer, “Well, that day I felt nervous. I don’t remember if I did a good job or not.” I assured her that she had, and indeed, Diana herself had commented on her growing confidence in her journal. When describing her first semester of participating in a service-learning course, Diana wrote in week 10 of the semester, “My experience was much better because I can have more communication with my partner and I have more confidence.” Her last journal entry of that semester ends with, “With this class is like if you are advancing other stair.” Language learning could indeed be compared to climbing a staircase, and fortunately, Diana felt as if she were ascending it to a new proficiency level.

Dolores also commented about her level of confidence. In one of her final journal entries for the semester, she wrote, “My feelings towards story time have changed. Before, I was very nervous about that because I have not done that before. However, now I am more confident and that is what I was looking for.” During the interview she noted that participating in the service-learning class:

...helped me, like, to be less timid or less introvert with other people out of the classroom because when I am in the classroom in an academic environment, I feel very comfortable when hearing or listening to my professors, but when I am out of the classroom, I don’t feel that comfortable and with this class I, like, I

started to feel more comfortable because it's like, you are in a class, but you are out of the classroom. You are, like, monitored or something. If you make a mistake or if you don't know something, like how to behave or something in a new place or a new country because the customs or the manners, I don't know, they're not the same, so probably if I don't know how to behave in some place, I have the teacher to ask how I have to do in this circumstance or in this situation.

This excerpt is reminiscent of Gloria's "license to make mistakes."

Gloria, too, felt a boost to her self-esteem. In her interview, she commented, "I increase my self-confidence a lot, so I want to share my experience with other person." Therefore, she felt compelled to share her story with another professor and some classmates. In one of her journal entries near the end of the semester, she wrote, "I feel more confident with my English because many people have been telling me I have improved my English." Evidently it was apparent to others that Gloria was making progress. More importantly, it was evident to Gloria herself. This excerpt is from her final reflection paper:

I really enjoyed this project. At first it was very difficult for me, but with time, I learned a lot and my self-confidence increased. I made connections with my knowledge in the English classes with the real world. Additionally, this project gave me a powerful impulse to speak every where. I put all my effort and love in my job. Finally, I am thankful with Sharon and Ronnie who were like my bird parents; they gave me wings to fly outside of [the college].

Gloria's beautiful imagery touched me. It also reminded me of a poem Gloria had written the previous year, first in her native Spanish before translating it into English.

Birds in Flight

When birds surge into the sky
 they lift their hopes beneath their wings,
 when immigrants take to the road
 their aspirations gain a foothold,
 birds abandon their nests,
 refugees sever their roots,
 clutches of dirt uprooted,
 yet in their hearts a homeland,
 wings to steady bodies in flight,
 persevering and spirited souls,
 comforting wings as hands labor
 beneath the relentless, searing sun
 broken wings as deferred dreams wither
 amid a storm of tears,
 new dreams inspire new vision.
 Birds flee the threatening skies,
 and in their shadows
 asylum seekers outrun
 persecution and violence.

We are sailors adrift
 Where is our promised shore?

Perhaps it is impossible for a non-immigrant to understand the loss that immigrants feel living in a new country. Thus, gaining self-confidence in an adopted land might be an unfathomable concept.

IK also saw an improvement. After he reviewed the transcript of his interview, he added the following comment:

Surely I felt more confident with talking with native speaker after service learning class. Although I heard my partner's telling his story more than talking,

it was really precious opportunities for me. I would describe the level of my confidence from 20% to 60% after the class.

Although IK felt like he listened more than he talked, he nevertheless felt better about his abilities to communicate in English.

Lily also gained confidence in front of an audience. She had the unique experience of being the only Vietnamese speaker in the class. Therefore, during our multicultural introduction to story time where the ESL students greeted the audience in their native languages, she alone was responsible for saying “welcome” in Vietnamese to the children and their parents whereas the Spanish or Korean-speaking students took turns performing this task. Perhaps the frequent exposure to being in front of an audience was helpful. Lily shared the following:

The first story time, I feel really shy, but when I stand in front of the people and say “Xin Chao” [“welcome” in Vietnamese] I feel like, oh my God, it’s embarrassing me. But after that, I feel it’s funny to do it, and like I say, so I feel more confident in front of the children and the parents.

Lily also wrote about overcoming her anxiety in her final reflection paper:

These story times gave me a lot of experiences, such as reading skill, standing in front of strange people (no more nervous), dancing skill and singing skill. I enjoyed it. It made me laugh so much and had really great time.

Although I included the next quotation in a previous section, it is important to refer back to it because it illustrates the change in Lily’s perspective after one semester. While

watching the librarian's demonstration of story time at the beginning of the semester, Lily had considered dropping the course out of fear. She wrote:

I was too scared when we just came to the children's library and watched the example for our performance. I wanted to change classes. I thought about it a lot. I wanted to change to a regular class, which is just like another writing essays, doing tests.

The only reason she did not drop the class is that the feeling of dread of waiting in line in the advisors' office was greater than her fear of the service-learning class.

Marystella, who participated in both service-learning classes, wrote several times of her growing confidence. In the ninth week of the class which visited the retirement home, Marystella expressed the following in her journal:

I believe my English is improving little by little. I think I became more confident of talking to American neighbors and my next-door neighbor, Marie, told me my English has improved. I also found myself speaking in English more fluently and easily in the Thursday afternoon after having prolonged discussions with Bob. Sometimes, I can speak in English without the process of thinking grammar and translating in Korean.

Two weeks later she mentioned confidence again in her journal:

I would like to recommend this class to my friends and classmates. First of all, this class is not only good for practicing English but also very worthwhile. Writing a biography for elderly must be a valuable experience. Second, students who take this class have the opportunity to be an author and have their own book

published. I think people who have a book by their name can gain self-confidence. It is one of the things people should do before they die.

The following semester, Marystella not only noticed a change in herself but in her classmates as well. She described her memories in her final reflection paper:

I am so pleased and proud that I have finished this class successfully. Looking back the first week of the class, everything was too obscure and scary to think I could do it, so I just wanted to run away. To make matters worse, my team was picked as the first team to perform the storytelling. I still remember how nervous I was during my first story time and how embarrassed I was when I danced in front of people. Considering my personality, performing in front of many people was the biggest challenge. Moreover, as [the librarian] told us, I should exaggerate my voice, motion, and expression to get the children's attention and make children's involvements in storytelling. I did my best to overcome my weakness, and my team did a good job for the first presenter. As time passes by, each team has performed better every time and seemed more relaxed and happy including me.

Indeed, the entire class had improved, each week learning from the strengths and weaknesses of the previous team. In the middle of that semester I wrote in my journal, "They have really been working hard on their lessons, and I'm so impressed. [The children's librarian] has also enjoyed their presentations. [She] even sent an email to the college president and vice-president today complimenting my students." At the end of the semester, I took the opportunity to sit down with the children's librarian and get her

impressions. She was pleased with the students' performances and wanted to continue the program in the future. She, too, had noticed a change in the students' confidence level and stated that the librarians had benefited from watching the ESL students' storytelling performances and learned about new songs, videos, and activities to use with the children.

In addition to building confidence, the service-learning projects also increased the participants' English skills in several ways. For example, not only had Diana's ability to converse dramatically improved, but her writing skills had as well. During the interview, I had her examine the two reflections papers she had written, one at the end of the semester in which we had visited the retirement home and the other from the following semester when we volunteered in the children's library. The first reflection paper had large margins; a full three inches were left blank on the bottom of the first page and over two inches were left blank at the top of the second page. In addition, the font appears to be at least 14 points. The two pages could have easily been combined onto one page. However, the reflection paper from the second semester has standard one-inch margins throughout, and is written in a standard 12-point font. It is a full one and a half page essay. During my interview with Diana, I showed her the two papers and asked her to compare them. She gasped audibly and asked, "I did that?" After taking a minute to gain her composure, she commented further, "Oh, yes. Yeah, I remember. Yeah, when I start, I start very, very poor. My meaning blank, didn't know how to say, but finally is amazing for me because I learn during the semester. I learn a lot." Indeed, Diana had commented on her improved skills in both papers. In the first paper she wrote,

“Now I can read and write much better than when I started the semester.” In the second paper she commented more about her speaking skills:

Since I started this semester I had been learning a lot because I can have conversations with people that speak English. For example, today I needed to take my son to the doctor because he is sick and the doctor only speaks English. In the doctor’s clinic there is a person that speaks Spanish but that person was very busy then the doctor started to ask me questions in English, and then I can responded in English, too. I could speak English, and the doctor could understand me without problems. Then I realized that studying English is worth it for my family and myself, too.

In the same paper, Diana also described talking to the mothers during story time and talking to another mother off-campus when both she and Diana wait for their children to finish their karate lessons. Diana concluded her paper with, “I’m excited because in this semester I can speak much better than the last semester.” Encouraged by her newfound English skills, Diana even volunteered for one of the leadership positions on the newly founded Toastmasters club on campus in the fall of 2010.

Both Dolores and Gloria felt that the nature of the course encouraged students to participate. Dolores asserted:

The main advantage is that you have the opportunity to go out of the classroom and go with English speakers and you have to practice although if you don’t speak English at all, you have to say something. You have to say “hello,” you have to say something and probably in a classroom, if you’re shy or if you’re

timid or, you never speak if the teacher doesn't call your name or doesn't say, "Give me an answer," you never speak in a regular class. Probably you are in a grammar class, you don't need to speak. But in a service-learning you need to speak and also the teacher organizes the class to have another skills, like grammar or reading or something, but you have to speak and you have to practice what you know.

Gloria restated this idea more succinctly, "...actually it force me to think in English and speak." Working in the community simply does not allow language students to hide in the back row of the classroom and avoid eye contact as some students do.

IK agreed that the class had an influence, not only on his English, but his knowledge of American culture as well. He stated, "The class influenced me many things, many good things, to learn English and to understand American society." He further asserted:

To develop my English I need more opportunity to communicate with American people and actually, learning English is not just get language. I need, I have to understand American culture, history, something like that, so the service-learning class gave me all of them.

He could see the connection between language, culture, and history, and based on his comments, he seems to have done quite a bit of research on themes related to topics his senior partner talked about.

After meeting her senior partner at the retirement home for the first time, Marystella immediately recognized how service-learning could influence her learning of English. During the interview, she responded to the question with:

You know, before, before I went to retirement home I was, I am very concerned about my pronunciation, my speaking, what to say, but after I met Bob and on the way home, I thought, “Oh, I could do it!” and I could speak in English, so yeah, very big influence.

The students expressed great enthusiasm when they realized that their English could be understood and they could participate in society.

Another positive aspect of participating in a service-learning course was motivation. Even though only two of the participants mentioned it, their comments were so compelling that I felt they must be included. In her final reflection paper, Diana referred to her senior partner as “a motivation in my life.” In the prologue of the biography Diana wrote for her senior partner, Diana expounded on this topic:

Mary Smith is a living part of history. She has experimented [experienced] women’s liberation, the right for women to vote, and she has participated in women’s fight for equality. Mary Smith has lived through hard times in her life such as the war and the Great Depression but she has also seen the economic boom in the United States. She has realized all the dreams that many women have, like studying in a college, getting a master’s degree, working as a teacher, being a wife and mother and now she is a great-grandmother. She is an example to follow and a source of motivation for all women. Mary Smith is a valuable

woman that made her dreams come true because of her dedication and perseverance.

Can you imagine a better way for an immigrant to learn about U.S. history? Diana herself recognized that she received valuable lessons. The last page of her biography reads:

Mary mentioned that during the war, immigration stopped. Today we live in a multicultural society. My family moved to the United States from Mexico in 2004, and by studying English here, I had the opportunity to meet Mary and learn more about this country. Mary has been a great teacher, and I have enjoyed learning about history and culture from her.

By contrasting immigration patterns throughout the history of the United States, Diana connected her own story to Mary's in a meaningful way.

IK's relationship with his senior partner also motivated him to learn more about American history and culture. IK explained that he would research topics online when he needed more information to fill in the gaps of what he did not understand from his senior partner's stories:

He, my partner, gave me kind of motive to search the topic, the background information. Usually I didn't search like that. Other ESL class I just read the textbook, but not more after that. But when I heard the story, what he said about life, the story have a lot of things about American society and culture, but I couldn't understand almost that so I tried to find. I tried to search for the information.

IK estimated that he would spend about two hours online researching various topics after one visit to the retirement home to speak to his partner. He felt an earnest desire to truly comprehend his partner's life: "At that time I have to understand his life, what he said, so I need to search, I need to find, I need to understand, all of them what he said. And I wanted to understand what his life was." Like Diana, IK had a unique opportunity to learn about topics such as World War II from someone who had experienced it firsthand.

Another significant factor that made an impact on some of the participants was the authenticity that service-learning brings to the learning situation. Diana used the word "real" numerous times in her interview. When asked if service-learning had influenced her English she responded:

Yeah, because it's like the real life. Real job. It's, I like that because all is very real. It's not the same when you stay in a class with the same people, a teacher, no problem. With real people, it's other responsibility.

Later in the conversation she again referred to the authenticity of service-learning:

Well, before I couldn't take participation because I was like scary. I am not sure about if I can, if I could do or not, understand or not, but finally I learn, was, that class was very, very good. Is the best, best class that semester because is, I can, I could practice in the real life. And get, got experience, yeah.

The word "responsibility" also appeared more than once in Diana's comments:

Well, that's because it's, service-learning is a good way to learn and pay more interest to learn English because it's like a real life. It's more interesting. It's like a job. There is more, there are more responsibility to do a good job, best, best.

In the following quotation from Diana's interview, she mentions that working with real people in both the retirement home and the children's library were good experiences for her:

Well, with that class I get, I got a lot of experience with, because I worked with real people, real children, with a person that had a lot of experience like [the librarian], and like [my senior partner], yeah. I got a lot of experience because was, were real people, like a job.

The volunteer experience became very real for Diana, and according to her words, she treated it as a responsibility and a job.

Like Diana, Gloria also noted the importance of the "real life" experience. When asked to discuss the biggest advantage of service-learning she said:

It's a real life. It's because class is, in class we do pretend that have different situations, but it's a class. But over there, it's no pretend. It's, even though you say "hello," you are doing with the other person. "How are you? OK." You are really know how is the other person or what you need to say before "How are you?" "OK, I am fine." It's not only to read on the test or see, doing at the class, the class is obviously a good experience but never compared with the real life because you need to put, you need to practice what you learn in the class. You need to practice on life without any book, only with your head.

Gloria also made a similar comparison with her current architecture classes. You have to take classes and practice, but when she had the opportunity to compete for a real project

to design an authentic building, the stakes changed and she felt more challenged and invigorated.

Marystella also shared similar feelings when asked to compare a typical ESL class to a service-learning class:

Very different. I mean, typical ESL class is just sitting down, listening, and just, just kind of boring, and, and most academic class I think, but the service-learning is a real life, I mean, I can meet the people and I can prepare for helping other people, and I can present, I can, I can talk a lot, so more, more realistic and more practical.

The authenticity of the service-learning projects made learning more interesting.

Dolores also noted the authenticity in her journal. While she was perhaps not as explicit as Diana, Gloria, and Marystella, she understood the serious nature of the commitment to the community: “We need to remember that this is a service and that we committed to do it.” Near the end of the semester she wrote in her journal, “In addition, I realized how teamwork is very important and above all in a ‘real’ situation or when doing a community service.” Dolores took her job in the library very seriously and fully expected her classmates to do the same. In fact, Dolores realized the importance of the experience because she had been considering becoming a teacher: “I really liked to share with the kids in the library because I was thinking on doing, or being a teacher, Pre-K teacher or kindergarten teacher, so that experience helped me a lot.” There was a very direct link between the volunteer service and a possible career.

This was true of several of the participants in this study as well as other students who enrolled in the class. Antonietta, who participated in the children's library, is now working as a teacher. Martha had operated a day care center in her native country before coming to the U.S. Van was looking for a job at a retirement home and actually volunteered at the retirement home we visited for approximately six months after the semester ended. Gloria used her knowledge of retirement homes to create a project in her architecture class of a new model of a retirement community. Diana wants to become a nurse one day. These students were able to capitalize on the service-learning experience because it either utilized a skill they had brought with them from their home countries or it helped them gain experience for a future career.

In comparing their service-learning courses to a typical ESL course, the participants used words such as dynamic and active to describe their experiences in the service-learning class. They recognized that they could not sit passively and wait for the teacher to call on them in order to speak. Diana stated:

Well, for me are different because in Oral Communication is memorize words, pronunciation, and listen the teacher. Sometime I speak, sometimes not, not some days, yes, some days not. My classmates speak Spanish in that class. And in Oral Communication [corrects herself] in service-learning all the time I use English. My teacher, instruction in English, my classmates only speak English, my partner, with my partner only speak English, listen, and I felt that I needed to pay a LOT of attention my partner to understand, understood. Yeah, that class helped me a lot.

Based on my previous experiences with Diana, she had been the shy student who quietly listened as other classmates spoke and did not offer her own opinions unless specifically asked to do so. In working in the community, she could no longer allow herself to remain passive.

Dolores made a similar statement:

I think a service-learning class is more dynamic than a regular ESL class because the usual class is always in the classroom. You don't have that contact with all people. I think that's very, the main difference, and the main thing, you can, why you can learn more English. Well, I like more in a service-learning class because it's more dynamic. You go out to different places, and you have, you have to communicate with other people, with English speakers. In the classroom, it's like you're receiving information, but also teachers have the conversation times and all that it's not the same, the same when you are out of the classroom.

Like Diana, Dolores identified how the typical ESL class can allow a student to passively receive information instead of actively participating.

This idea is again reflected in Gloria's commentary:

Very different. Very different because in class you are a student and probably you can be active or no, and it doesn't affect the class even though it doesn't affect you, but in the service-learning you need to be very active. You need to be organized with your information. You need to force yourself to try that the other person like you, and you try to, you need to have, in my experience, I need to program every meeting on advance because if I don't have the whole questions

for this day, I lose the time. I don't have time to make a questions, but when I make the questions before, I am prepared to ask him, my partner, what he thinks about what, and the other good thing was every time when I was there, I record every meeting.

Gloria's comment also indicates that it is not as easy for service-learning students to ignore their homework as they might in typical classes. The teacher may not notice that one out of 20 students has not done her homework, but when required to work with the expectant public, the need for preparation is imperative.

While not as wordy as the female participants, IK also understood that there was a difference between the typical ESL class and the service-learning experience: "I need to be more positive, more active in class, and I need to open my mind to understand." He stated that he had great difficulty understanding his senior partner in the beginning of the semester and had to really focus in order to understand the gist of the conversations with him.

Lily enjoyed the social aspect of working in the community. She said the following about her experience, "The first thing is the ESL typical class I just met a teacher and other student like day to day to day. I don't meet new people." She continued, adding that the service-learning project also allowed her to learn a new skill:

Oh, like I say, like, it make me laugh, too, and I learn more, like, um, because if I just take the typical ESL classes, I don't know, I won't have, like so much experience like reading a book to children. I haven't ever read a book for the children before. Um, and um, doing the craft with them. I love it.

Marystella also discussed her relationships with others:

When I take the ESL, the typical ESL class, I always meet the friend like me, so we just speak, we just speak, I think my speaking skills hasn't improved that much, but, but when I have to speak, when I, when I take the service-learning class I have to think about what I have to say. Is this wrong or is this correct, and I have to think, so, it's more, more, betefical, how to say? [beneficial]

The participatory nature of working in the community was noted by all of the participants. All six of them recognized that they could not stay silent and hope to learn passively; they were required to take an active role in communicating with others.

For some of the participants, this new experience of communicating with community members forced them to use different strategies, either for learning the language or to boost their confidence. Several of the participants discussed recording the conversations they had with their senior partners. After meeting her senior partner for the first time, Diana recalled, "I remember when I had my first interview with my partner. I couldn't understand nothing. That was a big problem for me, and I thought maybe it's not a good idea take this class." Therefore, Diana decided to record her interviews; however, she discovered that the background noise in the retirement home did not allow her to make clear recordings. Back at square one, she then decided to write out all of her interview questions and show the written question to her senior partner when there was confusion. Diana said, "I was very lucky because my partner was a teacher, elementary school, and sometimes she fix some words. Yeah! And she say when she don't understand me, repeat the correct pronunciation. I learn a lot with her."

Through trial and error, Diana was able to find a way to communicate with her senior partner.

Gloria also tried recording the interviews with her senior partner but had difficulty understanding the recordings due to background noise. She remedied the problem by asking her senior partner to move to a quieter location in the retirement home. Not only did Gloria find it helpful to replay her conversations in order to get material for the biography she was producing, she also learned about her own speaking skills by listening to the recordings: “When you record, it’s very good exercise too. I never do before, but it’s very good because after you listen your voice, you say, ‘Oh! Why I did this?’ I correct me.” She was able to learn from her own mistakes.

Another strategy that Gloria used was to take advantage of the close proximity she had to a fluent English speaker. During her conversations with her senior partner, she would watch his mouth and pay attention to the physical movements involved in pronouncing words:

You need to use your tongue to make the right sounds, but for the learner speakers, learning English in the first time, I don’t feel comfortable, I feel like, dumb, like, I don’t feel good with this, but when I saw his mouth and I saw the sounds of the words, you can see and you can learn what you see and you have the person in front of you.

Gloria actively looked for ways to improve her English skills.

Unfortunately, IK did not record the conversations he had with his senior partner which is something that he wishes he would have done: “Actually I should have

recorded what my partner said. That was my regret. If I recorded, it may be very helpful for me.” When I asked him later if that was his biggest regret, he replied, “Yeah, if I have recorded the story right now sometimes I turn on the recorder. I want to hear his story these days.” Although IK laments this missed opportunity, he did use another strategy to promote understanding. As previously mentioned, one strategy that IK used was to research topics that his senior partner mentioned in order to gain background knowledge so that he could better understand future conversations.

Another strategy that was mentioned by two of the participants was self-talk. Lily and Marystella both used this method to bolster their confidence. Lily remembered:

Just like when I decided OK just stay at that class and I say to myself, OK, it’s OK, you don’t have to be scared because everyone in the class just the same as me. Maybe they feel like, OK, like it’s first time for them just like me, and they feel scary something, but they didn’t drop it and why? Why me?

Lily allayed her fears by realizing that the other students were probably just as nervous as she was.

Marystella told herself that she would get through this new situation by reminding herself, “I just said again and again, ‘Time flies.’ I mean, it will go very fast, I mean the time, so I can deal with it.” She also mentioned something about how she “spelled” for herself. When I asked her to explain what she meant, she replied, “I casted a spell on myself I could do it.” So, either by self-talk or magic, Marystella found a way to encourage herself to continue.

The relationships that the participants forged were another important aspect of participating in a service-learning course. Working with both the elderly and children, the ESL students had the opportunity to communicate with two diverse groups. The director of the children's library where the participants volunteered commented on the forgiving nature of children. Having worked as a librarian for 11 years, she asserted that children do not care if you have an accent or if you mispronounce a word; they simply want to enjoy a good story. Not only were relationships formed with people in the community, the teacher-student relationship in a service-learning course is also different.

Diana, who participated at the retirement home and the children's library, felt the impact of working with both groups. She described what it is like to work with seniors: "I can learn because, well, depend the old, elderly people, they, they have a lot of patience. They repeat if I don't understand, they can repeat again without problems. They are very patient." I had also commented in my journal about Diana's demeanor during the semester as she worked with her senior partner, "Diana was so excited because her partner has asked her questions. She felt like it was more of a conversation than an interview." Diana's connection with her senior partner made such an impact that Diana wanted to introduce her to her daughter. Unfortunately, when Diana arrived at the retirement home with her daughter a few months after the semester ended, she found that her senior partner had relocated to another facility.

Diana also discovered the joys of reading to children. She wrote in her final

reflection paper:

...before I had my presentation I thought that it was going to be difficult to get the attention of the children but after I finished my presentation, I realized that the children were very interested about the story. After this, I wanted to continue reading more books because I liked to read to the children.

Diana's remarks illustrate her ability to connect with her senior partner, the children in the library, and also me, her teacher. In both of her final reflection papers, Diana thanked me personally for helping her. She also commented in the interview that, in general, teachers need to: "Be patient, like you." Diana indicated that because of her status as a non-traditional, older student, she appreciates patience and a relaxed learning environment.

Dolores also seemed to appreciate the connections she made with others. When asked how she felt about working with the children, their parents, and the librarians, she responded:

I felt very good. I think it was a new experience for me. Probably if I would have more time, I would do it again, like, volunteering in the library or in my kids' school or something. But sometimes it's a time thing.

Dolores would be willing to continue serving the community, but with a family and her own studies, finding free time is difficult. Also, Dolores commented on her relationship with me as the instructor. At the end of her final reflection paper, she wrote:

Sharon: I just want to say thank you again. You are a wonderful teacher. You have lots of patience with all of us. You have the experience and you are very

respectful. You are so kind, but at the same time, you are very objective and professional. Thanks!

Having a good relationship with the instructor helps the student know that she is supported.

Perhaps of all the participants in this study, the bond that Gloria formed with her senior partner was the strongest. Because her senior partner and her husband shared the same profession, Gloria had an immediate connection with her elderly partner. Gloria stated, “I was very happy to have this connection because I can share with him at the retirement home, and also I can share in my home because I can speak with my husband.” Gloria not only shared this experience with her husband but with her mother as well. When Gloria’s mother was visiting from Colombia, Gloria proudly showed her the biography that she had written for her senior partner. Her mother was so impressed that she wanted to meet Gloria’s partner. Therefore, Gloria took her mother to the retirement home for a visit with her senior partner. This visit was one of several that Gloria made to the retirement home after the semester had ended when there was no obligation to continue visiting. However, this relationship was apparently important to her senior partner as well. When Gloria spoke to his daughter after his passing, the daughter explained to Gloria that her father had explicitly told her that she was not to arrange any medical appointments or any other commitments on Thursday afternoons, which is when Gloria visited him. He wanted to make sure that he would always be available for Gloria’s visits.

IK also made a connection with his senior partner because of a related career; both were veterans. IK stated:

I had a similar kind of career with my partner. I served at Korean Air Force like him. He was an engineer at American Air Force. So I was very interested in his story. After the meeting, I searched military terms, traced his workplaces, and figures out a lot of information about his career. Furthermore, the stories about his ancestors – uncle, aunt, grandmother and great grandmother – were really excited like movie story. And my partner gave me plenty of data and pictures related to his work, career, and ancestors. That was awesome!

Not only did they have a career in common, but IK also saw similarities in his senior partner and his deceased father: “My partner reminded me of my father. At that time, I got similar feelings from him.” Having connections such as these made the relationship special.

Lily, who enjoyed the laughter involved in working with the children in the library, felt connected to her classmates and me. She wrote about her classmates: “The interesting thing is our classmates are women. We have no men. Maybe that makes our classmates closer to each other.” She also commented that she felt very comfortable with me as the instructor:

One thing that I feel, like, my teacher, Sharon, I don’t know, maybe I said it before, but you feel, you make me feel, like, really comfortable when I was in the class, and you talk to us like real friendly. And that’s make me feel OK, she,

between me and her, we don't have a big distance like teacher and the student.

We're like friend to friend.

A relaxed environment and support seem to be appreciated by students of all ages.

Finally, Marystella found a talking point to begin her relationship with her senior partner because he had been in Korea during the war. Unfortunately, he was shot shortly after his arrival and was medevaced out of the country, but he still had a few memories of arriving in the port city of Pusan, South Korea. Marystella stated, "That's the starting of the connection." Marystella also saw a resemblance to her own father. After being paired with him for the project, she wrote in her journal, "I was so pleased to have this man because he looked so kind and familiar. His smile reminded me of my father in Korea and he was only 4yrs older than my father." In working with her senior partner throughout the semester, Marystella recognized that everyone has something to contribute to the community. She commented in her journal near the end of the semester:

I now know there are people who I can help in my community. I do not need to speak in perfect English and to be daunted by my limited English. If I have ears to listen to their saying and a warm heart to console their sorrow, I can be a little help.

Perhaps Marystella's kind face and sweet smile had the same effect on her senior partner as his did on her the very first time they met.

Indeed, the activity director at the retirement home mailed a thank you note to me

at the end of the semester in May, 2009. She wrote:

It was great making new friends with each of you, I only wish our time was longer. The residents loved your visit and time, mostly your interest in their life. We are looking forward to the next class, I even had someone come to me and say, "I want to do that." So they are first on the list! Good luck to you all!

Even a colleague of mine felt compelled to send me an email to express her thoughts after Gloria shared her final project with her:

From the very first pages, you can tell that this was no ordinary assignment. No doubt this project touched so many lives in such incredible ways. I keep thinking about how these elderly, often forgotten members of our society must have felt to be really listened to throughout this project. Probably for the first time in a very long time, they felt important. And, then to add the communication element that the class served for our ESOL students – in a non-threatening, real-world environment – your idea was truly ingenious. Sharon, I have been linked to some very special – very lonely – people in nursing homes throughout the years. I can't imagine anything those people would have appreciated more than this opportunity to tell their life stories to someone who would really listen.

These unsolicited messages from observers reinforce the positive impact that service-learning can have and the opportunities for relationship building that exist.

In discussing the benefits of participating in a service-learning class, it is worth noting that some of the participants readily stated that the benefits outnumbered any disadvantages. When asked to discuss the disadvantages, Diana stated, "There are more

advantages, benefits.” Dolores asserted that while some people may not have been prepared to actively participate in the community, she was comfortable with the experience:

Well, for me, I don't think there is any disadvantage. But probably for another person that is not willing, like, to communicate or is used to a regular class, probably that will be a disadvantage, like go out and have to speak or doing a dynamic class like that or for instance, if the person doesn't know what is the class about, like, OK, you have to read in the library for kids, and the person doesn't like at all that, that would be a disadvantage for that person. But if you know in advance what the class is about and you like it and you are willing to participate, I think there isn't any disadvantage.

Like Dolores, Gloria also compared herself to her classmates: “Disadvantage? Mmm...I think not for my experience but experience for my classmates, I was lucky with my partner, but not all the people has the same way.” Finally, IK and Lily stated that there were no real disadvantages aside from feelings of insecurity due to the language barrier.

Challenges Associated with Service-learning

Although the number of advantages seems to outweigh the disadvantages, service-learning is not perfect and problems did exist. Each participant was asked to comment on his or her biggest challenge and how he or she overcame it. Three of the participants named communication difficulties as their biggest problem. Diana stated that her biggest predicament was not being able to understand her senior partner. However, as mentioned previously, Diana sought to correct this problem on her own,

first by recording her interviews and then by sharing her written questions with her partner when she didn't understand Diana. IK shared a similar concern about communicating with his senior partner:

In the first or second meeting with my partner, actually, I couldn't understand what he said. I just understand about almost 30 or 40 percent what he said. That was the biggest problem at the beginning of the class, but time passed over and my listening was getting better. Yeah, and I could handle that.

Marystella, who first enrolled in the course that visited the children's library, said, "I don't have confidence for me, so I was very timid and I was shaking, so I couldn't, I couldn't show my, I couldn't show everything I prepared for the class, so that's the biggest problem." As mentioned previously, Marystella used self-talk to calm her fears and get through a stressful situation. About the second course when she visited the retirement home, Marystella stated, "Of course, the biggest problem is the listening and speaking. Sometimes I misunderstand [corrects herself] I misunderstood what he was talking about, so I reacted another way, in another way, so he stopped talking." This did not appear to be too great of a problem because Marystella followed up by saying, "...but mostly we understood, I think."

The other three participants found their greatest challenges to be unrelated to service-learning. There were simply typical problems that all students face from time to time. Lily did not enjoy writing the original children's book that was a required

assignment at the end of the semester. In describing her biggest challenge she said:

Yeah, preparing the book. I have no idea what I'm going to do. I have some idea in my mind, but not easy thing, you know. I think about it, and I cannot do it when I start to do it, I realize that I cannot do it.

Even though I had assured the students that I did not expect their books to of publishable quality, some of the students felt intimidated by this assignment.

The biggest problem that Dolores and Gloria shared again had nothing to do with service-learning. Instead, both Dolores and Gloria had issues with their peers. Dolores indicated that getting along with certain classmates was difficult at times. Although she did not mention any names, I knew instantly whom she was referring to. During the semester when we volunteered in the library, the class was comprised of 19 students, and the students took turns working in small groups of three or four students to produce the weekly storytelling sessions. One of the students was very loud, outspoken, and opinionated, and thus, difficult to work with. Dolores tried to remedy this situation "...by trying to forget what we did wrong and working to get a good result, that is, 'don't worry, take action' or 'take action to stop worry.'" Related to this, Dolores had also mentioned in a previous journal entry that, "I think at first I have a perception that we were a whole group working together, now I feel that is more like a competition of who is doing a better job when presenting." Interestingly, Gloria's answer revealed a similar answer in that it relates to competitiveness and possibly jealousy. Gloria stated, "Sincerely, my biggest problem was with my classmates." Gloria felt that her classmates' shunned her when they saw how much effort she was putting into the

biography for her senior partner. When they were still struggling to write their biographies, Gloria had already produced five chapters of her partner's biography. As in the course in the children's library, the ESOL students seemed to be comparing themselves to one another in a negative way.

During Marystella's interview she said that one of her friends in the class that visited the children's library decided to discontinue her English studies after that semester because she felt "too disappointed to take another step to English." She explained that it was:

... not because of the course, but after then, she never take another class, so I asked her to another class, but she said, "I lost my interesting. I lost my confidence, so I don't want, and I don't need because I meet Korean friends, so I don't need" so she doesn't want to speak English again.

According to Marystella, this student felt that her ability to speak English was inferior to other ESOL students. Instead of motivating her to try harder, she decided to walk away.

When asked about disadvantages, Diana commented that she felt uncertain if she was doing a good job because it was a new experience and she felt she needed to improve her vocabulary in order to converse with her senior partner: "It's better if I learn more English vocabulary." IK, too, felt his knowledge of vocabulary and American culture was insufficient because he commented several times about doing research online to gain the background information necessary to discuss topics with his senior partner. I had noticed this problem of lacking vocabulary skills the first time I taught the course that visited the retirement home; therefore, one of my interview questions

concerned vocabulary. I asked the participants what specific vocabulary words they remembered learning. Diana recalled learning words related to animals, numbers, and seasons in the children's library and with her senior partner she stated that she learned vocabulary related to "the story of [her senior partner], about her parents, her husband, her children, her job." Dolores remembered studying homophones, words that have the same pronunciation but different meanings and/or spelling such as "prince" and "prints." Gloria remembered learning the word "neonatal" from her senior partner because it related to his daughter's profession. IK enjoyed learning vocabulary related to the military since both he and his senior partner were veterans. Lily laughed as she remembered onomatopoeic words such as "vroom vroom." She said the librarians told her that children enjoy words like that. In comparing the two service-learning courses, Marystella asserted that when visiting the children's library, "...vocabulary and everything is not that harder [hard]" compared to working with her senior partner at the retirement home. From her senior partner, she remembered learning the names of cities and countries in which her partner had either lived or visited. I remember one occasion helping another student with the words Alabama, Port Arthur, and Lake Charles. I had also written in my journal about the variety of vocabulary words used by the senior partners. After one of our visits to the retirement home, I wrote the following:

I was worried about Thuy's partner because she didn't look very friendly, so I sat with them for a while. The woman was actually quite forthcoming. She was talking about her first husband, an alcoholic, who would "beat the crap out of" her. He ended up committing suicide. After we left [the retirement home] that

afternoon, I asked Thuy how much she had understood, for example, “beat the crap out of.” She hadn’t understood, so I explained it to her, and she asked me, “Like domestic violence?” She knew this high level phrase, “domestic violence,” but she had no clue about “beat the crap out of.” How does an ESL teacher teach that?

In addition to idiomatic phrases, topics such as the Great Depression and World War II seemed to occur frequently. The senior partner of one of my student’s had served with the U.S. troops that liberated Dachau; however, the student was unfamiliar with Dachau, Buchenwald, and concentration camps. This same senior partner also talked about Shirley Temple, Mae West, and Kirk Douglas – other names the student did not know. A few weeks later, I added more unknown vocabulary words to my journal: Boy Scouts, boarding house, and raking the yard.

In addition to requiring more vocabulary, talking with senior partners in the retirement home also involved more intense face to face communication. Two of the participants felt that they needed more assistance in coping with this situation. Gloria suggested that students in the class should be given a “schedule to follow.” For example, the teacher would dictate that students and senior partners would talk about a certain topic in the first week such as family. In week two, everyone would discuss education, in week three, careers, and so on. This idea had also been suggested at the end of the semester by Gloria’s classmates. Related to this, Marystella discussed wanting help with

interviewing skills:

When I think about the questions, what I'm going to ask him was very difficult and very narrow, limited, very limited, so, so some day I don't have any questions about him because I asked everything, everything I want to know and if I asked about him more, more specific or more details, he just repeated, repeated, repeated same answers, so there is more things, but I couldn't do that because I'm limited English, I have limited skills, English skills.

Even though I often reminded the students throughout the semester to ask for help if they needed it, students did not necessarily voice these concerns until after the course was over.

Another issue that was mentioned specifically about the retirement home was the location. When asked about disadvantages, Diana declared, "The disadvantage was that I needed to go to other place." Marystella voiced a similar concern, "We have to drive the car to there and take more time and speaking with American people will be very, very difficult and nervous, so, yeah, a lot of burden." Interestingly, Diana and Marystella were the only two participants who took part in both service-learning programs and perhaps, therefore, realized how easy it was to simply walk across campus to work in the children's library as compared to driving 20 minutes to get to the retirement home.

A third problem arose that also involved only the retirement home. The first time my students visited the retirement home, the activity director placed the ESL students with seniors who had either expressed an interest in participating in our project or with seniors whom she felt needed more attention and companionship. In most cases, this

approach worked; however, I had failed to specifically mention that the senior partners needed to be native or native-like English speakers. I assumed this aspect of the program was self-explanatory because I said my students were ESL students and wanted to practice their English in authentic environments. Unfortunately, one of my native Spanish-speaking students from Colombia was paired with a senior partner from Mexico. The Mexican woman saw this as an opportunity to converse in her native language even though the both student and I explained to her that the student needed to practice her English. I sat in on one of their interviews to observe and noticed that even when the senior partner spoke in English, she would often insert Spanish words periodically. The student was disappointed because she felt she had lost a valuable opportunity to improve her English skills. Gloria also touched on this issue. Her senior partner had been born in Ecuador, but he had lived most of his life in the United States and spoke English fluently. Once Gloria explained to him that the interviews needed to be conducted solely in English, he immediately stopped speaking in Spanish and only spoke English with Gloria until one day after the semester was over when Gloria brought her mother to meet him. Gloria wrote, "If he speak in Spanish, I will lost my time over there." Thus, in future semesters, I made certain to request that the senior partners speak only English with the students.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Introduction

To date, numerous scholars have commented on the lack of research available on ESL and service-learning (Elwell and Bean, 2001; Glicker, 2006; Heuser, 1999; Whittig and Hale, 2007). In fact, Whittig and Hale (2007) very specifically noticed "...little focus on student voice, experience, and perspective" in the research that does exist (p. 382). Therefore, this study attempted to address a gap in the literature by investigating the perspectives held by adult ESL students who participated in service-learning programs as the providers of a service in an English-speaking environment for at least one semester. More specifically, this study aimed to answer the following questions:

- What are the perceived benefits of participating in a service-learning course for ESL students?
- In particular, how has participating in a service-learning course impacted the ESL students' ability to communicate outside the classroom?
- What are the perceived disadvantages of participating in a service-learning course for ESL students?
- What common characteristics, if any, are evident in the students who willingly participate in a service-learning program?

By using the methodology of narrative inquiry, the participants' experiences and perspectives were told primarily through their own unique voices, thus adding another dimension to the existent literature.

Benefits

By far the biggest benefit of participating in a service-learning course for the ESL students involved having the opportunity to connect with other human beings while communicating in English. During their interviews, all of the participants were asked to describe their biggest successes, and their answers are summarized in Table 5.1. Sharing with others in English gave the students a measure of confidence that they did not have previously.

Table 5.1 Participants' Biggest Successes

Participants	Biggest Successes
Diana	I could take conversation and understand more... and [feel] a little less nervous.
Dolores	I really liked to share with the kids in the library because I was thinking on doing, or being a teacher, Pre-K or kindergarten teacher, so that experience helped me a lot.
Gloria	In the first meeting [with her senior partner at the retirement home] I know that it will be one of the most wonderful experiences with the English language because I never thought that I can speak for one hour in English.
IK	The activities made me understand the culture, American culture and history. The events, you know the search for the American society events. While I search that, I could understand the background, cultural background, historical background. That made my helpful to understand and that helped me to understanding and communicating with my partner.
Lily	I talked to the children more and, like, I know how to make them laugh.
Marystella	The big success for me is to, to, is that I can help, I can be a little help for this country, I mean, the people in [it]. I can be more confident in myself.

Outside observers and the students themselves noticed their newfound confidence and their ability to communicate more easily in English. Not only did the students improve their English language skills, in the case of the students who visited the retirement community, they also increased their knowledge of American history and culture. The participants were motivated to learn and excited about meeting new people. The authentic settings created meaningful learning contexts that allowed the students to be exposed to “real-life” English. Although working in the community challenged the participants to rise to the occasion, they found ways of coping with stressful situations and managed to feel successful. For example, IK used the Internet to research unknown topics in order to better understand the conversations he had with his senior partner, and Gloria recorded interviews with her senior partner so that she could replay them later.

Another benefit is that the students experienced the reciprocal nature of service-learning. They may have initially registered for the course simply wanting to practice their English language skills, but they learned that they had the power to give something valuable to another person in exchange. Diana illustrated this point beautifully when she said, “I like to help people and because at the same time, I learn. They help me, too.”

Participating in a service-learning program benefited the ESL students by increasing their levels of confidence and by demonstrating that even without perfect language skills, they did indeed have the skills necessary to make an impact in their community. However, there were also issues to be addressed.

Lessons Learned

Even though the participants were enthusiastic about working in the community, they also expressed a great deal of anxiety and self-doubt. All of the participants mentioned feelings of fear, incompetence, and apprehension at various times. In fact, Marystella even commented that one of her classmates, who was one of my former students, refused to register for any more English classes because she had lost all confidence in herself. She felt inferior not only to native speakers of English but also to her peers in the ESL class as well. Her behavior, in contrast to the participants of this study, clearly illustrates the differing effects of facilitating and debilitating anxiety:

Facilitating anxiety motivates the learner to ‘fight’ the new learning task; it gears the learner emotionally for approval behavior. Debilitating anxiety, in contrast, motivates the learner to ‘flee’ the new learning task; it stimulates the individual emotionally to adopt avoidance behavior. (Scovel as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991, p. 187)

Therefore, it is imperative for ESL teachers to keep in mind how powerful anxiety can be and the burdens that some students may place upon themselves. Symptoms of anxious language learners include, but are not limited to, forgetfulness, difficulty concentrating, sweating, and experiencing palpitations (Horwitz, Horwitz & Cope, 1986, p. 126). This is reminiscent of Gloria commenting on her first meeting with her senior partner, “While Ronnie was answering all the questions that I asked, I was sweating. I felt all my clothes getting wet, but I did not take off my jacket because it seemed inappropriate.”

More recently, Gregersen and Horwitz (2002) reported on the connection between anxiety and perfectionism. By definition, perfectionists are people who criticize themselves for not being able to reach impossibly high performance standards. According to Gregersen and Horwitz (2002), “With respect to language learning, perfectionist students would not be satisfied with merely communicating in their target language – they would want to speak flawlessly, with no grammatical or pronunciation errors, and as easily as a native speaker” (p. 563). This lack of satisfaction is evident in IK’s writing, “Finally, I started to make a storybook of Ken. I thought over, wrote and edited repeatedly for more than twenty days. But I was not able to be satisfied with it. I was sorry to give it to Ken.” Additional comments from IK also mirror Gregersen and Horwitz’s (2002) continued description of perfectionist students: “...perfectionist language learners would likely prefer to remain silent, waiting until they were certain of how to express their thoughts. Such impossibly high performance standards create the ideal conditions for the development of language anxiety” (p. 563). IK wrote, “Actually, I don’t like making mistakes to other people rather than being a perfectionist. This kind of personality makes me hesitate doing something. I don’t act and speak out until I make sure what I try to do.” After reading the transcript of his interview, IK stated, “I read your transcript. Oh my god! Some of them [his comments] were really messed up as you pick out [I had asked him to clarify a few remarks]. When I can say perfectly what I mean?” Fortunately, some of the recommendations listed for encouraging perfectionist language learners are compatible with service-learning methodology: creating a

supportive learning environment and playing the role of a facilitating instructor instead of an authoritative one (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002, p. 569).

ESL instructors should be particularly aware of the issues of anxiety and perfectionism because of the detrimental effects they can have. However, if ESL instructors have never tried to learn another language, can they truly empathize with their students and understand the levels of anxiety that students may bring into the classroom? Moreover, if an ESL instructor has never felt the need to leave his or her homeland, can he or she truly understand the emotional distress many immigrants feel? Gloria asked the poignant question in her poem, “We are sailors adrift. Where is our promised shore?” ESL instructors must seek to provide a safe refuge for these “sailors,” especially if the instructors place the students in new situations where they may feel uncertain and scared, which is what happens when students visit the service-learning site. ESL students need to feel comfortable with their instructor and know that they are supported. Diana, Dolores, Gloria, and Lily all indicated that they felt comfortable with me as their instructor, and this was also discussed in the existing literature on service-learning (Pak, 2007; Stewart, 2007; Tilley-Lubbs, 2007). In fact, out of the 57 students I have had in my service-learning courses, 39% were former students with whom I had already formed a rapport. Furthermore, visiting the service-learning sites as a class as we did can promote bonding and a sense of community and add an extra layer of support for students who may be hesitant to volunteer by themselves (Wurr, 2001).

Even though some of the participants felt emotional support, two participants wanted more instructional support with the project at the retirement community. Gloria

recommended that I, as the instructor, give the students strict guidelines about which themes to discuss with their senior partners each week, and Marystella wanted more specific training in how to interview someone. As the instructor, I have conflicted emotions regarding my response to these two comments. On the one hand, I want to support my students and provide the scaffolding necessary for them to succeed. In fact, after the first semester that I taught the class that visited the retirement home, I revamped the content of the course to include less information about ageing and more information about the history of the United States knowing that students were going to encounter topics such as the Great Depression and World War II. On the other hand, I envisioned this project as an opportunity for two people to get to know one another. While the first few meetings might be more formal as the partners became acquainted, I hoped that subsequent visits would become more conversational and less of a structured interview. I provided several website addresses where students could locate possible interview questions to begin the process, but as far as dictating exact questions to ask or topics to discuss, I remain reluctant. For instance, imagine if I assigned the students the topic of “family” one week. There could be individuals at the retirement community who do not have good relationships with their families and might not want to discuss them. In fact, this situation actually occurred with one of my students who was not a participant in this study. Her senior partner almost refused to speak of his family. He would answer all questions about his deceased wife with “I don’t know” and “I don’t remember;” however, he would talk at length about his experiences in World War II. Therefore, instead of assigning a specific weekly topic, perhaps an instructor could offer a range of

possible topics such as family, education, childhood, professions, vacations, hobbies, historical events, etc., and students would have to decide with their senior partners exactly which topics they would discuss based on a predetermined number of topics that must be included in the final biography. In this way, students would gain more structure while still having the opportunity to develop communicative competence by negotiating with their senior partners. Ellis (2004) stated, “Teachers cannot teach scaffolding but only create the conditions where it can arise; they cannot teach learners social identities that will foster acquisition, but only help them to understand who they are and what they wish to be” (p. 244). If the language learner is serious about acquiring the target language, he or she must assume some measure of responsibility and seek autonomy.

Lily explained this concept with a metaphor:

Teachers teach the children lessons. Not their own lives. For example: like birds, [the] teacher is a big bird and students are birds which don't know how to fly. Big bird (of course) knows how to fly and trying to teach little birds [to] fly, he encourages them, tell them how to do it, gives them the strength but he cannot fly instead of them. They have to fly for themselves. Just like human, no one can help if they don't want to do it.

Lily's metaphor reinforces the idea that instructors can provide opportunities for students to speak, but they can never force them to do anything. The teacher/big bird/interlocutor at the service-learning sites could be, in Vygotsky's (1978) words, “the more capable peer,” but the students must find the courage to do their own work (p. 86).

That being said, in order to promote more discussion between the ESL student and the senior partner, it might be wise to avoid a random pairing of ESL students and senior partners if at all possible; however, this might be extremely difficult for several reasons: the ESL teacher would have to be extremely familiar with the students; the coordinator at the retirement community would have to be equally familiar with the residents; and the ESL teacher and the representative of the retirement community would have to spend a great deal of time negotiating the best possible fit for each person. Perhaps some kind of initial questionnaire could be completed by both the ESL students and the senior partners in order to look for similarities that might induce fortuitous bonds. Both Gloria and IK had strong connections with their senior partners because they shared something in common. In Gloria's case, her husband had the same profession as her senior partner, and IK and his senior partner were both veterans. These commonalities gave the pairs a place to begin their conversations.

One way of addressing this issue could be through the use of determining students' learning profiles which is one of the components of differentiated instruction (Campbell, 2009; Scigliano & Hipsky, 2010). A student's learning profile consists of his or her preferences, strengths, and learning styles (Scigliano & Hipsky, 2010). By becoming more aware of students' personalities, an instructor can better provide appropriate guidance and activities to individual students. Scigliano and Hipsky (2010) recommended using a self-assessment tool based on Gardner's (1999) theory of multiple intelligences which indicates strengths in categories such as logical/mathematical, verbal/linguistic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986)

used the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale. For those students who seem to exhibit more signs of introspection, shyness, or anxiety, perhaps extra observation on the instructor's part could be warranted in order to provide extra support as needed.

Another issue that arose was a lack of vocabulary. Again, this seemed to have been more of an issue with the class that visited the retirement community. The ESL students encountered a range of miscellaneous words that included topics related to the Great Depression and World War II, various geographical locations, celebrities from past decades, and idiomatic expressions such as "beat the crap out of." Because the students spent time with their individual partners, there was no way to adequately prepare them for what the senior partners might say. Therefore, I encouraged the students to record their conversations so that they could listen to them again and also to share the recordings with me if they were uncertain about the content.

One issue that was mentioned by the two students who participated in both of the service-learning courses was that it was much easier to work in the library because it was located on campus. The retirement community required a drive of at least 20 minutes, and in the city in which we live, public transportation is not available. The students had to either drive themselves or carpool with their classmates. Thus, the proximity of the service-learning sites is important (Levesque, 2006).

Finally, sustainability appears to be an issue. Even though all of the participants claimed that having contact with the English-speaking community gave them more confidence to speak in English, they did not necessarily build on this skill after the semester was over. I interviewed the participants in the summer of 2010, and most of the

participants were not currently involved in activities that necessitated frequent communication in English. Some dedicated time to watching TV or listening to the radio in English, but these are passive activities. They were waiting until the fall semester began to really put their English skills to use.

The Participants

While it is impossible to generalize from a sample of six participants, it is interesting to note that commonalities are apparent in their personalities and backgrounds. Diana, Dolores, and IK immediately identified themselves as having introverted personalities. Gloria also identified herself as an introvert, but stated that she is more so when speaking in English as compared to Spanish. On the other hand, Lily and Marystella both described themselves as talkative and outgoing when speaking their native languages, yet they become nervous and shy when speaking in English. Their comments suggest that speaking in a language that is not one's first language can be intimidating for anyone. No one wants to make mistakes and appear foolish in front of others. However, in the United States universities and businesses are full of non-native speakers from a multitude of countries. What gives some individuals the courage to forge ahead regardless of how many mistakes they might make, and what inhibits others from doing so? How much of a risk-taker must a language learner be in order to fully integrate him or herself into the new society independently? Because all of the participants in this study identified themselves as feeling self-conscious when speaking in English, perhaps having the support of a teacher and classmates as they venture outside the ESL classroom provides the safety net they need to support their risk taking.

Another interesting finding that revealed itself in the course of this study was that all of the participants have held or have aspirations of being involved in a helping profession, more specifically in education, medicine, or housing. Gloria worked as a nurse in Colombia, and Diana and Lily would like to become nurses one day. IK plans to study Oriental medicine, and he also taught martial arts in South Korea. Marystella studied to become a language teacher in Korea, and while she never actively pursued a career in teaching, she did serve as a volunteer teacher for her church for two years prior to living in the United States. Dolores has considered earning her teaching credentials in the United States, and both Dolores and Gloria studied architecture in their home countries. Dolores is currently finishing her associate's degree in interior design while Gloria is currently earning her master's degree in architecture at a university in Texas and dreams of helping the underprivileged in Colombia with housing issues one day. Perhaps this is another facet of the kind of ESL student who is willingly drawn to participate in service-learning classes. They are already interested in helping others, and service-learning allows them to fulfill this intrinsic need at the same time that they are developing their English skills.

Symbolism and Metaphor

In narrative analysis symbolism and metaphor can play a significant role. Therefore, in interviewing the participants I asked each of the six to pick a symbol that represented their experiences as ESL students. I was anticipating creative answers that would lead to deeper insight into their thoughts, but instead I was met with blank stares. Initially, I was disappointed that none of the participants could be wildly creative on

demand. However, I slowly came to realize that a beautiful metaphor was already guiding my research. The metaphor of the tree and the bird were already interwoven in this project; it just took me a while to recognize their presence.

Eisner's (1998) quotation about the tree illustrated how the symbolic tree represents all trees:

No tree, no oak tree, no young oak tree is the same as any other young oak tree. The task the artist faces is to experience individual features of *this* tree, of *this* person, and to create a form that succeeds in revealing the essential and unique features of the object seen. In the process of revealing what is individual, the work also – ironically – becomes what Arnheim (1990) calls a canonical image through which the features portrayed through the visual rendering of a distilled particular can be used as a generalizable image to locate similar features found elsewhere. In this process the image becomes a concrete universal, a means through which perception is sensitized so that it can locate like qualities. (p. 63)

Thus, the case study can be representative of a larger group. I relished the symbolism in his writing because it reminded me of Gloria's pictorial representation of the life cycle as shown in Appendix C. Then I remembered Gloria referring to me as one of her "bird-parents" who gave her wings to fly outside of the college; she felt that visiting the retirement home and using her English in an authentic setting had given her a sense of freedom. By chance, I also noticed a poem written by Gloria which had been hanging on my office wall for so long that I had almost forgotten its existence. "Birds in Flight" is filled with the sorrowful images of "birds abandon their nests" and "refugees sever their

roots.” At that point, I connected the tree and the bird in my mind. In addition, Lily’s metaphor about the big bird teaching the baby birds to fly was also present in my thoughts.

Without even trying, I found further references to trees and birds in the material I was reading. Estes (as cited in Baldwin, 2005) connected trees to storytelling, “In the best tellers I know, the stories grow out of their lives like roots grow like a tree” (p. 150). I even had the privilege of bearing witness to a life and death scenario on my patio one weekend as one tiny baby bird fell from its nest and died on the concrete while its stronger sibling spent 24 hours trying to gather the strength to fly away while its parents anxiously waited.

Lamott’s (1995) *Bird by Bird: Some Instructions on Writing and Life* was recommended to me by a friend, and I read it hoping to gain inspiration before tackling my dissertation. The book is so titled because Lamott remembered her brother struggling to write a report about birds. Feeling totally overwhelmed, their father encouraged him to write it bird by bird, simply staying focused on one bird at a time, until he was finished. After reading this, my student-participants became my “birds,” each chapter in the dissertation a bird, until the end.

To me, the birds symbolize freedom – the freedom I want my students to feel, being able to negotiate life successfully in the United States, and my freedom as I complete another chapter in my academic life. During my proposal defense, Dr. Carpenter, one of my co-chairs, told me that I had the bare bones of a tree in my proposal, and my task for completing my dissertation was to flesh it out by adding the

branches and the leaves. Hopefully, I have accomplished that task and have added some singing birds as well.

Recommendations for Future Research

In concluding this study, I feel as if I have answered some questions, but others remain. While I believe that service-learning is beneficial for ESL students in that it provides opportunities for meaningful communication in English, I wonder if it is more beneficial to certain ESL students. For instance, are introverts and extroverts equally attracted to service-learning? The majority of the participants in this study identified themselves as introverts, and the two who did not consider themselves introverts in their native languages felt very shy about speaking in English. As more ESL programs begin to utilize service-learning projects, perhaps future studies could determine the type of ESL students who feel the need to have extra support as they venture into the community.

Another common characteristic that revealed itself in this study is that students who already had an interest in helping professions were attracted to working with the elderly and with children. If there is a direct correlation between students' career aspirations and the types of service-learning projects they are willing to work on, what other service-learning projects can be offered to students who may still be perfecting their language skills?

Furthermore, does service-learning appeal more to ESL students from certain cultures than from others? In the service-learning courses I have taught, I have noticed an unusually high percentage of students from South Korea. For example, six of the nine

students (67%) who enrolled in the course that visited that retirement home in the spring of 2009 were from South Korea. In the following semester, eight of the 20 students (40%) who enrolled in the class that conducted story time in the children's library were Korean. Of the five students who took both service-learning courses, three (60%) were from South Korea. The campus in question does not have a large Korean population. In comparison, in the four classes I am currently teaching this semester, two classes have no Koreans enrolled. In the third class, three of 15 students (20%) hail from South Korea, and in the fourth class, two of 10 students (20%) are Korean. In total this semester, only 9% of my students are Korean. In contrast, of the 57 students who enrolled in any of the service-learning courses offered, 14 (25%) were Korean. Is a student's country of origin significant?

Finally, how likely is it that ESL students who participate in service-learning courses will take more active roles in their communities by volunteering of their own accord? As more service-learning programs for ESL students are created, longitudinal studies can be conducted to determine the long-term effects of service-learning. These questions will hopefully be answered in time as more ESL instructors begin to use service-learning to promote language skills and involve their students in the local community.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR ESL STUDENTS

The questions below represent general questions that were asked during semi-structured interviews. Additional questions that attempted to probe deeper into the participants' mind-sets were asked; however, these questions varied from participant to participant. For instance, based on the way participants answer the questions below, immediate follow-up questions were appropriate to obtain more information or to clarify answers. In addition, other questions were generated on a case by case basis based on information that was provided in student written work such as journals and reflections papers that was collected prior to conducting the interviews. These interviews were recorded, and afterwards the data was transcribed and coded. Member checks were conducted so that participants had the opportunity to approve of the contents.

Background Questions

- Are you aware that you are being audio recorded?
- What country are you from?
- What is your native language?
- Would you mind telling me how old you are?
- How would you describe your personality when you are talking in your language? When you are talking in English? (Students will be able to refer to a list of adjectives such as extrovert, introvert, outgoing, shy, etc. Refer to the list of adjectives in Appendix B.)

- What is your level of education?
- What is your profession? (if applicable)
- What previous volunteer experience did you have in your home country?
- When you were growing up, did your family or school encourage community involvement? If so, please describe.
- Why are you in the United States? For example, for an education or for a job?
- How long have you been in the United States?
- Do you plan to remain in the United States for an extended time? If so, how long?
- What kind of community do you live in? Do you have much contact with the [insert native language]-speaking community?
- How much exposure do you have to English on a daily basis?
- What are your specific reasons/goals for studying English?
- How long have you been studying English in the United States?

Questions about Service-learning

- What did you know about service-learning before taking a service-learning course?
- How do you define service-learning?
- How does a typical ESL class compare to a service-learning class?
- Why did you enroll in a service-learning course?
- What are some of the advantages of being in a service-learning course for ESL students?

- Think of your biggest success in the service-learning class. What was it and why was it special for you?
- What are some of the disadvantages of being in a service-learning course for ESL students?
- Think of your biggest problem in the service-learning class. What was it and how did you deal with it?
- (if applicable) You participated in two service-learning courses, one with seniors at a retirement home and one in the children's library. Could you compare and contrast your experiences in these two courses? Which experience was more beneficial for you as an ESL student? Why?
- How did you feel about working with the community?
- Did you feel like you were providing a needed service? If so, what? Did you also receive something in return? If so, what?
- Has engaging in a service-learning class influenced your learning of English? If yes, how?
- Do you remember any specific vocabulary words that you learned from the class?
- How would you describe your level of confidence speaking in English before and after the service-learning class?
- How would you describe your level of participation in the local community before and after the service-learning class?

- Do you think that your gender influenced your decision to participate in a service-learning project?
- What can an ESL teacher do to help students gain confidence and become more involved in the community?

Wrap up questions

- If you had to pick a symbol that represents your experiences as an ESL student, what would it be? Why?
- Is there anything I did not ask you that you would like to share with me about your experience with service-learning?
- May I contact you again if I have more questions?
- Is it OK if we meet at a later date so that you can review the transcript of our conversation today?

APPENDIX B
LIST OF ADJECTIVES

Caring

Extrovert

Friendly

Helpful

Introvert

Loud

Nervous

Outgoing

Quiet

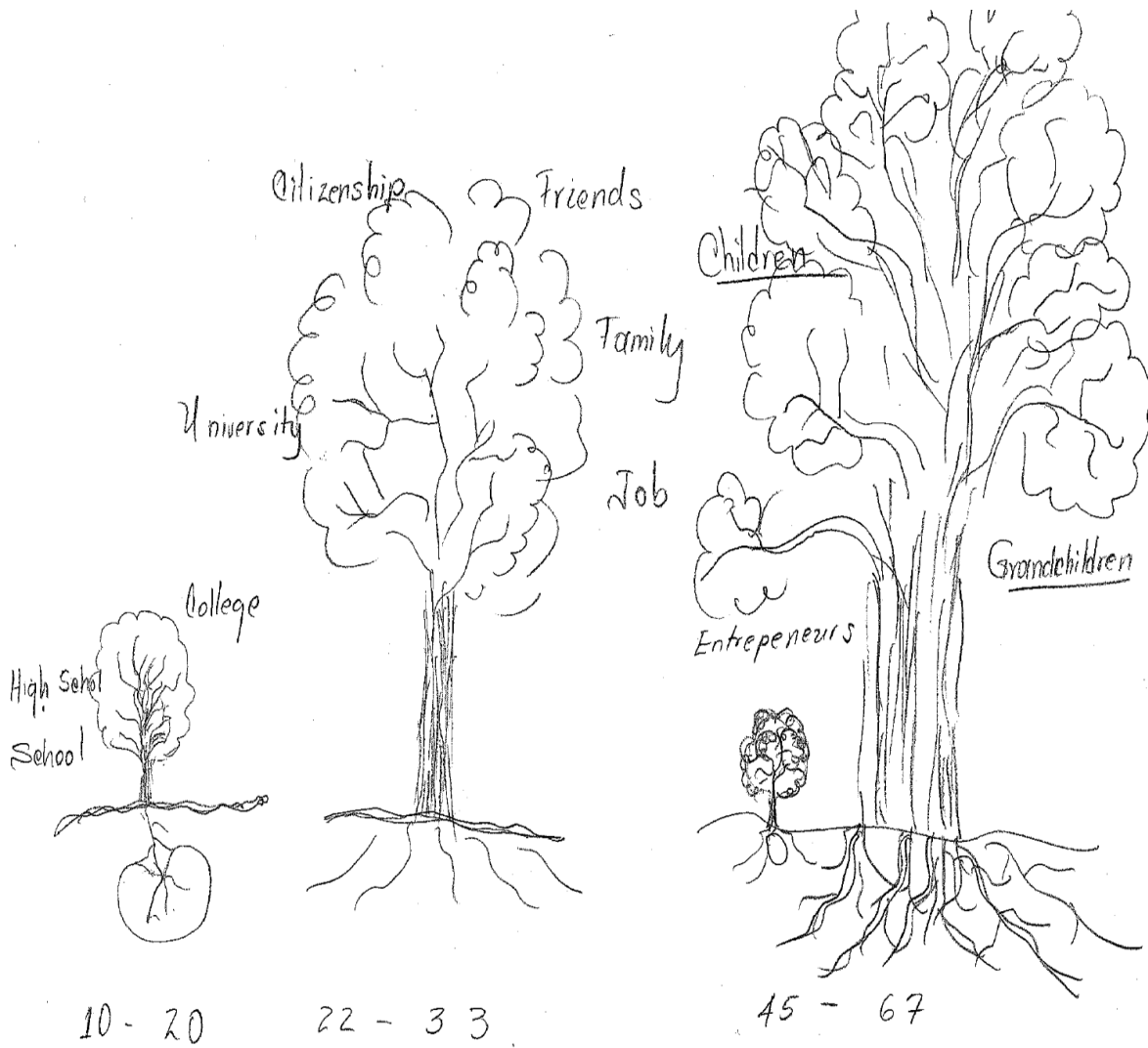
Shy

Talkative

Timid

APPENDIX C

GLORIA'S TREE METAPHOR



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