English as a Language of Service:

Incorporating Service-Learning into the American Language and Culture Program at CSUMB

A Research Report by
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California State University Monterey Bay (CSUMB) has kept service-learning at the core of its values and mission since opening its doors in 1994. The Vision Statement of CSUMB makes clear its commitment to service through learning and learning through service, putting particular emphasis on serving historically marginalized groups in California, including undereducated and low-income populations. This vision has been realized through the establishment of a Service-Learning Institute, which acts as an academic department, and by requiring all degree-seeking CSUMB students to take both a lower-division and an upper-division service-learning course during their time on campus.

The American Language and Culture Program (ALCP), housed within the International Programs Office, currently provides short- and long-term English language instruction and programming to both conditionally admitted degree-seeking and non-degree-seeking international students, but does not include a service-learning component or requirement. ALCP wishes to incorporate service-learning into its programming with the goals of 1) increasing student interactions and engagement with the local community, and 2) providing ALCP students with an experience that all CSUMB students go through, creating a commonality and breaking the barrier between "international" and "regular" students. The following research report highlights what service learning is, what it is not, and highlights the benefits of service learning in language intensive programming. The report concludes with recommendations for ALCP on how to best incorporate service-learning into its current curriculum.

Service-Learning…

- is a teaching method that links to academic content

- requires service-learners to think critically about their identity, social responsibility, and social justice as they relate to civic engagement

- involves learners in helping to determine and respond to real, defined community needs

- values multiple sources of knowledge

- incites compassion and empathy

- requires critical reflection

- is reciprocal in nature

Service-Learning is not…

- an episodic volunteer program

- an extracurricular activity or "add-on"

- compensatory or punitive

- one sided: benefiting solely the students or the community

- achieving a set number of service hours as a graduation requirement

"Service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity change both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content."

NATIONAL SERVICE-LEARNING CLEARINGHOUSE

"Service-learning is a form of experiential education where learning occurs through a cycle of action and reflection as students work with others through a process of applying what they are learning to community problems, and, at the same time, reflecting upon their experiences as they seek to achieve real objectives for the community and deeper understanding and skills for themselves."
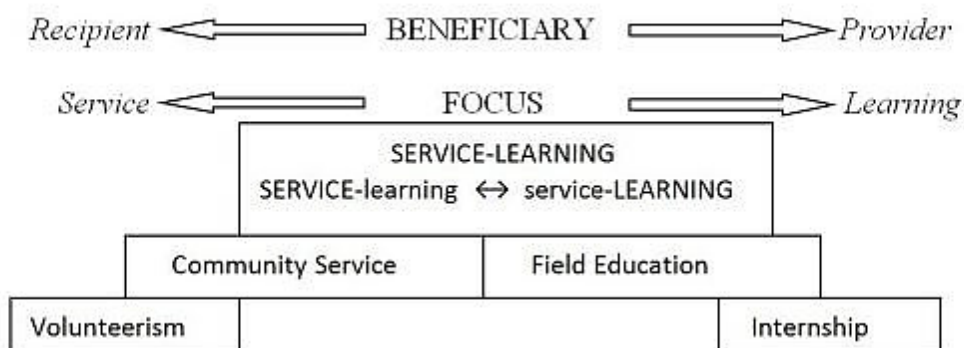
JANET EYLER & DWIGHT GILES, JR.

SPECTRUM OF SERVICE

Service-Learning exists on a spectrum of service activities. On one end of the spectrum the focus of the experience lies on the service performed, with the main beneficiary being the recipient of service. Volunteerism, episodic or sustained, with no associated credit-bearing coursework is a good example of this kind of service.

On the other end of the spectrum, the focus of the service is predominantly on the learning gained for the benefit of the provider of service. Field education or an internship, such as student-teaching, is an example of such service.

Authentic service-learning remains at the very center of the spectrum: it intentionally focuses on reciprocity, equally benefiting both the recipient and provider or service, and splits the focus between service and learning. This commitment to reciprocity is visualized orthographically through the hyphen in service-learning. Additionally, within the hyphenated model, either service or learning can be slightly emphasized over the other, which Phelps (2012) distinguishes as SERVICE-learning and service-LEARNING respectively.

Figure 1: Distinctions Among Service Programs (Taken from Furco 2003)]

Recipient ⟵══════ BENEFICIARY ══════⟶ Provider

Service ⟵══════ FOCUS ══════⟶ Learning

SERVICE-LEARNING
SERVICE-learning ⟷ service-LEARNING

Community Service   Field Education

Volunteerism   Internship

"Unlike extracurricular voluntary service, service-learning is a course-based service experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentations. Unlike practica and internships, the experiential activity in a service-learning course is not necessarily skill-based within the context of professional education."

ROBERT BRINGLE & JULIE HATCHER

"Service-learning is different from volunteerism in that it is a teaching and learning approach that integrates community service with academic study to enrich learning, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities."

NATIONAL COMMISSION ON SERVICE LEARNING

SERVICE-LEARNING AS A HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE

The work of George Kuh (2008) highlights the benefits that certain activities have on student engagement, retention, and success at the university level. Kuh refers to these activities as High Impact Educational Practices. Service-Learning is counted as one of ten High Impact Practices described by Kuh.

Key Elements of High-Impact Practices within Service Learning:

- Opportunities to discover relevance of learning through real-world applications
- Interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters
- Experiences with diversity, wherein students are exposed to and must contend with people and circumstances that differ from those with which students are familiar
- Periodic, structured opportunities to reflect and integrate learning
- Significant investment of time and effort by students over an extended period of time
- Frequent, timely, and constructive feedback
- Public demonstration of competence
- Performance expectations set at appropriately high levels

In this way, service-learning is beneficial to the student experience as a High Impact Educational Practice. Service-learning engages students both academically and emotionally, facilitates self-reflection and holistic development, and brings course material to life through real-world application of knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

SERVICE-LEARNING INSTITUTE AT CSUMB

The mission of the Service Learning Institute is "to foster and promote social justice by cultivating reciprocal service and learning partnerships among CSUMB students, faculty, staff, and the surrounding tri-county community" (Service-Learning Institute Mission, Philosophy & Goals). This mission is closely aligned with the academic programs' vision statement that establishes "coordinated community service" as a vehicle to develop the "critical thinking abilities to be productive citizens and the social responsibility and skills to be community builders" (CSUMB Vision Statement).

The ultimate goal for students is for them to become multicultural community builders: "students who have the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to work effectively in a diverse society to create more just and equitable workplaces, communities, and social institutions" (Service-Learning Institute Mission, Philosophy & Goals).

Through service-learning, the development of self-reflective, culturally aware, and socially responsible graduates is a core educational goal at CSUMB.

Students engage in this development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes by completing two service-learning courses during their career at CSUMB:

- A lower division course that introduces them to concepts of service and multicultural community participation
- A course in their major that addresses social issues more specific to their field and career aspirations

In this way, each student has an opportunity to engage with real community projects while exploring issues of social justice, diversity, responsibility, and compassion.

SERVICE-LEARNING PRISM

CSUMB believes that learning is transformed through the process of service-learning, much like light is transformed through a prism. The prism highlights three key ways in which service-learning differs from traditional classroom learning.

The first key difference is found in multiple sources of knowledge. Whereas traditional classrooms rely on a "sage on the stage" who disseminates knowledge to students, service-learning acknowledges not only discipline-based or textbook knowledge, but also sees students themselves and the communities in which they serve as vital and highly valuable sources of knowledge. Students are encouraged to explore different perspectives with regard to knowledge and ultimately to be able to integrate all three.

The second characteristic that sets service-learning apart from traditional learning is that students engage with the facets of service as the content of the course, with emphasis on diversity (issues related to serving in a multicultural society), compassion (understanding the world from another person's perspective), justice (how power, privilege and oppression affect the service setting), and social responsibility (an individual's commitment to and engagement with civic society).
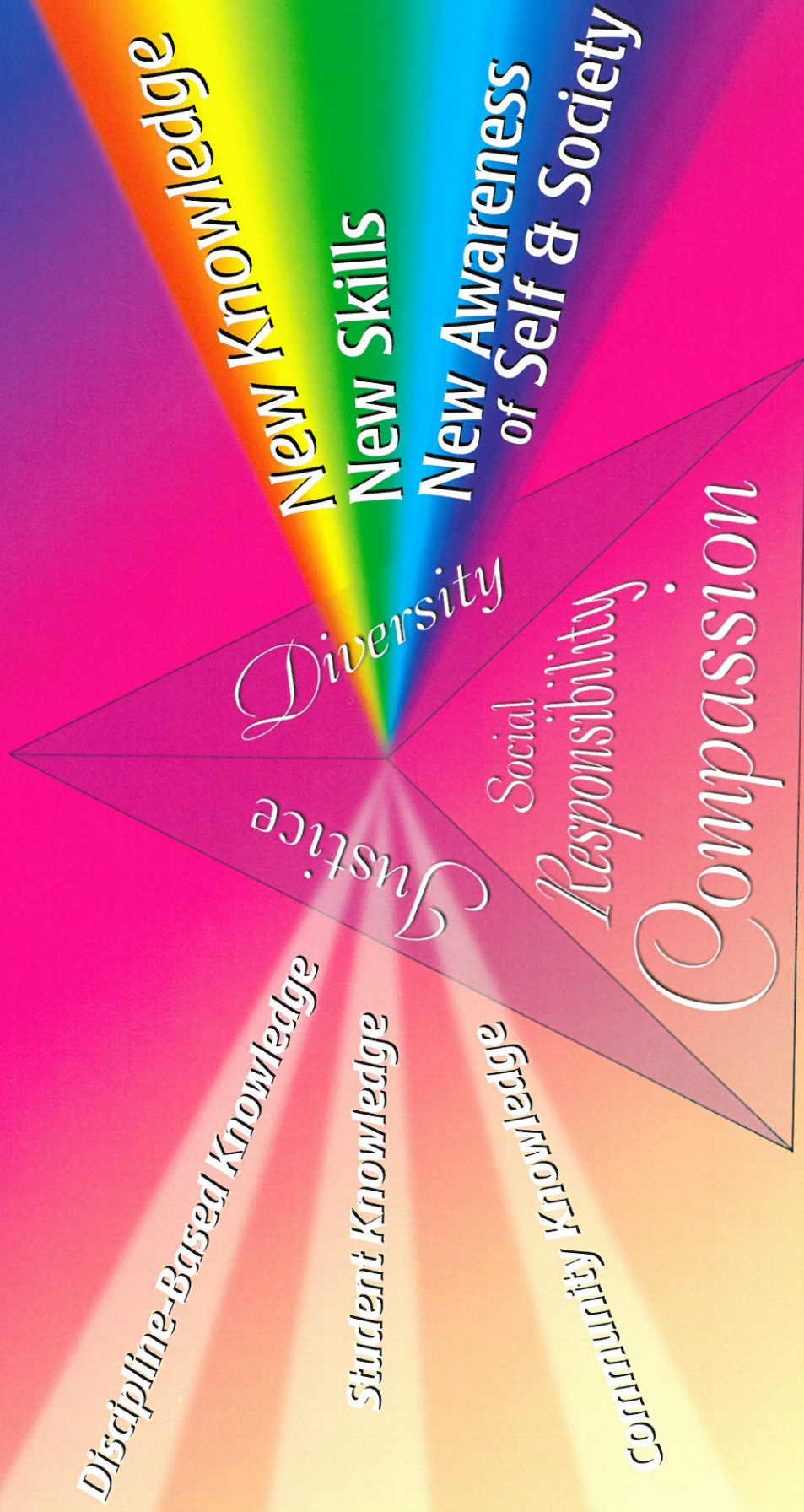
Finally, service-learning at CSUMB is articulated and measured through distinctive service-learning objectives. By explicitly making issues of social justice and responsibility a part of the curriculum, students come to clarify their own conception of service as they participate in the community, enabling moral and civic learning to become a component of the curriculum. Learning then becomes a tool for both individual and social empowerment, betterment, and change.

The Service-Learning Institute explicitly acknowledges the benefits of service-learning in the context of international education: the Service-Learning Institute sees it as an imperative that students develop the requisite knowledge, skills, and attitudes in preparation for our "increasingly multicultural and global society. Students must develop the skills to work collaboratively across the differences that have traditionally separated diverse segments of society."

CSUMB's Service Learning Prism

Transforming Learning Through Community Service

New Knowledge

New Skills

New Awareness of Self & Society

Diversity

Justice

Social Responsibility

Compassion

Discipline-Based Knowledge

Student Knowledge

Community Knowledge

SERVICE-LEARNING & ESL INSTRUCTION

Scholarly research about service learning in the ESL context is growing. Generally, the literature suggests that service-learning is potentially beneficial for English Language Learners (ELLs) in nearly all aspects of the language learning experience (Perren & Wurr, 2015).

Research has found that ELLs benefit from service-learning mainly in gaining the "confidence to contribute" in new and diverse contexts. The importance of developing the confidence to speak in the target language in unfamiliar or new situations cannot be stressed enough, especially given the marginalization and isolation of international students on many US campuses. Additionally, "[g]iven the anti-immigration views of some in society, a subtle but important benefit to positioning ELLs as service-providers is the opportunity to provide counter-texts to popular meta-narratives in the media about immigrant and, by extension, international students as being needy" (Perren & Wurr, 2015, p. 3). Service-learning, therefore, can not only help to increase students' confidence to speak, but it can also serve to empower them as well.

Sousa (2015) and Cameron (2015) draw connections between the tenets of service-learning and those of Long's interaction hypothesis (1996) and the sociocultural theories of Second Language Acquisition. Sousa states that service-learning is supported by "Long's interaction hypothesis, stating face-to-face interaction and communication promote language proficiency" (p. 30). Cameron points out that service-learning is in alignment with "Vygotsky's view (1978) that language is rooted in a sociocultural environment in which meaning is constructed through interaction" (p. 57). Avineri (2015) found that service-learners experience "nested interculturality, in which successive layers of culture complement and inform one another" and students move "within and among a range of cultures throughout their experience" (p. 207).

Following the research, it becomes clear that the service-learning context is ideal for language learners, as they are engaged in authentic exchange with multiple interlocutors, and using language to address real-world problems.

SERVICE-LEARNING & ESL INSTRUCTION

Perren & Wurr (2015) point to other benefits of service-learning for ELLs including positive outcomes in social, cognitive, and affective domains, learning about the target culture, academic writing skills, critical thinking skills, leadership, responsibility, time management, and patience. In sum, "service-learning can potentially enhance learners' knowledge and use of all language skills" (p. 3), but it can also facilitate personal growth and development as well. Service-learning can therefore contribute positively to the holistic development of ELLs, encompassing academic, professional, and personal domains.

Though a body of research and literature regarding service-learning in the ESL context has been established, Perren & Wurr (2015) encourage a flexible, piecemeal approach to building a service-learning curriculum for ELLs: "best practices must always be reinterpreted and adapted to fit the local context" (p. 9).

Perhaps the biggest challenge for ELLs in service-learning is the issue of proficiency: can ELLs with lower proficiency participate effectively in service-learning? And if so, how? Service-learning's focus on reciprocity creates a difficult question of when an ELL's language proficiency stops being a "burden" on a community partner. While there is no clear answer, the authors suggest that "project framing needs to be combined with reflection among community members about cross-cultural interactions so that community members can form generative relationships with ELL service-learners" (p. 12).

Ene & Orlando (2015) see value in ELLs with lower proficiency taking part in service opportunities pointing out that "studies have shown over time that ESL students can produce not only presentations or essays for their ESL class, but also deliverables for the community such as newsletters, brochures, or web pages for local organizations or philanthropic presentations" (p. 116). Thus, ESL students at any level can participate in service activities, however instructors and curriculum designers are advised to appropriately scaffold and differentiate service projects and activities based on learners' proficiency levels. Furthermore, it is suggested that just as instructors prepare their learners for the service-learning experience, care should be taken to spend time helping community partners prepare to work effectively with ELLs.

Ultimately, scholarly research and literature supports the incorporation of service-learning in ESL programming and instruction, but with the caveat that it is intentional, well thought-out, and properly scaffolded for learners. What each individual learner will gain from the experience will differ, but service-learning has something to offer everyone.

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"Service-Learning approaches and sociocultural theory share the fundamental view that it is imperative to create opportunities for language learners to interact with the target language and community outside of the classroom."

ESTELA ENE & HONNOR ORLANDO
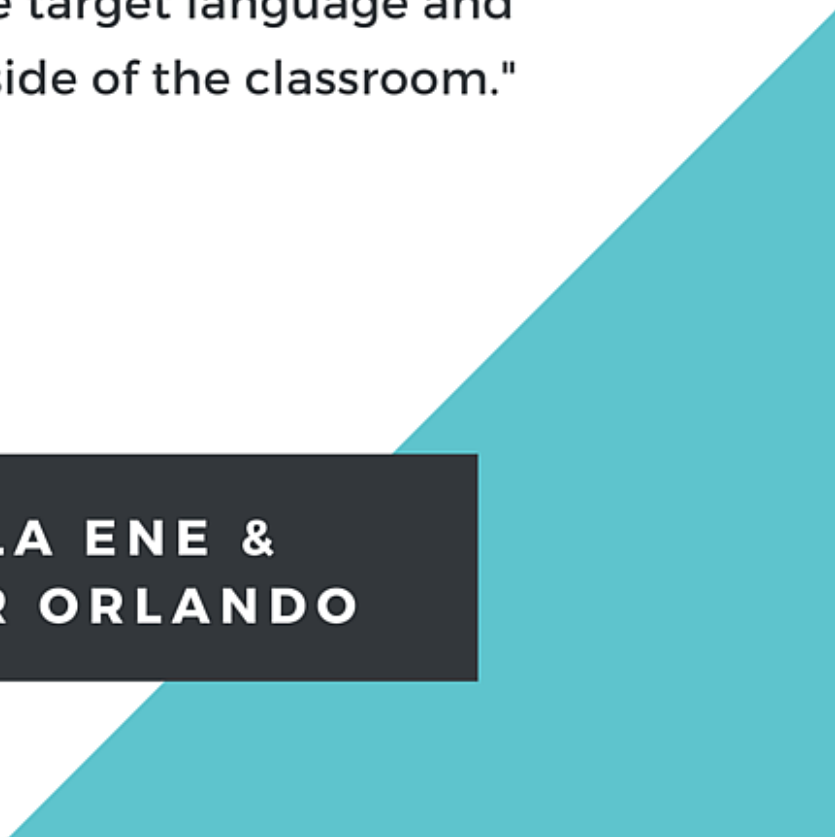
"Second language acquisition pedagogy supports the inclusion of a service component in foreign language teaching."

ERIN-KATE SOUSA

"By finding validation for the role they can play in the target language community, learners may feel more empowered and motivated to learn the target language, about society, or both."

**ESTELA ENE &
HONNOR ORLANDO**

SERVICE-LEARNING INSTITUTE'S RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALCP

The Service Learning Institute (SLI) at CSUMB recommends scaling opportunities for service based on English language proficiency, which would mean that lower-proficiency students would not complete a full-fledged service learning course, but would be introduced to concepts related to SL and could engage in service projects/opportunities. Reciprocity and exchange are so important in SL so there would likely be a large imbalance of power between recipient and provider of service, as well as a larger burden put on the community partners who will likely have to work harder to help students be able to engage in the service. Therefore we should match service opportunities with language proficiency levels accordingly--with the experience increasingly mirroring the SLI model as students' proficiency increases.

Service-learning in the ESL context has great potential for valuable Intercultural Communication (ICC) learning and exchange, as its core concepts, including in/equality, in/equity, service, identity, diversity, community, and civic engagement, are all culturally situated and bound. The SLI sees value in partnering with ALCP and is willing to help coordinate logistics and share their community connections that would be a good match for ALCP students.

SLI thinks that ALCP participation will benefit the community by having students with diverse backgrounds engage in service with the local community (e.g. local children meeting people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds) as it will provide both a unique opportunity to learn from and about each other. There is also potential for having "Service-Learning Buddies", in which ALCP students are paired with CSUMB students to engage in service together which could benefit both parties, in that the intercultural exchange spreads further.

ALCP INSTRUCTORS' INPUT

The six ESL instructors in the American Language and Culture Program (ALCP) gave their insights and opinions regarding implementing a service-learning curriculum in the ALCP program. All teachers agreed that a service-learning dimension could positively contribute to the students' experience, as service-learning provides an opportunity for and actively encourages authentic language exchange.

Conversely, instructors believe that a service-learning course would be potentially too challenging for lower-proficiency students, especially if community partners are not practiced in interacting with English language learners. Instructors stressed that they did not want to place undue burden on the community partners and suggested a modified and appropriately-scaffolded service experience for students at the lower levels of the program.

Whereas some instructors believe service-learning should be its own unique course, others were of the opinion that elements of service-learning can be incorporated either into the Language Lab course or into the American Culture special topic course. The Lab and Culture courses often include elements of volunteerism and community engagement; however, if incorporated as a separate course, the subject of service would necessarily be the instructional focus, and would not have to compete with other topics already covered in these courses.

Regardless of how it is implemented, all instructors stressed the importance of expectation setting, scaffolding, and taking the requisite time to explain the processes, so as to set students up for successful and meaningful service experiences.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SERVICE-LEARNING IN ALCP

Taking all available information into account, it is recommended that ALCP:

Curriculum

- Develops a fully-fledged service-learning curriculum for its conditionally admitted and advanced proficiency (level 4) students
- Incorporates relevant service-learning topics and accompanying service projects and opportunities into the existing curriculum for students at levels 1-3 in semester-long programs
- Does not incorporate service-learning topics or projects for short-term summer programs

Collaboration

- Collaborate with the Service Learning Institute with regards to identifying and establishing connections with their extensive list of community partners
- Coordinate with the SLI and the International Club to organize a service-learning buddy program
- Work with the SLI to develop a service day or event on campus for lower proficiency students
- Identify and invite relevant persons and organizations to be guest speakers in ALCP classrooms

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