Chapter 6
The Value of Service-Learning in L2 Teacher Preparation: Engaging in Diverse Contexts

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ABSTRACT

Service-learning (SL) constitutes a particularly effective vehicle for engaging pre-service teachers with ELs during their university-level coursework, mostly due to the nature of SL that addresses the potential cultural and linguistic mismatch between teachers and learners in today’s school systems by encouraging future educators to engage with the communities of their students long before they enter the teaching profession. This chapter describes four cases that demonstrate how second language (L2) teacher education programs utilize service-learning (SL) to engage pre-service teachers in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts through the lens of pedagogy of particularity. Each case presents four consistent key principles of service-learning: course content, community collaboration, integrated assignments that guide student engagement, and reflective practices that culminate the SL experience.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes four cases demonstrating how second language (L2) teacher education programs utilize service learning (SL) to engage pre-service teachers in diverse cultural and linguistic contexts through the lens of Pedagogy of Particularity (Kumaravadivelu, 2003). Each case presents four key principles of service learning: course content, community collaboration, integrated assignments that guide...
student engagement, and reflective practices that culminate the SL experience. Qualitative data from this comparative case study include archived assignments, field notes, and analytic memos to provide evidence and additional support for the potential benefits and challenges of SL in L2 teacher preparation, as well as guidance for how similar programs may be implemented in other contexts.

In synthesizing themes common to all four SL experiences, authors discuss implications, and argue for an increased commitment to expanding traditional SL models to incorporate critical approaches instead of transmissive models of SL, wherein well-meaning pre-service teachers are the main providers of service while English learning (EL) students are situated as its passive recipients (Curtis & Curran, 2015). Instead, the authors promote notions of community funds of knowledge, as well as advocacy for and by diverse language groups (Fenner, 2013; González, Moll & Amanti, 2006). By participating in programs that find ways to tip this balance, pre-service teachers are positioned to see EL students not through a lens of deficits, i.e., lacking English language proficiency, but in contrast, through a lens of assets, i.e., as individuals with diverse cultural and linguistic repertoires.

BACKGROUND

EL students are the largest rising demographic in United States’ (US) K-12 public schools, at approximately 5 million students, or 10% of all school age children (Ruiz-Soto, Hooker, & Batalova, 2015). While ELs are heavily concentrated in states such as Texas, California, New York, and Illinois, certain segments of the Midwest and the South of the US have also experienced high levels of EL student growth. With the recent migrant crisis, Europe is experiencing similar trends, with 3.8 million immigrants to European Union Countries in 2014 alone (Eurostat, 2016). As English is the most common foreign language taught in Europe, these classroom demographic changes have implications for English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers, many of whom, like their US counterparts, can no longer expect to work with homogenous, monolingual student populations. Despite these high numbers, many pre-service and in-service teachers are underprepared to work with EL students in both English as a second language (ESL) and EFL contexts, and remain unfamiliar with best practices to effectively teach culturally and linguistically diverse learners (Howard, 2006).

In addition to school-age children in formal classroom contexts, millions of adults world-wide are also learning English. Some use English for integrative purposes (such as immigrants and refugees), some seek participation in a globalized culture, and still others have instrumental business, academic, or political purposes for English learning (Birch, 2014). Multiple organizations place the number of people learning English globally at around 1.5 billion people, with approximately 375 million of them learning in ESL contexts, and 750 million in EFL contexts (Beare, 2017). While most L2 teacher education programs--sometimes known as Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) programs--prepare teachers to work with EFL and ESL learners, the teacher knowledge base for working with adult newcomers who are at emerging levels of literacy in non-formal settings goes beyond the core of most TESOL teacher education programs. Vinogradov (2013) presents a model for the teacher knowledge base that connects early literacy instruction to four key areas of knowledge: 1) teaching, 2) the immigrant and refugee experience, 3) language and language acquisition, and 4) adult learning. In preparing teachers for this context, teacher educators enhance the educational experience for adult newcomers and simultaneously empower the teachers as they join in the co-construction of knowledge for this important work.