JOURNAL OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

ISSN: 2162-6685

THE JOURNAL OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION IS A PUBLICATION OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA AT LAFAYETTE. JSLHE IS AN ONLINE, INTERNATIONAL, PEER-REVIEWED JOURNAL FOR THE DISSEMINATION OF ORIGINAL RESEARCH REGARDING EFFECTIVE INSTITUTIONAL-COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS. OUR PRIMARY EMPHASIS IS TO PROVIDE AN OUTLET FOR SHARING THE METHODOLOGIES AND PEDAGOGICAL APPROACHES THAT LEAD TO EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY-IDENTIFIED OUTCOMES. THIS PUBLICATION IS SUBSCRIPTION-FREE WITH A REVIEW BOARD MADE UP OF VARIOUS ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES OF THE MEMBER INSTITUTIONS OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LOUISIANA SYSTEM AS WELL AS OTHER NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY ACCREDITED COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES AND AFFILIATED ORGANIZATIONS.

JSLHE Volume 20 Summer 2025

Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education
A Publication of the University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Volume 20 Summer 2025
ISSN: 2162-6685

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Why Are We Doing This?

David Yarbrough
Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education

I believe that it was early summer, 48 years ago that I volunteered to work with the Appalachian Service Project (https://asphome.org) with a handful of friends. We had no idea what we were getting into.

ASP believes all people should be able to live in affordable, safe, and sanitary housing. Shelter is a basic human need impacting all areas of life for families. ASP addresses this basic need so families no longer need to worry about leaky roofs, soft floors, or unsafe porches and stairs. [from https://asphome.org/about/]

That summer gifted me with perspective. I was not and am not a stranger to Appalachia. My mother's family stretches from Knoxville to Boone. The smaller communities of Newport, Mountain City, and Shouns are filled with relatives and others who are accustomed to the beauty of those mountains. The people are rich and poor, educated and not, prideful and humble, and just like similar insulated communities all over the world. I've walked in the mountains, tasted fresh food and homebrew, and discovered that I am more alike than different from everyone. I discovered hard work and the dignity of living in and relying on a community. Not my own hard work – but rather what I witnessed was the everyday feature of the families with which we worked.

Today, almost 50 years later, I still see the resilience of communities and the value of introducing my own students to work they have often not even imagined. But now, I'm getting tired. I'm getting tired of week after week, year after year, still describing what so many don't want to see in their own communities. The basic need for safe shelter, for clean water, and for the respect deserving of everyone. At what point in our individual and

FORWARD

David Yarbrough is a Professor of Human Development and Family Science, the Dean of Community Service, and the Head of Department for Sociology, Anthropology, Human Development & Family Science at the University of Louisiana at Lafayette

community development do we come to insist that there are those who are undeserving of care. From what I can tell, every major religion still on Earth instructs us to care for others without condition. Public and private institutions of education guide us through critical exercises that challenge us to imagine solutions to the problems that plague our communities. But then at some point, our interpretations twist simple instructions to allow for exclusion. Living a good life does not have to be so complicated. It's just a matter of working to do the next right thing. There is a leader in my home community that instructs us to “breathe deep and love wide.” Maybe that’s enough.

Welcome to this, the 20th edition of the Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education. I’m glad that we’ve made it this far. Given the uncertainty of support for platforms such as this, I hope that there will be more. Before this edition, the JSLHE had published 160 articles from authors, researchers, and teachers representing institutions of higher learning from 21 countries. 160 manuscripts accessed over 41,000 times between 2016 (when access metrics began) and 2025. The work shared in this edition is exciting, instructive, and impactful. I hope that you’ll enjoy the work of these authors as much as I have and, please, keep up your good work. Breathe deep, you’re not alone.

Benefits of Service-Learning in a Youth Development Program

Alice H. Hall
Georgia Southern University

ABSTRACT

Undergraduate students majoring in child and family development (CHFD) at a southeastern public doctoral/research university were required to complete 14 hours of service learning in a local after school program as part of the course requirements in a class titled *Youth Development.* The course is a required course for majors and reviews research, theory, and practice as they relate to the development of children ages 6 to 18 years as well as planning and implementing developmentally appropriate youth programming. A two-page survey measure called the *Benefits of Academic Community Engagement (BACE)* developed by Miller, Mehta, and McCauley (2018) was used to assess the benefits of the service-learning requirement in this course. Findings from this three-year (six semester) study found evidence in support of service learning as means of hands-on pre-services learning experiences with children ages 6-12 in an undergraduate class (N=219).

Service-learning requirements in higher education courses have been found to be a positive educational experience in a variety of disciplines and at many different institutions of higher education. Service-learning is also known as one form of High Impact Practices (HIPs) which Kuh (2008) found to be beneficial to college students from a variety of backgrounds. In addition, in 2006 the Carnegie Foundation added community engagement as an elective classification emphasizing the value of community engagement in higher education. The goal of service learning and community engagement is for students to take the knowledge they learn in a course and implement it in their communities. Research on service learning has found that it gives students the opportunity to apply course knowledge skills and acquire awareness about their discipline and community (Desmond et al., 2011; Hildenbrand & Shultz, 2015; Jenkins A. & Miller et al, 2018, Sheehey,P., 2011; Rockenbach et al., 2014; Stringfellow & Edmonds-Benred, 2013; Weiler et al., 2013; Wilson, 2008). Service learning positively impacts the academic knowledge of students as well as impacting their personal development and community understanding. Both learning outcomes are beneficial to the overall educational experiences of undergraduate students.

The research on service learning as a strategy for developing civic engagement and community awareness has been documented to be effective (Weiler et al., 2013). In addition, the Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) has published two books on service-learning research: Volume 2A of *Research on Service Learning: Conceptual frameworks and Assessments* focuses on Students and Faculty (Clayton et al, 2012) and Volume 2B of *Research on Service Learning: Conceptual frameworks and Assessments* focuses on Communities, Institutions, and Partnerships (Clayton et al,

2013). The authors of both volumes bring perspectives from a variety of disciplines to aid in the research on the impact of service learning to meet community needs. Civic engagement and community awareness are important, but in disciplines such as CHFD it is also valuable for students to get hands-on experience with children and youth.

Teacher Education Programs

The mission of higher education laboratory early childhood programs has remained consistent over time and are an important, if not vital, component in the education of early childhood preservice teachers and professionals. University laboratory programs have strived to be higher quality model programs that are implementing the most current trends in early childhood education as well as meeting the new challenges and changing needs of children. Unfortunately, most elementary, middle school, and high school laboratory schools no longer exist on university campuses but thankfully early childhood laboratory schools at some universities have survived budget cuts and criticism. Therefore, students are getting valuable pre-service experiences and training with young children but no longer with school-age children and older. Laboratory childcare programs provide students the opportunity to apply theory to practice with children ages six weeks to five years in a supervised classroom environment. Students get hands-on experiences in infant, toddler, and preschool classrooms with related written assignments and a periodic evaluation of skills.

Due to the lack of laboratory schools for elementary school children service learning in undergraduate courses can provide hands-on pre-service experience with school-age children and research on these requirements have found positive results. In a study by Fleck et al. (2017) on service learning a control group was given the course content but did not participate in service learning at a Boys and Girls Club, the non-control group was given the course content and participated in service learning at a Boys and Girls Club. Findings indicated that the service-learning students performed significantly better on their exams and reflected more in-depth course knowledge assessed via written assignments. In another study, Whitley, et al. (2017a), “findings included the development of leadership, self-confidence, self-understanding, self-efficacy, and tolerance, along with increased sensitivity to and awareness of diversity and reduction in stereotypical beliefs” (p. 426). In another discipline, Fisher et al. (2017) found that therapeutic recreation students perceived service learning to be academically and personally beneficial when compared to non-therapeutic recreation students. Students benefitted from the service-learning component of a course which allowed students to gain experience and practice skills learned in course work preparing them to be future recreational therapists.

Teacher education research indicates service-learning as an effective means of preparing pre-service teachers for future classroom settings (Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Chen, 2004; Legette, 2018; Nelson, 2013). In addition to teacher education program, undergraduates in fields like child and family development, psychology, and social work can benefit from service-learning experiences. McElwain et al (2016) had undergraduate service-learning students implement a relationship education program for high school students in their community. The relationship education program was beneficial to the high school students but also enhanced the student’s professional development and hands-on learning. In another study, Legette (2018) was concerned

by a lack of preservice Pre-K experiences in his music teacher education degree program, so he created a service-learning experience in Pre-K settings for students in an elementary music education teaching methods course. College students were required to spend one hour a week in a community childcare program for a semester. Undergraduate students taught a variety of music related activities each week and then reflected on the experience by writing two papers. The children in the childcare centers gained music education experiences that they otherwise might not have had access to otherwise.Three of the centers were in low-income neighborhoods. The result was a valuable learning experience that benefited the community, the children, and the preservice music teachers.

In a study by Mergler et al (2017) researchers explored the value of service learning on preservice teachers in Australia looking specifically at the need for preservice teachers to embrace and understand diversity. There is increased emphasis in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in many disciplines. The repeated measure design found that fourth year pre-service teachers reported significantly higher levels of confidence in supporting diversity, willingness to be inclusive, and were more prepared to teach diverse students after the service-learning requirement. The students had other coursework related to teaching children from diverse backgrounds, but the pre- and post-test design did quantify growth in the one semester that the pre-service teachers had the unity on inclusive education and the required service-learning experience. Working with diverse populations of children is the goal and reality for becoming an inclusive teacher and university laboratory schools are not always representative of a diversity in SES, race, or ethnicity.

In the discipline of Child and Family Development (CHFD), one goal of the undergraduate major is to educate students to teach in a childcare classroom or a Pre-K classroom. The undergraduate students majoring in CHFD are required to take three courses designed to teach about development and teaching methods and skills from conception through the first five years of life and apply them in the university laboratory childcare center where students get hands-on experience with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. A study by Hall et al. (2017) completed at this same institution assessed the effectiveness of the three-course sequence and found that the laboratory classes were an effective means of promoting understanding and developmentally appropriate practices in undergraduate students. While laboratory schools are a more controlled environment since they are units within a university, it is hypothesized that service-learning experiences could have the same benefit for undergraduate students working with a different age group. It is one thing to lecture on how to work with young children, school-age children, the elderly, or children with special needs but more beneficial to provide students with hands-on experiences with these populations via service-learning opportunities.

In addition to early childhood jobs, a degree in CHFD prepares students to work at summer camps, with after school programs, or in 4-H. To address the lack of hands-on experiences with school age children at this institution, a service-learning requirement was added to a course examining the development of children ages 6 to 18 titled *Youth Development*. Without a laboratory school, service learning at local after school programs has been a valuable pre-service learning experience for undergraduate students.

The Service-Learning Requirement in Youth Development

Youth Development is a required major course and can also be used as one of the course choices for the CHFD minor. The course description states that "this course reviews research, theory, and practice as they relate to the physical, cognitive, language, aesthetic, and social and emotional development of children ages 6 to 18 years. Emphasis will be on current issues that relate to these years and planning and implementing developmentally appropriate youth programming." *Youth Development* requires students to complete 14 hours of service learning in one of three after school program settings in the community. Community engagement knowledge is gained by understanding the need for after-school care in communities. While all communities have public schools not all have after school programs which are operated by a variety of organization across the United States. After a presentation from the site directors, students chose the site to complete their hours. While at the site, students were not there to observe but to interact with the children/youth in that program and serve as an additional member of the staff/child ratio. The learning element is applying and critiquing what students have learned in *Youth Development* and other CHFD course content with their experience at the site. One site in the study was no longer a service-learning option after the Spring Semester of 2017. The three sites have different missions and serve children from a variety of socio-economic backgrounds. One program was free, another subsidized by donations and fundraising, one funded by tuition, the third funded by parent tuition.

After the students selected a site and had a favorable background check, they could begin their hours. The instructor made sure students enrolled in the course know they must have a background check and time in their course schedule between 2:00 and 6:00 in the afternoon since their site is an after-school program prior to enrolling in the course. The days of the week are flexible but not the times of the day. This course is offered online in the summer to accommodate students whose schedule does not work to complete the hours or if students do not have transportation. The instructor does encourage carpooling and none of the sites are further than 10 miles from campus.

Using the definition of service learning stated earlier, the service element is for the students to serve as an additional member of the staff/child ratios at each site. The **l**earning element is applying and critiquing what students have learned in *Youth Development*. From the first day of class, the focus is on how to work with school-age children in a youth development program, specifically an after-school program. Lectures on a high quality after school environment, a daily schedule, building relations with children, behavior management skills, and program planning are embedded into the course outline in addition to lectures on the physical, cognitive, and social/emotional development of school-age children. The goal is for students to be knowledgeable and prepared as they complete their service-learning hours. To assess course content learning, three two-page reflection papers were assigned. The students were also required to plan and conduct a developmentally appropriate activity at their chosen site. The course content coincides with the reflection papers' due dates and prepares the students for what they will experience at the site. There can be some anxiety for students who have little experience with this age group and/or have not been in an after-school program. The first paper reflects their first impression of the site and their

goals for the service-learning experience. The second paper asked the student to reflect on an observed behavior challenge with children and critique how it was handled. The final paper asks students to use the readings and course content to critique the program: indoor space, outdoor space, daily schedule, and program elements. These papers were given to each site after the semester was over with student names removed to aid in program improvement. Without a laboratory school, service learning at local after school programs has been a valuable pre-service learning experience for undergraduate students. The focus of this study was to assess the undergraduate students' perceptions of the benefits of the required hands-on experiences with youth in a local after school programs using a scale developed at another university.

Method

Participants

During the last week of classes every semester, an IRB approved a consent letter, and the written survey were passed out to students enrolled in the course from Fall 2015-Fall 2017. The researcher explained that the survey was designed to assess the effectiveness of service learning and would not have any impact on individual course grades. Students were given the right to take the survey or to refrain. No incentives for participating in the research were given. If students chose not to participate, they were asked to sit quietly in their seat until the survey was completed and collected.

Measure

At Sam Houston State University, Miller, Mehta, and McCauley (2018) developed a measure called the Benefits of Academic Community Engagement (BACE) scale to assess student's perceptions of growth in social responsibility and personal development of the Office of Academic Planning and Assessment at their university. The faculty developed the instrument and then conducted three studies of the instrument's validity and reliability. The goal was to create an instrument that could be used by a variety of disciplines and was easy to administer. The results of the three studies yielded an instrument with strong reliability and validity and a factor analysis yielded two factors they called personal development and social responsibility. The authors gave permission for the scale to be used at this southeastern public doctoral/research university.

The two-page survey has 20 questions using a Likert scale from 1-5, with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. The second page asked demographic and classification questions. In addition, students were also asked to use three words to describe what they liked most about the service-learning part of the course and three words to describe what they liked least about the course. Because these researchers were focused on the pre-service teaching skills and after school programming, questions #13, #14, #15, and #18 were changed to assess content specific to *Youth Development* to measure gains in course content as well as personal development and social responsibility. For example, Question #14 reads "This course helped me understand effective behavior management techniques to use with youth," and Question #15 reads, "The service-learning aspect of this course showed different types of youth

development programs." These four questions address the skills and knowledge needed to work with school-age children in a youth development program and were part of the course content. The demographic questions were summarized, and the mean scores were calculated for each of the 20 questions. The three words listed were grouped by similar answers. A one-way ANOVA was run to assess any meaningful differences between each after school site.

Results

Of the 236 students enrolled in *Youth Development* from the Fall 2015 to the Fall 2017, 176 surveys were completed (a 75% return rate). The participants included 2 males and 174 females, 145 (82%) of the students fell into the ages of 19 to 22. Among the students, 61.36% were White Caucasian, 32.39% were African American, 3.41% were Non-White Hispanic, 2.27% identified as Other, and 0.57% were Asian-American. This is not like the demographics of the student population at the university but representative of the major. The students were primarily (67%) CHFD majors. The mean scores on the 20 survey questions ranged from 3.09-4.66 (on a 5-point scale). The overall mean was 4.07 on all 20 questions, indicating an overall positive experience. The lowest mean score was Question #1 which talked about being uneasy and the lower mean indicates that students were not uneasy. The instructor tells them to go in pairs if they are apprehensive. On the non-course specific questions, the higher mean scores were for Questions #7, understanding differences, M=4.31 (SD=1.08), Question #12 applying the subject matter to the "real world", M=4.29 (SD=.93), and Question #16 becoming more aware of the needs in the university town, M=4.31 (SD=.99).

While it is challenging to sum up pre-service teaching skills with only four questions, the four given do reflect basis skills needed to be a pre-service youth development program leader or teacher. The means for the four questions changed to reflect the *Youth Development* course were M=4.34 (SD=.88) for Questions #13, understanding developmentally appropriate youth programming and planning, M=4.29 (SD=.96) for Question #14, understanding effective behavior management techniques, M=4.13 (SD=1.04) for Question #15, different types of youth development programs, and M=4.22 (SD=1.08) Question #18, using the skills developed in the course in future career. On a 5-point Likert scale, the meant scores were high and affirm that most students perceived themselves to be learning and applying course content at the service-learning youth development program. The highest means and smaller standard deviations were related to youth programming and behavior management techniques which are basic and necessary skills to work in a youth development program (see Table 1).

Table 1.

Benefits of Service Learning in Youth Development Course

Question	M	SD
1. At the beginning of the semester, I was uneasy about the service-learning component of the course.	3.08	1.28
2. Participating in the community helped enhance my *leadership* skills.	4.07	1.02
3. The service-learning I did in this course helped me *analyze problems.*	4.10	1.06
4. The service-learning I did in this course helped me to *think critically.*	3.95	1.04
5. The service-learning in this course helped me to develop *workplace skills.*	3.97	1.09
6. The service-learning in this course has made me *more employable.*	4.06	1.05
7. The service-learning in this course assisted me in defining the *type of work* I want to do in the future.	3.84	1.08
8. Participation in the community helped enhance my *communication skills.*	4.04	0.99
9. The service-learning in this course helped me to develop *organizational skills.*	3.63	1.13
10. The service-learning in this course helped me to connect *theory with practice*.	3.93	1.07
11. Working in the community helped me to define my personal *strengths and weaknesses.*	4.04	0.99
12. The service-learning in this course helped me to apply the subject matter in a “real world” situation.	4.29	0.93
*13. This course helped me understand developmentally appropriate youth programming and planning.	4.34	0.88
*14. This course helped me understand effective behavior management techniques to use with youth.	4.29	0.96
*15. The service-learning aspect of this course showed different types of youth development programs.	4.13	1.04
16. The service-learning aspect of this course helped me to become more aware of the needs in *my community.*	4.22	0.99
17.This course helped me understand differences (i.e., cultural, racial, economic, etc.) that exist in our community.	4.31	1.08
*18. I probably will use the skills I developed in this course in my future career.	4.22	1.08
19.I would recommend this course to a friend, specifically because of the service-learning aspect.	3.62	1.34
20. At the *end* of the semester, I thought that the service-learning aspect of this course was valuable.	4.21	1.09

*Questions revised to fit content in this course.

Of the four questions that were revised to reflect course content, total (*n*=176) mean scores for each agency were: Site A 4.61, Site B 4.47, and Site C 4.17. A one-way ANOVA between agencies indicated no significant differences, therefore no matter which agency students chose they had similar experiences which is important to the instructor. All three sites resulted in the same experience, so no one group of students gained more from one site than the other. This was important to ensure that students at one site were not getting different experiences than the students at another site.

The two open-ended survey questions asked for three separate words indicating what they liked most and disliked most about the experience. The top four most common words listed as liked were *Children, Experience, Relationships, and Fun*. These words indicate the first and foremost the undergraduate students enjoyed their time with the children. This is a frequent comment on the course student ratings of instruction. The instructor encourages the students to build relationships with the children and the children always ask them when they are coming back. The instructor emphasizes that fun is not the goal, but education and enrichment are the goals of after school programs, but it is positive that the students enjoy the experience and call it fun. The top four most common words listed as disliked were *Time-consuming, Unorganized, Behavior*, *staff* (see Table 2). Spending 14 hours during a semester in an after-school program requires planning and time management skills so it was not surprising that students mentioned time consuming. After school programs are active, loud, programs, which are important since the children have been sitting in a classroom all day, but students find them a little chaotic. Challenging behaviors exist and the students are developing effective behavior management techniques which is why there is a question about behavior management. Since it was an open-ended question there were a wide variety of answers and only 9 students did not answer these two questions, Overall, top four words listed are not surprising and consistent with the Students Rating of Instruction Survey (SRI) administered by the university every semester. While the SRI information was not part of the IRB approved study, the SRI reports have consistently listed working with the children in service learning as a benefit and the time involved to complete the hours as a hinderance.

Table 2.

Words Used to Describe Service-Learning

Answer	Frequency
Most Liked	
Children	85
Relationships	59
Fun	49
Relationships	45
Most Disliked	
Time-consuming	94
Unorganized	46
Behavior	44
Staff	40

The service-learning experience helped the undergraduate students apply the course content to the “real world” and helped the students become more aware of the needs in the local community. Some students report having lived in communities where there are no after-school programs. After school programs are vital for all communities since children need them before, after, and full day care when schools are not in session. This experience gave the students a sense of what the local community provided especially compared to their home community, The experience also helped the student understand cultural, racial, and socio-economic differences in the local community. Another important outcome is that students learn about the elements of high quality after school care and realize differences in quality of care.

Discussion

The 20-question survey assessed the goals of service learning in higher education and specifically this course content. The findings indicate that the service-learning requirement in *Youth Development* is beneficial to students prior to graduation, much like the positive research findings from teacher education programs (Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Chen, 2004; Legette, 2018; Mergler et al, 2017, Nelson, 2013). When the instructor first started requiring service learning in 2010, the service-learning and the HIPS terms were very new, and the primary goal was for students to interact with school-age children. When the researcher learned of the BACE survey it provided a measure to assess student learning other than grades and SRIs. These results found that the service-learning requirement contributed to the students’ academic knowledge of youth development and their personal development based on the questions asked in the survey. Their short answer statements indicated that the students benefitted from the relationships that they built with the children at the afterschool programs. CHFD

majors want to work with children professionally, so it makes sense that they enjoy getting to know and mentoring the children who attend the program. The children bonded quickly with the college students and asked them frequently when they were coming back again so the extra adults benefited the youth enrolled in the program.

In addition, the students were able to critique the way programs were organized and the ways challenging children's behavior was managed. The word "unorganized" appeared in the disliked question. This was not surprising since after school programs are busy and full of lots of social interaction. School-age children are learning rules, pro-social behavior, and test limits. Managing behaviors in a youth development program involves learning skills and take practice to perfect. High quality programs are not an extension of the school day so they can appear a bit chaotic at times. This course adds to student's experience since it is the only class in the child and family development major that offers hands on experience with children 6–12-year-olds. Students enrolled in the course gained a better understanding of high-quality after-school programming and behavior management techniques. In addition, students believe this course will be beneficial to their future careers.

One major limitation of this study is that the results are based on descriptive statistics and not inferential statistics. In addition, all the information was self-reported by the students. The study could be strengthened using control groups and pre and post test data. Ryan (2017) used control groups to assess the student learning of students who completed 10 hours of service-learning at a nursing home, assisted living facility, or hospice location. She found a significant increase in aspects of social responsibility, empathy, and community and personal involvement in the service-learning group but not in the control group. This was a gerontology related course which added to student's understanding of our older adult population by working with seniors in a variety of settings in the same community at the same university in the present study. A future study could get IRB approval to analyze the students' required three reflection papers which could contribute to the literature on what students learn by completing the service-learning hours.

Even without a control group and pre and post test data these findings support the importance of service-learning as means of pre-service experiences with children ages 6-12. In addition, this study does contribute to the literature supporting the use of service-learning in the discipline of Child and Family Development for pre-service teachers. Laboratory school experiences and student teaching in K-12 schools have been used for many years but with emphasis and support of service-learning and high-impact practices in higher education more disciplines will be likely to use community organizations and services as part of the pedagogy. This literature review included the implementation of service learning in teacher education but also a therapeutic recreation, sport science, and psychology. More research needs to be done to understand the pedagogy of service learning in higher education courses and making sure students have the time and resources to get in the community. This institution did provide van transportation to sites and the instructor encouraged carpooling, but some students still struggled to get to sites. The course is offered in the summer and does not require the service-learning component to aid students who cannot fit it in their schedules.

References

Chambers, D. J. & Lavery, S. (2012). Service learning: A valuable component of pre-service teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education. 27(4), 128-137.*

Chen, D. (2004). The multiple benefits of service-learning projects in pre-service teacher education. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin.* Austin, TX: Delta Kappa Gamma Society International.

Clayton, P.H., Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A., (2012) *Research on Service Learning: Conceptual frameworks and Assessments.* Volume 2A. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing LLC.

Clayton, P.H., Bringle, R. G., & Hatcher, J. A., (2013). *Research on Service Learning: Conceptual frameworks and Assessment.* Volume 2B. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing LLC.

Desmond, K.J., Stahl, S.A., and Grahm, M.A. (2011). Combining service learning and diversity education. *Making Connections to Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cultural Diversity. (13)1.*

Fisher, E.E., Sharp, R.L. & Bradley, M.J. (2017). Perceived benefits of service learning: A comparison of collegiate recreation concentrations. *Journal of Experiential Education.* 40(2) 187-201. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825917700922

Fleck, B., Hussey, H. D., & Rutledge-Ellison L. (2017). Linking class and community: An investigation of service learning. *Teaching of Psychology.* 44(3) 232-39.

Hall, A. H., Maurer, T.W., Peden, J.G. (2017). Assessing birth to age 5 teaching methods at a university laboratory school. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education. 31(2),* p. 270-280. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02568543.2016.1273286

Hildenbrand, S.M. & Shultz, S.M. (2015). Implementing service learning in pre-service teacher coursework. *Journal of Experiential Education. 83(3).* *https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825915571748*

Kuh, G.D. (2008). *High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter.* AAC&U, Washington, D.C.
Jenkins, A., & Sheehey, P. (2011). A checklist for implementing service-learning in higher education. *Journal of Community Engagement & Scholarship.* 4(2).

Legette, R. M. (2018). Preparing preservice music teachers to teach in PreK setting through the use of service learning. *Music Educators Journal 105(1)* 28-32. https://doi.org/10.1177/0027432118784364

McElwain, A., Finnegan, V, Whittaker, Q, Kerperlman, J., Adler-Baeder, F, & Duke, A., (2016). Evaluation and lessons learned from an undergraduate service-learning course providing youth-focused relationship education. *Evaluation and Program Planning (58)* 116-124. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.evalprogplan.2016.06.002

Mergler, A., Carrington, S. B., Boman, P., Kimber, M. P., & Bland, D. (2017). Exploring the value of service-learning on preservice teachers. Australian Journal of Teacher Education (Online), 42(6), 69–80. https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/ielapa.952497301507861

Miller, L., Meheta, S., & McCauley, D. (2018). The BACE scale: A new measure for assessing the benefits of community engagement. *International Journal of Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement, 6*(1), Article 4.

Nelson, R. (2013). A model for using service-learning in teacher education programs. *US-China Education Review. ,* (1), 59-65.

Rockenbach, A. B., Hudson, T. D., & Tuchmayer, J. B. (2014). Fostering meaning, purpose, and enduring commitments to community service in college: A multidimensional conceptual model. *Journal of Higher Education,* 85(3). 312-338. http://dx.doi.org/10.1353/jhe.2014.0014

Ryan, R. (2017). Social and cognitive outcomes of service learning: Results from a pre-post control group comparison. *Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education.* 9(3), 19-34

Stringfelow, J., & Edmonds-Benred, C. (2013). Service learning: Extending the classroom to the community. *Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin.* 79(3). 42.

Weiler, L., Haddock, S., Zimmerman, T., Krafchick, J., Henry, K., & Rudisill, S. (2013). Benefits derived by college students from mentoring at-risk youth in a service-learning course. *American Journal of Community Psychology.* 52(3/4). 236-248. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10464-013-9589

Whitley, M. A., Walsh, D., Hayden, L., & Gould, D. (2017a). Narratives of experiential learning: students' engagement in a physical activity-based service-learning course. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education.* 36, 419-429. https://doi.org/10.1123/jtpe.2016-0141

Whitley, M.A., Farrell, K., Maisonet, C. & Hoffer, A. (2017b). Reflections on service-learning: Student experiences in a sport-based youth development course *Journal of Physical Education, Education & Dance*. 88:7, 23-29. https://doi.org/10.1080/07303084.2017.1340202

Wilson, M. N. (2008). *Service-learning benefits and opportunities for business programs*. Business Education

About the Author

Dr. Alice Hall is a Full Professor in Human Development and Family Science at Georgia Southern. She got her undergraduate degree in Child and Family Development from Virginia Tech, her master's in early childhood education from James Madison University, and a PhD in Human Development and Family Studies from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She has been on the faculty at Georgia Southern since the fall of 1999. She does conference presentations and consulting in the area of After School care and has done numerous training workshops for youth development program leaders. She completed a 6-year term on the Board of the National Afterschool Association (NAA) in 2015. Dr. Hall has been on numerous university committees including Faculty Development, Faculty Senate, Faculty Service, University Athletic Committee, Academic Standards, and SHE and CBBS Major Review Committees. Her extensive service has earned her the Service Distinction Award for the College of Behavioral and Social Sciences in 2021, the Award for Service in 2006 by the College of Health and Human Sciences, and the School of Human Ecology Award for Service in 2013. She is also a member of several honor societies: Omicron Delta Kappa, Kappa Omicron Nu, and Phi Upsilon Omicron.

Contact Information

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Alice H. Hall, Human Development and Family Science, School of Human Ecology, Georgia Southern University, P.O. Box 8034,Statesboro, GA 30460-8034, Email: alicehall@georgiasouthern.edu

Author Note

This project was a three-year evaluation completed with the help of three undergraduate students: Katherine Delp, Kristen Pritchett, and Victoria Harper

The Impact of Community Engaged Learning and Narrative Persuasion on Student Attitudes Towards the Death Penalty

Thomas R. Wagner
Xavier University

Jared S. Vornhagen
Harvard Law School

Grant Zentmeyer
The Children's Theatre of Cincinnati

Maria Vassanelli
Crohn's & Colitis Foundation, Southern Ohio Chapter

ABSTRACT

Attitude change on the death penalty is a highly relevant issue to both legal and public policy actors. The current study adopted a novel approach to student attitude change with exposure to first-person narratives through community engaged learning. Senior capstone students (*n* = 28) completed projects on the death penalty. Students submitted four journal reflection entries in three-week intervals, which captured attitude change and learning experiences over time. Coders examined 119,522 words and conducted thematic analysis. Participants who connected with a narrative experienced a significant reduction in death penalty support and increased advocacy intentions, attitude strength, and subject knowledge.

Public opinion on the death penalty in the United States has greatly fluctuated over the past century. The lowest point for death penalty support was in 1966, where Gallup recorded public support for the death penalty at 42%. After reaching a high of 80% in 1994, support for the death penalty stabilized in the past two decades (Newport, 2010). Pew Research Center (2021) recently reported 60% of Americans support the death penalty for those convicted of murder. This is despite 56% of those polled believing the death penalty is applied disproportionately to African Americans, 63% believing the death penalty does not deter serious crimes, and 78% believing we lack adequate safeguards to prevent an innocent person from being executed. One explanation states that 90% of those polled who supported the death penalty stated that the death penalty is morally justified, (Pew Research Center, 2021).

Attitude Strength

Attitude strength is a primary feature of attitudes and, consequently, some attitudes are more durable over time (Krosnick, 1988), more resistant to change during a persuasive appeal, and wield more influence on individuals' thinking and behavior. Attitude strength consists of various independent yet interconnected constructs such as attitude importance, accessibility, and certainty. Visser et al. (2003) examined the

relationship between participants' attitude certainty and attitude importance on political and social issues, considering cognitive-behavioral consequences. The results of three studies found attitude importance and attitude certainty both impacted individuals' attitude-expressive behaviors.

Theories of Attitude Change on the Death Penalty

The Marshall hypothesis, explicated by Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall in his 1972 opinion in *Furman v. Georgia*, states that the more the public learns about the facts and statistics related to outcomes from the death penalty the less they will support it. Specifically, three key tenets make up his hypothesis are:

> (1) support for capital punishment is inversely associated with knowledge about it (2) exposure to information about capital punishment produces sentiments in opposition to capital punishment (3) exposure to information about capital punishment will have no impact on those who support it for retributive reasons (Cochran & Chamlin, 2005, p. 573).

In a series of studies testing the Marshall Hypothesis through quasi-experimental methods in a classroom (Bohm, 1989; Bohm, 1990; Bohm et al., 1991; Bohm & Vogel, 1994), modest support was found for Justice Marshall's contention that people are uninformed about the death penalty and attitude change occurs as a result of becoming informed. Attitude change was best explained by students' learning of the risk of executing the innocent and racial bias in the death penalty's application. Studies supported Marshall's theory that those who favor the death penalty for retributive reasons will not be swayed by learned information. Bohm and Vogel (2004), in a follow up study more than ten years after their original set of studies, found students' attitude change towards the death penalty rebounded back to pre-test levels of support. In the follow-up questionnaires, participants erroneously remembered facts about the death penalty, such as the cost of execution compared to life imprisonment. This indicated either a loss in classroom-learned information or exposure to erroneous information on the topic in the years since the initial studies. More recent studies (Cochran & Chamlin 2005; Cox, 2013; Lee et al., 2014) added to the Marshall Hypothesis discussion, finding no significant change in attitude between students taught factual information about the death penalty compared to those not exposed to any educational material on the death penalty. The findings from the aforementioned Marshall Hypothesis research suggest mixed support, for the second tenet of the Marshall Hypothesis specifically: increased knowledge about the death penalty results in greater opposition to the death penalty. Strong support, however, was found for the first and third tenets.

According to the 2021 Pew Research Center polling, 27% of Americans today strongly favor the death penalty and 15% strongly oppose the death penalty. Consequently, the majority (58%) do not have strongly-held attitudes towards the issue, (Pew Research Center, 2021). Unnever et al. (2005b) systematically reviewed national opinion polls on the death penalty to assess weakly-held attitudes towards the death penalty. The authors proposed that these attitudes can result from a conflict of values within the individuals that hold them, such as the conflict between belief in retribution as

justice and belief in the sanctity of human life. This dissonance, they suggest, and the lack of true reconciliation between the conflicting values could lead a person to adopt a binary position, one held more weakly than attitudes fully aligned with the individual's values.

Narrative Persuasion

The use of fact-based narrative as a persuasive tool can influence attitudes and beliefs on a variety of issues (Fisher, 1984; Fisher, 1994). First person narratives are often most effective at influencing change in attitudes and behavior (Kauman & Libby, 2012). Fisher (1984, 1994) explicated the process of narrative persuasion, which posits that attitude change occurs by being psychologically "transported" into a narrative and reflecting on that narrative. Murrar and Brauer (2019) reviewed current empirical evidence supporting narrative as a persuasive tool to promote more positive attitudes towards people in diverse social groups. Murrar and Brauer concluded that there is sufficient evidence to warrant further research on the role of narrative in attitude change and examination of theoretical applications of narrative persuasion. Nabi and Green (2015) examined the role of narrative flow on narrative persuasion. They argued, "the desire for and the experience of emotional shifts influence key factors that underlie persuasive influence—message exposure, message processing (which includes transportation and identification), and post-message engagement and discussion," (Nabi & Green, 2015, p. 153).

Narrative Persuasion and the Death Penalty

A handful of studies examined the role of fictional and nonfictional portrayals of executions changing opinions on support and opposition to the death penalty. Participants viewing a televised execution displayed lower support for the death penalty after watching the execution compared to their pre-test levels of support, (Howells et al., 1995). Holbert et al. (2004) found that viewing news stories, police reality, and crime dramas increased participants' fears, subsequently increasing support for the death penalty. Studies exploring fictional media have found similar results. A pro-death penalty fictional drama increased support for the death penalty (Slater et al., 2006) and anti-death penalty fictional dramas and films decreased support for the death penalty, (Mutz & Nir, 2010; Till & Vitouch, 2012).

Rodriguez, (2017) reported that, after presented with the first-person narrative of a death row inmate, participants experienced a significant reduction in their support for the death penalty. This contrasts with those who were presented with a third-person narrative of the same story about the same inmate, narrated by the inmate's brother, did not significantly reduce support for the death penalty, (Rodriguez, 2017). In short, third-person accounts are less persuasive than first-person narratives. However, this study was limited to fictional narratives.

Impact of Community-Engaged Learning on Attitudes

Community-Engaged Learning (CEL) is an pedagogical practice that incorporates direct or indirect engagement with social issues. Three key components of CEL include preparation, action, and reflection (Cornell University, 2021). These

components are enacted as follows: students do background research on the community partner's mission and initiatives; they apply background knowledge on projects in collaboration with the partner; and they reflect on experiences through journaling, discussions, and other guided exercises. The goals of CEL include making connections between one's field of study and pertinent social issues, developing connections to those impacted by the issues, and becoming more informed citizens.

Student engagement in service learning can be a catalyst for attitude change (Seider et al., 2010). Over time, students working with a community partner develop greater self-insight and recognition of the importance and need of engaging in service work (Furze et al., 2011). When a sample of pre-service education students reflected in writing on community service, most perceptions were positive, including an increase in empathy, resilience, initiative, individual growth, and practitioner competency (Chambers & Lavery, 2012). Results from a multiyear comparison between CEL courses and traditional classroom lectures found "that students engaged in Community Service Learning, coupled with Team-Based Learning, learned and retained subject matter content more effectively, valued their CSL experience, and felt better prepared for real-world work," (Alexander, et al., 2020, p. 15). The reflection component of CEL serves as a critical component of attitude change (Ceo-DiFrancesco et al., 2019). Buxton and Ellison (2015) found that journaling has a significant impact on the depth and quality of student learning. Applied studies reported significant attitude change on poverty as a result of CEL and reflection (Caswell, 2018; Terry & Lockwood, 2020).

Current Study

Rodriguez (2017) is the only study that explored the use of a nonfictional first-hand narrative in changing attitudes on the death penalty, albeit indirectly by comparing third-person narratives to first-person narratives. In the current study, we directly examined how connection to a narrative impacts death penalty attitudes, strength, knowledge, and advocacy intentions. Building upon previous research with a classroom methodology (e.g., Bohm, 1989; Bohm, 1990; Bohm et al., 1991; Bohm & Vogel, 1994; Bohm & Vogel, 2004, Cochran & Chamlin, 2005; Cox, 2013; Lee et al., 2014) to examine attitude change on the death penalty, the current study explored the impact of exposure to narrative through CEL on death penalty attitudes. CEL is an effective approach to intertwine learning with direct experiences and, therefore, expose participants to first-person narratives from people involved with experiences impacted by the death penalty, including supporters, abolition advocates, death row inmates, and victims' families. The course also involved journal reflections, which served as the qualitative data later coded and analyzed in the study. Journals were collected at four stages of a semester enabling observers to learn the process of CEL on attitude change. This approach was intended to have high external validity, as attitude change was processed over four months and in real-life contexts. This created an effective methodology to examine the impact of narrative on attitudes towards the death penalty.

Based on the connection between narrative persuasion and their impact on attitudes, and in the context of CEL, the following research questions were posed:

RQ1: What is the impact of narrative on attitude position?

RQ2: What is the impact of narrative on attitude strength?

RQ3: What is the impact of narrative on knowledge?

RQ4: What is the impact of narrative on advocacy intentions?

Method

Participants

Senior Communication majors (*n* = 28) enrolled in a capstone course at a medium sized mid-western university worked on a CEL project, with the goal assisting a local organization to improve its advocacy efforts. Half of the participants identified as female (*n* = 14) and the other half identified as male (*n* = 14). Ages ranged from 21-23 (*M* = 21.82). A majority of participants identified as Caucasian/White (*n* = 23), while the remainder identified as Black/African American (*n* = 5).

The community partner for the course was a local advocacy organization whose mission includes promoting anti-death penalty messaging and action. Participants worked in six project groups, to improve the community partner's public communication effectiveness. Two groups worked on improving anti-death messaging to legislatures. Two groups developed effective message transmission via website and social media platforms. Two groups helped develop presentational speaking training for student advocates. All participants were exposed to death penalty statistics, first-person stories, and arguments. Additional course learning activities included meeting virtually with nonprofit advocacy volunteers and employees, discussing issues with classmates, and reading related scholarly research.

Students submitted a reflection journal, every three weeks, totaling four times during the semester. Students wrote a cumulative average of 4,268 words across the four journal entries. Journals focused on attitudes toward social issues and learning experiences. IRB requirements included all participants signing a consent form to allow anonymous analysis of their reflections following the conclusion of the course. Participants' reflection journal responses described their attitudes and experiences towards the issues. Specifically, participants were asked to respond to the following prompt, "Explain how the work you are doing relates to an ethical challenge and/or how your attitude about an issue related to the community partner has been impacted by this work."

Coding

Coding followed Thomas' (2006) methodology. This method requires three student coders to independently read all journals twice. After the first reading, coders developed coding criteria employing an open coding method to jointly establish

categories. Based on these categories, a coding form was developed and used by coders in their second, in-depth reading. The total word count of all journals was 119,522 and coders created 56 items to analyze on the second reading. Coding themes that emerged included attitude position, attitude strength, attitude knowledge, and advocacy intentions. Coding included: nominal (yes or no) primary categorizations; Likert scaling for items such as attitude strength and position; and continuous values for items such as the number of learned facts provided by the participants. Overall, interrater reliability was high (α = .91).

Journals were first separated into two categories: narrative connection and no narrative connection. Journals with an explicit connection to a first-person story throughout the three-month period fell into the former category. Journals without any explicit connection to a story were classified as "no narrative connection."

The primary categories coded included: students' *initial attitude position* was scored on a Likert scale from 1 to 5 (the position stated prior to taking the class) and for a students' final attitude position (the last position stated at the end of the semester; after students' community engaged experiences). Coders assigned a score of 1 to participants who expressed their position as strongly in favor of the death penalty, with a score of 5 for students articulating a position strongly opposed to the death penalty. For example, coders unanimously assigned a 1 to a student who expressed their initial attitude position in the following manner:

> *My attitudes towards the death penalty have always been very strong and standard in one direction. I have always considered the idea 'an eye for an eye' is right and fair. Meaning, those who kill others should not be able to live themselves. (Journal 9)*

A student scored a 5 unanimously for their final attitude position expressed the following beliefs:

> *After much reflection and communication with [nonprofit partner], along with reading personal stories of victims on death row, I now believe that executing an individual is never the answer even if some believe it is "easier" if that individual was no longer living. (Journal 2)*

Change in attitude strength was coded on a Likert scale of 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree* to the statement: "the journal author experienced a substantial change in attitude strength:" Journals scored as a 1 demonstrated little to no change in the students' passion about the death penalty. Journals scored as a 5 demonstrated a substantial increase or decrease in their passion toward the subject.

For *gain in knowledge*, coders responded to the statement, "the journal author demonstrated a significant amount of new knowledge/learning" by coding on a Likert scale of 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Journals scored as a 1 demonstrated little or no new knowledge (0-1 distinct facts/details/stories provided).

Journals scored as a 5 demonstrated a substantial amount of new knowledge (7 or more distinct facts/details/stories provided).

Advocacy intentions were assessed by coders using multiple scales. Coders responded to the question "did the journal author mention a change in behavior or planned change in behavior" with 1 = *yes* and 2 = *no*. For students who shared planned advocacy, coders rated the specificity of the students' planned advocacy, responding to the prompt "planned action/advocacy was specific" on a Likert scale of 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*. Finally, coders responded to the question "the journal author demonstrated a connection between social responsibility to society" on a Likert scale of 1 = *strongly disagree* to 5 = *strongly agree*.

Results

Impact of Narrative on Attitude Position

Students who identified with a story throughout their experience with the project had a significantly greater attitude change compared to those who did not connect with a story. Specifically, by the fourth journal entry, the impact of story was significant, t (26) = -3.31, p = .003, d = .5. Notably, there was no initial difference between these same participants' initial attitude positions, t (26) = -1.44, p = .163, d = .56, (see Table 1 for mean differences). All attitude change was in one direction: increased opposition to the death penalty and reduced support for the death penalty. As exhibited with this quote, students explicitly connected their attitude change to the personal stories they were exposed to:

> *It was in large part my interview with [death penalty abolition advocate] that fully convinced me to forever be against the death penalty. When I heard his personal story with [death row inmate] and got to read his transcript of the events that he presents as speeches at universities I was blown away by the mistreatment of this human being and a system that is inherently corrupt. It was very beneficial to hear about the racism within the court and prison system. (Participant 2)*

Additionally, one student explained their dramatic shift in attitude as a consequence of their learning about personal stories of death row exonerees:

> *If you had asked me senior year, or even freshman or sophomore year of college what my opinion of the death penalty was, I probably would have said that it's good and it gives the worst criminals exactly what they deserve. However, seeing [nonprofit partner's] work and being able to work on this myself, has led me to a pretty major realization...When I learned of the few men who have been placed on death row, and then after their execution they were somehow found innocent, it made my stomach turn. If they had just been holding those men in prison then they would have had the opportunity to see the sky and their families again, but instead we chose to take justice into our own hands and take everything they ever had away from them. (Participant 8)*

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Coded Attitude Positions for Narrative Connection

	Initial Attitude Position (1st Round Journals)	Final Attitude Position (4th Round Journals)
Narrative Absent	3.13 (.56)a	3.93 (.53)a
Narrative Present	3.36 (.50)a	4.55 (.47)b

Note: Attitude position was coded on a 1-5 scale; 5 = *strongly opposed* to the death penalty.

Means with common subscripts do not differ significantly.

Impact of Narrative on Attitude Strength

The coded data indicated a significant effect of narrative on participants' attitude strength, t (25) = 3.51, p = .002, d = .72. Several students connected the narratives with increased passion towards the subject:

> *I am also finding out that I am much more passionate about this issue than I ever could have believed several weeks ago. It only took the kindness of the people I have talked to along the way and their poignant stories to reach my breakthrough. (Participant 3)*

Impact of Narrative on Knowledge

Coders' assessments of the extent to which participants provided new knowledge throughout the four journals was significantly different for participants who identified with story (M = 2.70) compared to those who did not (M = 1.96), t (26) = -2.25, p = .033, d = .92) highlighted the importance of connecting to people affected by the issue stating "researching people is just as important as researching topics." Students explained their connection with a narrative spurred their desire to gather further information on the topic:

> *I am still against the death penalty but for different reasons. I had never considered specific scenarios, such as a mentally ill person being put to death. Attributing my attitude on the death penalty to facts and stories yields much stronger feelings. In other words, simply aligning my viewpoints with those of my religion does not require me to listen or do further research on the issue. (Participant 12)*

Impact of Narrative on Advocacy Intentions

A significant difference in planned behavior change was found when comparing participants who connected with a story against those who did not, χ^2 (1, N = 28) = 4.04, p = .044. Students explained their plans to advocate for death penalty reform, “I have looked at the hard work those at [non-profit partner] do and in myself, a fire has been ignited. I knew that the death penalty was wrong but now, I actually want to do something about it!” (Participant 2)

Most students (n = 24) provided a plan of action for advocacy. The specificity of planned advocacy of students who connected with a story was significantly greater compared to those who did not, t (22) = -2.47, p = .022, d = .85.

> *By searching through pages of statistics and listening to numerous stories of the lives of death row inmates and their loved ones, I have also formed the emotional, empathetic connection that leads to changed behavior and taking real action. After college, I hope to get involved in local organizations advocating for the end of the death penalty wherever I end up living. Even if I move to a state in which capital punishment has already been abolished, I want to stay involved in some way. (Participant 4)*

Students also expressed a desire to engage in related nonprofit work after graduation:

> *After this course, I would still like to be connected to this organization and get involved with them even if I am living back in [student’s home state]. In addition to becoming involved in this organization after college, maybe I could even find an organization similar to [nonprofit partner] in [home state]. (Participant 1)*

There was also a significant difference with explication of social responsibility to society between participants who connected with a story and those who did not, t (26) = -2.25, p = .033.

> *It has sparked self-reflection relating to the death-penalty personally, I just found this issue to hit home the most for me. The current system of killing people regardless of crime I find to be cruel and inhuman. When learning about certain cases [nonprofit partner] published on their website, it seems that many instances are against those most vulnerable in society, many of the minority in our country. So instead of not being involved it has made me realize that change is needed and I need to get out and advocate for change instead of relying on change to occur through the actions of others. (Participant 18)*

Discussion

The student journal data provide support for the use of narrative as an effective persuasive tool on the topic of the death penalty. Connection with a narrative was linked both quantitatively and qualitatively to significant attitude change, increased advocacy intentions, increased attitude strength, and increased subject knowledge. Furthermore, narratives yielded higher attitude strength and planned advocacy intentions, mirroring a relationship found between one’s attitude importance and attitude certainty with one’s

attitude-expressive behavior (Visser et al., 2003). The effectiveness of narrative could be attributed to the narratives' impact on multiple components of participants' attitudes.

This study contributes to a greater understanding of attitudes and communication on the death penalty, supporting previous research on the value of emotional connection to influence death penalty attitudes, (Unnever et al., 2005a; Unnever et al., 2005b). Unnever suggested raising empathy with those on death row reduces support for the death penalty. Narrative appeals may have increased empathy which led to the observed reduction in support for the death penalty. The Marshall Hypothesis is consistent with our finding, with participants connecting to narrative experiencing both attitude change and increased subject knowledge through participation in the capstone course. Participants gained knowledge about the death penalty through the lens of a narrative. This could explain why we found support for the Marshall Hypothesis while other studies found mixed support.

Directions for Future Research

Narrative's impact in this study may have been partly due to students first-hand exposure to people affected by death penalty and policy advocates. Future research should examine how the persuasiveness of a narrative determined by participants' predispositions towards affective or cognitive. Potentially, the participants who attached more to a narrative did so because of a predisposition towards that type of appeal, resulting in the significant changes noted. Future research can use survey research to pretest participants' predispositions towards types of appeals to investigate narrative's impact on attitudes. Future research can also further examine the unique impact of narrative appeals in a CEL context and investigate potential differences in attitude change based on how narrative appeals are presented.

Conclusion

Given the criminal justice field's roots in interpersonal relationships and conflict, the effectiveness of narrative appeal may apply to other debates that have direct consequences for people. Past social psychological and criminal justice research, along with our findings, support the impact of narrative on death penalty attitudes. Specifically, hearing first-person narratives from people affected by the issue can yield changes in attitude position, attitude strength, subject knowledge, and advocacy intentions.

CEL courses aim to engage students directly with various social issues. Participants' attitude change could be attributed to the structure of the course, which provided connections to persuasive narratives. The findings provide support for CEL's goal of promoting attitude change. Support was also found for the use of CEL by death penalty abolition advocates as an effective means to reduce support and increase opposition of the death penalty, via the lens of narrative. The reflection component of CEL, completed through journal reflections in this study, may be another critical component that better allows attitude change to manifest. Our study also supports CEL as an effective pedagogical model of engaging students' attitudes.

References

Alexander, E. S., Browne, F. R., Eberhart, A. E., Rhiney, S. L., Janzen, J., Dale, K., & Vazquez, P. (2020). Community service-learning improves learning outcomes, content knowledge, and perceived value of health services education: A multiyear comparison to lecture. *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*, 8(1). https://doi.org/10.37333/001c.18079

Bohm, R. M. (1989). The effects of classroom instruction and discussion on death penalty opinions: A teaching note. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 17*, 123–131. https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2352(89)90005-6

Bohm, R. M. (1990). Death penalty opinions: A classroom experience and public commitment. *Sociological Inquiry, 60*, 285–297. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-682X.1990.tb00146.x.

Bohm, R. M., & Vogel, R. E. (1994). A comparison of factors associated with uninformed and informed death penalty opinions. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 22*, 125–143. https://doi.org/10.1016/0047-2352(94)90108-2

Bohm, R. M., & Vogel, R. E. (2004). More than ten years after: the long-term stability of informed death penalty opinions. *Journal of Criminal Justice, 32*, 307–327. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2004.04.003

Bohm, R. M., Clark, L. J., & Aveni, A. F. (1991). Knowledge and death penalty opinion: A test of the Marshall hypotheses. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency, 28*, 360–387. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022427891028003006.

Brannon, S. M., DeJong, A., & Gawronski, B. (2019). Determinants of lateral attitude change: The roles of object relatedness, attitude certainty, and moral conviction. *Social Cognition*, *37*(6), 624-658. https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2019.37.6.624

Burgason, K. A., & Pazzani, L. (2014). The death penalty: A multi-level analysis of public opinion. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *39*(4), 818-838. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-014-9261-7

Buxton, T., & Ellison, N. (2015). Using Ignatian Pedagogy to guide reflections while blogging. *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal, 4*(1), 83-88. https://epublications.regis.edu/jhe/vol4/iss1/4

Caswell, T. A. (2018). Psychology of poverty: Attitude change via service-learning. *Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education*, *7*(1), 25-34. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1186248.pdf

Chambers, D. J., & Lavery, S. (2012). Service-learning: A valuable component of pre-service teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 37*(4), 128-137. http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n4.2

Cochran, J. K., & Chamlin, M. B. (2005). Can information change public opinion? Another test of the Marshall hypotheses. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *33*(6), 573-584. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2005.08.006

Cornell University. (n.d.). *What is Community-Engaged Learning?* Cornell University David M. Einhorn Center for Community Engagement. Retrieved November 3, 2021, from https://oei.cornell.edu/resources/community-engaged-learning/

Cox, A. K. (2013). Student death penalty attitudes: Does new information matter? *Journal of Criminal Justice Education, 24*(4), 443–460. https://doi-org.xavier.idm.oclc.org/10.1080/10511253.2013.787638

Ceo-Difrancesco, D., Dunn, L.S., & Solorio, N. (2020). Transforming through reflection: Use of student-led reflections in the development of intercultural competence during a short-term international immersion experience. *The Internet Journal of Allied Health Sciences & Practice, 18*, 8. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/ijahsp/vol18/iss2/8/

Fisher, W. R. (1984). Narration as human communication paradigm: The case of public moral argument. *Communication Monographs. 51*, 1-22. https://doi.org/10.1080/03637758409390180.

Fisher, W. R. (1994). Narrative rationality and the logic of scientific discourse. *Argumentation. 8*, 21-32. https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00710701.

Furze, J., Black, L., Peck, K., & Jensen, G. M. (2011). Student perceptions of a community engagement experience: Exploration of reflections on social responsibility and professional formation. *Physiotherapy Theory and Practice*, *27*(6), 411-4. https://doi.org/10.3109/09593985.2010.516479

Howells, G. N., Flanagan, K. A., & Hagan, V. (1995). Does viewing a televised execution affect attitudes toward capital punishment?. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, *22*(4), 411-424. https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854895022004005

Kaufman, G. F., & Libby, L. K. (2012). Changing beliefs and behavior through experience-taking. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 103*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0027525

Krosnick, J. A. (1988). Attitude importance and attitude change. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *24*(3), 240-255. https://doi.org/10.1016/0022-1031(88)90038-8

LaRossa, R. (2005). Grounded theory methods and qualitative family research. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *67*(4), 837-857. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2005.00179.x

Lee, G. M., Bohm, R. M., & Pazzani, L. M. (2014). Knowledge and death penalty opinion: The Marshall Hypotheses revisited. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *39*(3), 642-659. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12103-013-9229-z

Liu, B. S., & Ditto, P. H. (2013). What dilemma? Moral evaluation shapes factual belief. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *4*(3), 316-323. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550612456045

Murrar, S., & Brauer, M. (2019). Overcoming resistance to change: Using narratives to create more positive intergroup attitudes. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, *28*(2), 164-169. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721418818552

Mutz, D. C., & Nir, L. (2010). Not necessarily the news: Does fictional television influence real-world policy preferences?. *Mass Communication and Society*, *13*(2), 196-217. https://doi.org/10.1080/15205430902813856

Nabi, R. L., & Green, M. C. (2015). The role of a narrative's emotional flow in promoting persuasive outcomes. *Media Psychology*, *18*(2), 137-162. https://doi.org/10.1080/15213269.2014.912585

Newport, F. (2010). *In U.S. 64 % support death penalty in cases of murder.* Gallup Annual Crime Survey. http://www.gallup.com/poll/144284/support-death-penalty-cases-murder.aspx

Pew Research Center. (2021, July 13). *Most Americans favor the death PENALTY despite concerns about its administration*. Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy. https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/06/02/most-americans-favor-the-death-penalty-despite-concerns-about-its-administration/

Rodriguez, K. O. (2017). Analyzing the effect of exposure to a first-person narrative of a death row inmate on the support of capital punishment. *Journal of Forensic Psychology*, *2*(1000123), 2. https://doi.org/10.4172/2475-319X.1000123

Slater, M. D., Rouner, D., & Long, M. (2006). Television dramas and support for controversial public policies: Effects and mechanisms. *Journal of Communication*, *56*(2), 235-252. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00017.x

Seider, S. C., Gillmor, S. C., & Rabinowicz, S. A. (2010). Complicating college students: Conception of the American dream through community service learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 17*(1), 5-19.

Terry, A., & Lockwood, A. (2020). Exposure to urbanized poverty and attitude change: A longitudinal case study on service-learning with rural undergraduate criminal justice students. *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*, *31*(4), 489-508. https://doi.org/10.1080/10511253.2020.1803387

Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for qualitative data analysis. *American Journal of Evaluation, 27*, 237–246. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748

Till, B., & Vitouch, P. (2012). Capital punishment in films: The impact of death penalty portrayals on viewers' mood and attitude toward capital punishment. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *24*(3), 387–399. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edr051

Unnever, J. D., Cullen, F. T., & Fisher, B. S. (2005). Empathy and public support for capital punishment. *Journal of Crime and Justice*, *28*(1), 1-34. https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2005.9721205

Unnever, J. D., Cullen, F. T., & Roberts, J. V. (2005). Not everyone strongly supports the death penalty: Assessing weakly-held attitudes about capital punishment. *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, *29*(2), 187-216.

Visser, P. S., Krosnick, J. A., & Simmons, J. P. (2003). Distinguishing the cognitive and behavioral consequences of attitude importance and certainty: A new approach to testing the common-factor hypothesis. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *39*(2), 118-141. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-1031(02)00522-X

About the Authors

Thomas R. Wagner (PhD, Kent State University) is Professor and Chair in the Department of Communication at Xavier University. wagnerT@xavier.edu

Jared S. Vornhagen (BS, Psychology and Criminal Justice 2024, Xavier University) J.D. Candidate at Harvard Law School.

Grant Zentmeyer (BA, Communication Studies, 2022, Xavier University) Patron Experience Manager at The Children's Theatre of Cincinnati.

Maria Vassanelli (BA, Communication Studies, 2023 Xavier University) Special Event Fundraising Manager Crohn’s & Colitis Foundation - Southern Ohio Chapter.

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the Xavier University Communicaiton Studies graduating class of 2021 for their voluntary participation in this research project. Also, we grateful for the student research support of Xavier University through the College of Arts and Sciences Summer Research Fellowship and the Eigel Center’s Community-Engaged Scholars Program.

Pedagogies of Engagement: Creating Spaces to Enhance Undergraduate Students' Intercultural Competence Through Community Involvement

Marianela Rivera
Florida Gulf Coast University

Marta Ramos
Florida Gulf Coast University

ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explores how undergraduate students, who are learners of Spanish as a foreign language, perceived an experience of service-learning and the impact it had on their intercultural competence. Participants were undergraduate students at a public university in the United States who completed a Hispanic culture course. The course included a service-learning component with members of local Spanish-speaking immigrant communities. Drawing from document analysis and interviews, three main themes emerged: civic engagement, cultural interaction and awareness, and lifelong learning. Beyond an educational and linguistic development opportunity, all participants recognized the positive impact of service-learning on their perception of and relationship with local Spanish-speaking communities, their own civic responsibilities, and the use of Spanish as a bridge to increase their engagement in social advocacy. Besides expanding on the literature available on the interconnection between service-learning and the enhancement of intercultural competence, this study provides information for faculty members interested in developing practical learning opportunities for students as they make decisions related to course content.

In an era of interconnections, multiculturalism, and globalization, the development of students' intercultural competence has become fundamental in higher education institutions (Childress, 2010; Deardorff & Arasaratnam-Smith, 2017; Garwe & Thondhlana, 2022; Gregersen-Hermans & Lauridsen, 2021; Pinto, 2018; Zolfaghari et al., 2009). Hence, both curricular and cocurricular spaces and experiences are continually created in order to provide opportunities to develop and enhance students' intercultural competence. Those experiences aim to form global citizens who are capable of effectively interacting with people from different cultural backgrounds and can cultivate an appreciation for diverse ideas and perspectives while developing a greater understanding of their own culture.

Among the numerous multicultural experiences available for higher education students, service-learning initiatives have become increasingly relevant (Caldwell, 2007; Falce-Robinson et al., 2012; Halberstadt et al., 2019; Molderez & Fonseca, 2018; Liu & Lin, 2017). Exposing students to culturally diverse environments through service-learning projects provides them with opportunities for authentic linguistic and cultural interactions that are not feasible in the classroom (Palpacuer Lee & Curran, 2018). Therefore, it is expected that these intentional service initiatives have an effect on student learning. This trend is of particular interest in the foreign language disciplines as language is a vital tool to gain access to other cultures. The Spanish-speaking community is the largest linguistic minority in the United States; hence, numerous Spanish Programs have been at the forefront of this growing wave

(Barreneche & Ramos-Flores, 2013). This phenomenological study intends to explore how undergraduate students, who are learners of Spanish as a foreign language, perceived an experience of service-learning and the impact it had on their intercultural competence. Although there are several studies on the subject, the majority are centered on undergraduate students' experiences abroad (Brandel, 2016; Covert, 2014; Nickols et al., 2013; Paras & Mitchel, 2017; Wessel, 2007) and on heritage speakers (Belpoliti & Pérez, 2019; MacGregor-Mendoza & Moreno, 2016; Salgado-Robles & Lamboy, 2019). This study focuses specifically on a service-learning project developed by undergraduate language learners in local Spanish-speaking immigrant communities.

Literature Review

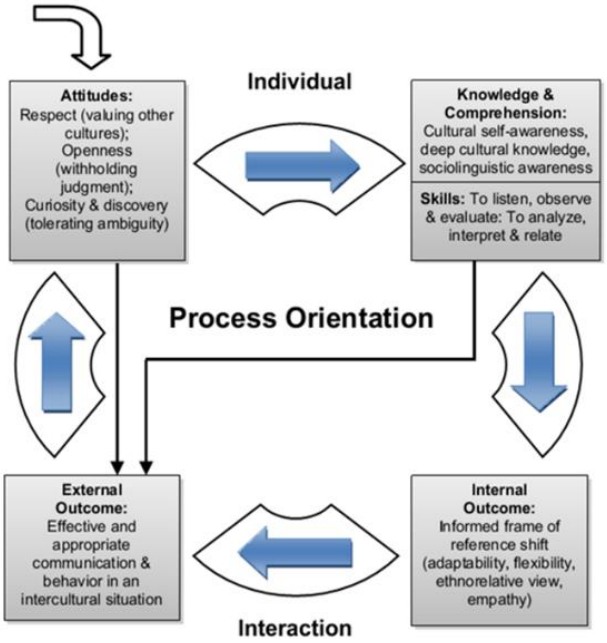
Service-learning plays an important role in higher education institutions and has had its momentum in recent decades (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2021, Salam et al., 2019; Schneider, 2019). Its roots are often attributed to John Dewey (1942), who proposed a committed education, not centered on individualism but on social collaboration. Higher education has inherited that sense of commitment, and it aims to foster in students a sense of responsibility within the community along with professional goals and personal interests (Boyer, 1996). Service-learning has played a crucial role in higher education since the mid-1980s and has since been developed to promote opportunities that benefit both the students and the community (Schneider, 2019). Moreover, this practice is an academic experience that intertwines meeting specific objectives of a course or discipline with developing students' civic responsibility and engagement. Bringle and Hatcher (1995) define service-learning as […] a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of the course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (p. 112)
Therefore, service-learning experiences transcend mere volunteer work, in which formal assessment of academic learning is not necessarily employed.

Theoretical framework

Providing learning experiences through civic engagement has been an effective method to enhance students' academic and critical skills that they can apply to real-life situations (Adams, 2015). Several studies highlight the impact of service-learning experiences on the development of students' social sensitivity and intercultural competence (Brandell, 2016; Collopy, 2020; Rauschert & Bryam, 2018). Deardoff (2004) defines intercultural competence as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (p.194). Highlighting the lack of consensus among scholars regarding intercultural competence, Deardorff (2006) described it in her Process Model of Intercultural Competence (Figure 1) as a complex construct that includes multiple components. Deardoff's (2006) model proposes that the individual's attitudes ignite intercultural competence development. The model also suggests that cultural self-awareness as well as cultural and sociolinguistic knowledge play a crucial role in cultural negotiations. Whether there is an internal outcome or not, the expected external/visible outcome is effective communication in intercultural situations.

Figure 1

Process Model of Intercultural Competence



Note. From "Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization" by D. Deardorff, 2006, *Journal of Studies in International Education 10*(3), p. 256. Copyright 2006 by D. Deardorff.

The crucial value of intercultural competence in an interconnected and globalized world has been acknowledged across professional fields. However, intercultural competence is not necessarily easy to develop in a classroom setting; thus, service-learning is an important pedagogical tool that can be used to develop it. Research has demonstrated the impact of service-learning activities on the development of students' awareness regarding issues related to race, culture, and social justice (Compare & Albanesi, 2023; Wiersma-Mosley & Garrison, 2022) as well as their sensitivity to diversity (Colvin, 2020; Driscoll et al, 1996; Gallini & Moely, 2003; Otten et al., 2022; O'Grady, 2012). Nevertheless; despite the value given to including service-learning activities in the curriculum, more research is needed to provide a clear and relevant connection between service-learning and intercultural competence (Dienhart et al., 2016, Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2020), specifically in courses that not necessarily focus on developing language skills.

Service-Learning as a pedagogical tool

Several studies have confirmed the value of service-learning activities in the development of students' language skills as they gain confidence and linguistic proficiency (Abbott & Lear, 2010; Baker, 2018; Caldwell, 2007; Ebacher, 2013; Kanost, 2014; Riley & Douglas, 2016; Thompson & Brown, 2019) while assuming an active role in their learning and using the target language in a real-life context. Since service-learning brings people together across differences to address local and global issues

(De Leon 2014), many higher education service-learning programs specifically involve minorities and immigrant populations. The presence of numerous local Hispanic communities throughout the United States has provided higher education institutions with multiple opportunities to develop service-learning projects in which students without the resources to participate in a long-term study abroad program can engage with native speakers and participate in an enriching language and culture learning experience (Barreneche, 2011). This has encouraged higher education institutions to develop service-learning programs within the curricula for undergraduate students who want to enhance their language skills and improve their intercultural competence in connection to the Hispanic community. However, the studies related to service-learning initiatives with the Hispanic community have primarily focused on heritage speakers, the experiences of students enrolled in language courses, and service-learning activities completed abroad.

Service-learning experiences have been proven to be effective language-learning support tools for students at intermediate and advanced levels (Bettencourt, 2015). In a study conducted with students enrolled in a first-semester Spanish course, Bloom (2008) found that students demonstrated progress in their intercultural sensitivity in addition to more interest in learning Spanish. Similarly, in a comparative study between students who completed a conventional Intermediate Spanish course and students who completed a service-learning component in a Hispanic community, Kanost (2014) found that students' confidence in the target language increased; however, she also found that those who did not do the service-learning component expressed more interest in study abroad opportunities. Studies focused on service-learning with students who are heritage speakers of Spanish (MacGregor-Mendoza & Moreno, 2016; Martínez, 2010; Pak, 2018; Pascual y Cabo et al., 2017; Pereira, 2015; Petrov, 2013) have underscored the benefits of those experiences not only in the development of the students' language skills but also as an opportunity to serve the community by applying their linguistic skills in specific professional fields. In a study done in New Mexico, for example, MacGregor-Mendoza and Moreno (2016), found that “the amount of knowledge and perspective gained by learners from their involvement was remarkable” (p. 425). Moreover, the results of that study reinforced the value of providing students with opportunities to strengthen connections between the university and the community, specifically through experiences of translation and interpretation related to the medical field. Similarly, Pascual y Cabo et al. (2017) and Pak (2018) found that community engagement led to positive responses from Spanish heritage language learners, as they reported an increase in their linguistic confidence and more interest in participating in meaningful community work. In addition to describing the benefits of including service-learning experiences, other studies have focused on understanding the challenges behind them. Such is the case of a qualitative study done with an upper-level undergraduate Spanish conversation course for non-traditional students (many of whom were heritage speakers of Spanish) by Ignizio (2018). Ignizio (2018) found that even though the service-learning experience was successful, his students faced several challenges given their “substantial lack of free time, economic resources, and transportation” (p. 19), which demanded a “higher level of flexibility on behalf of the faculty and staff at the institution” (p. 19).

Service-learning abroad has also become an emerging area for research, as it combines two forms of experiential education: study abroad and community service (Palpacuer Lee & Curran, 2018). Previous studies (Gaugler & Matheus, 2019; Martinsen et al., 2010; Menard-Warwick & Palmer, 2012; Walker & Johnson, 2022; Wessel, 2007) demonstrated the value of exposing students to experiences abroad to enhance their academic, professional, and personal development in real-life multicultural environments; however, despite the popularity of those programs, many students still face several obstacles that prevent them from participating in such learning experiences, such as lack of access and/or accommodations to meet particular needs (Soneson & Cordano, 2009), students' socioeconomic status (Di Pietro, 2020; Kubota, 2016; Simon & Ainsworth, 2012; Wanger et al., 2020), employment responsibilities (Celeste Gaia, 2015; Murray Brux & Fry, 2010; Penn & Tanner, 2009), and inequities in study abroad marketing materials (Boulden, 2022).

The positive role of service-learning activities in expanding students' linguistic and cultural development has been explored from different perspectives. Contrary to other studies, this study focuses on learners of Spanish as a foreign language. The focus of this study is not language; moreover, in this study, language was employed as a scaffolding tool for the development of the students' intercultural competence.

Methodology

This study followed a phenomenological approach as it focused on exploring how undergraduate students who are learning Spanish as a second language perceive a service-learning experience and its impact on their intercultural competence. Phenomenological studies are deeply rooted in a philosophical component (Creswell & Poth, 2018); thus, this study was aligned with a constructivist philosophy, which emphasizes gaining understanding by interpreting undergraduate foreign language students' perception of the impact of a service learning project in a Spanish-speaking community (Creswell & Creswell Báez, 2021; Creswell & Poth, 2018), in this case, a service-learning project. Our values were important to consider as we move forward with the study; hence, they are explicit in the interpretation of the data. We are experienced professors of Spanish language, literature, and Hispanic culture and identify as part of the Latinx community.

Participants for this study were purposely selected through criterion sampling. A group of 3 undergraduate students, all of them non-native speakers of Spanish, enrolled in a public university in the southeastern region of the United States, agreed to participate in the study. All participants were female undergraduate students in their twenties. Their race or ethnic background was not considered as a sampling criterion. The participants completed a Hispanic culture course that included a service-learning component with local Spanish-speaking immigrant communities. The participants were in their junior or senior year and enrolled in the course as a requirement to complete a minor in Spanish. Since this was a course that was open to all majors, their academic backgrounds or career plans were not considered during the recruitment process. The main goal of the course was to help students gain a deeper understanding of Hispanic immigration in the United States, particularly the role of cinema in the way immigrants' identity is perceived and (re)defined. The course examined the representation of Hispanic immigration to the United States in contemporary films and the portrayal of

racial, ethnic, cultural, and social aspects that are part of the integration and/or assimilation process of Hispanic immigrants. In this course, students were exposed to a variety of films (both foreign and American) that shape and are shaped by race, gender, globalization, discourses of social identity, cultural integration/assimilation, and the idea of "belonging" in national and historical contexts. Initially, the course looked at the United States' political and cultural relationship with Latin America. As part of the course, participants were required to submit one written proposal for their service-learning project, three journals, and a reflective essay. For each submission, participants were provided with specific instructions that guided them as they worked with the non-profit organization of their choice and with members of local Spanish-speaking immigrant communities. The participants in this study collaborated with a local nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting access to education in underserved communities. The students proposed a work plan in alignment with the organization's mission to increase awareness of the educational resources available to the community. They also attended various public events where they were able to apply their skills and knowledge while assisting the organization. For instance, at one of the events, the participants provided information about educational opportunities and financial aid resources available for local high school students. At the event, the participants had the opportunity to directly interact with members of the local Spanish-speaking community. Data collection took place through in-depth, semi-structured, one-on-one interviews. Interviews were conducted over a 1-month period; each participant was interviewed once. Interviews took approximately 1 hour per participant and were conducted virtually. Document analysis of 3 journals and a reflective essay that the participants submitted as they participated in the service-learning experience was also crucial. The data collected from these documents was written evidence of the participants' points of view.

The data analysis process consisted of several steps and analytic strategies. The interviews were carefully transcribed and reviewed along with all other documents collected, including notes taken during the interviews. We used an intercoder agreement to compare the codes of the data and developed a narrative discussion that reveals the essence of the participants' experience. In this study, three validity checks were implemented: triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing. These are strategies that are cost-effective and will verify the accuracy of the findings. Triangulation helped improve the accuracy of the codes as we looked for commonalities across multiple sources of data (interview transcripts, journals, reflective essays). Peer debriefing was done as a third validation strategy. An academic specialist with expertise in qualitative research studies in the field of multicultural education evaluated the quality of the report.

Findings and Discussion

Supported by a theoretical framework that links service-learning to intercultural competence development, this study explored how undergraduate students perceive a service-learning experience with local Spanish-speaking immigrant communities and its impact on their intercultural competence. Three main themes emerged during the data analysis process, which demonstrated the development of the participants' intercultural competence: civic engagement, cultural interaction, and lifelong learning. Figure 2 shows the themes as well as the subthemes that emerged from the data. The diagram

proposes dialogic, circular, and bidirectional connections between the emerging themes and subthemes. In the flowchart, the attitudes and experiences about civic engagement lead the intercultural interaction. While both cultures interact, self-awareness and language play an important role as tools in cultural negotiation and are likely enhanced in the process as well. An effective intercultural exchange is expected to translate into meaningful and long-lasting learning demonstrated through awareness, empathy, and social action.

Figure 2

Intercultural Competence Development

Civic Engagement

We found that several factors, such as previous experiences and the environment they were exposed to, provided the participants with a common ground that equipped them for this service-learning experience and shaped their attitudes toward civic engagement. First, the university they attend promotes service, diversity, and community outreach as staples of its mission. Moreover, students enrolled in that institution are expected to complete a certain number of service hours as a graduation requirement; therefore, the participants -who were in the third or fourth year of their undergraduate studies- had previously engaged in service activities. Participants were also undergraduate students minoring in Spanish and had taken both Spanish language and literature courses as well as Hispanic culture courses; thus, they had developed some language skills and cultural knowledge that likely facilitated their interactions as they navigated a different culture. Finally, all the participants were enrolled in a Hispanic culture course in which Spanish-speaking immigrants in the United States were the focus of the study. In the course, they read articles, watched movies, and held discussions and reflections about this population. Those experiences very likely provided the participants with linguistic and cultural tools before getting directly involved in the service-learning project with the Spanish-speaking immigrant community, which is predominant in the region.

Civic engagement is highly valued in higher education institutions, which has led to an increase in the development and implementation of initiatives aimed at enhancing students' social responsibility and intercultural competence (Mobley, 2007; Schneider, 2019). Hence, service-learning opportunities and meaningful connections with the community are expected to contribute to developing this competence as well as awareness regarding race, culture, social justice, and diversity. We found that the participants' attitudes towards both other cultures and service-learning played a vital role in the participants' perceptions and experience through the service-learning project. The participants in this study shared experiences that presumably shaped their attitudes and sensitivity toward this service-learning project. Parting from Dearfford's (2006) model, context and previous experiences are part of the initial level of the development process, which is attitude (valuation and respect for other cultures, receptivity, and curiosity). We found that the context and the experiences described favored cultural interaction and the development of intercultural competence. From the responses provided by the participants and the data collected from their journals and reflective essays, we found a general openness and receptive attitude towards civic engagement and towards the local Spanish-speaking immigrant community. Participants seemed to acknowledge the value of community service.

Cultural Interaction

Direct interaction with other cultures helps increase self-awareness and could lead to a change in perspective (Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2021). As they completed the service-learning experience, the participants of this study had the opportunity to be in direct contact with members of the local Spanish-speaking immigrant community. During the interviews and in their reflective essays, all three participants expressed the value of the service-learning project as a critical feature that facilitated cultural interaction and reciprocal learning experiences that could not be replicated in the classroom.

Intercultural Knowledge

Getting out of their comfort zone and having direct contact with people from the local community was relevant to all of them and positively impacted their learning. Daisy explained that "the setting of service, as opposed to being in the classroom, reading about it, or hearing about it, offers a deeper perspective and forces the students to really learn." However, she highlighted the usefulness of her background knowledge as she prepared to participate in the experience: "My cultural awareness allowed me to go into our service with prior knowledge of issues these families may be facing and how to communicate with them best." Lily recognized the value of the project to get experience in the real world and mentioned that "just getting out of your comfort zone and meeting different people just helps you become more well-rounded." Rose also valued the opportunity to get directly involved with the community and described service-learning as "practicing what you preach" in reference to the institution's mission. She added, "We can talk a lot about service-learning, and we can talk a lot about the community, but actually going out into the community is very important." These interactions provided opportunities for the participants to apply what they had learned in the course and previous courses as part of the language program

and to reflect on their identity, their understanding of the local Hispanic community, and their role in society. Daisy emphasized the impact of listening first-hand to the voices and stories of community members and how it encouraged her to reflect on her own responsibilities as a citizen. She said, "I think the service [experience] really helped me gain some more perspectives that I wouldn't have known; I was able to hear their [members of the Spanish-speaking immigrant community] perspectives on topics such as what it was like for them to come to the US." Daisy added that “it definitely has helped me a lot with my culture […] It also helped me understand what it means to be American.” Furthermore, Rose and Lily reported that, in their exchanges with community members, they were able to see genuine interest from Hispanic parents in educational and development opportunities for their children. Lily explained that doing this service-learning project "helped [her] understand what areas they [Spanish-speaking immigrants] really were concerned with, like education." Rose also noted the value given to education within the Spanish-speaking immigrant community and how formal education is prioritized for young generations. She said, "It was cool to hear about what the kids were doing in high school to get prepared and how excited they were in the accelerated classes they were taking." From the participants’ standpoint, this experience helped them better understand the crucial role of education in achieving equitable conditions for the members of the Spanish-speaking immigrant community.

Language

Even though the course and the project did not necessarily focus on the learning and use of Spanish, language played a central role in the learning experience and the participants' reflection processes. Participants consistently noted the value of having opportunities for direct communication with members of the Hispanic community, both linguistically and personally. From a linguistic point of view, the three participants pointed out the benefits and the difficulties of having to communicate in Spanish. Daisy reported, "When communicating with families who spoke little English, I remembered to be considerate of the language and cultural barrier.” She explained that even though having a general knowledge of the language was helpful, understanding other cultural aspects was also important and made the project more cohesive and significant. She said, "Being able to do service-learning with the Hispanic community was so fulfilling. […] to me, it’s not just learning the language; it’s learning about the culture, it’s learning the history of all aspects of Spanish culture and doing a service-learning project as a Spanish student was supplemental because I was able to bring everything together.” Lily articulated her experience as one in which, despite some challenges, she was able to use and improve her language skills: “Sometimes there was a language barrier, sometimes I didn’t know the right words to say, but we were in a group so if I couldn’t get the message across, someone else could.” Lily also mentioned the importance of being exposed to real-life situations as a critical component in her learning process by adding, "I think sometimes, as students of Spanish, we think we are not learning enough, or we are not doing good enough. So, when there is a real-life situation where you can put it to the test, what you have learned, and the actual language itself, it is motivating. […] I did something that I would not have been able to do if I [had] not learn[ed] this. It helps connect and close the gap." Rose spoke of the value of having some background knowledge of the language and the culture as an effective way to

prepare her and her group for the project: “My cultural competence and learning from class, and just being able to apply that when I’m out speaking to people, I think that was really helpful.” To this, she added, “I had to use my Spanish while I was working on my service-learning project. […] We had to use the Spanish that we had learned. The aspect of cultural sensitivity and everything we’ve learned throughout the course made it easier to enter the service-learning project.” This underscores the importance of participants receiving formal preparation that emphasizes both language and culture to help them become more responsive and empathetic to linguistically and culturally diverse groups.

Self-Awareness

The participants had the opportunity to reflect on the impact of the service-learning experience on their own socio-cultural identity, the influence of the environment in which they grew up, and the recognition of differences between their culture and others, as well as their own privilege. Reflections were done in writing; participants submitted journals and a final reflective essay. During the interviews, participants were also provided with the opportunity to discuss the impact the service-learning experience had on them. Their responses suggest that this type of task helped them develop a sense of social and cultural self-awareness and a deeper understanding of themselves and others, specifically in relation to access to education. Daisy expressed the existence of a direct connection between the academic and professional opportunities available to her and her position as an American citizen in contrast to that of many Spanish-speaking immigrants: "I am excited about my future career and opportunities, and now I recognize that part of that is my privilege of growing up American.” Lily acknowledged the disadvantages that many Spanish-speaking immigrants face trying to pursue an education in the United States as she stated that "speaking to some of these individuals directly helped me put what I have learned in action and hopefully assist in closing the educational gap for immigrants in the region." Like Daisy, Lily acknowledged her position of privilege regarding access to education: "During this service-learning experience, I recognized the privilege I have had [...], so I can imagine the experience being even more intimidating for immigrants." During her interview, Rose expressed a transformation in her understanding of educational issues affecting the local Spanish-speaking immigrant community: “Before working [on the service-learning project], I knew low literacy rates were an issue, but I did not understand the extent to which it could affect and impact lives.” Even though she had some knowledge of the educational challenges faced by the local immigrant community, being in direct contact with the members of that community had a more profound impact on her perception of the relevance of those issues. This experience moved Rose to compare her own background, experiences, and culture with what she observed while completing the project: “It was just completely different; like learning about my own culture and just where I grew up, it was just like two completely separate worlds.” This experience prompted participants to pursue a deeper level of reflection on their own positionality and the complexities of the immigration processes, which supports the idea that service-learning experiences directly impact participants’ socio-cultural self-awareness.

Lifelong Learning

Impact and Advocacy

Service-learning experiences can contribute to changes in perceptions that may help participants become more culturally aware and increase their engagement in social advocacy (Drewelow & Granja Ibarreche, 2020; Hébert & Hauf, 2015; Mthethwa-Sommers, 2020). The participants in this study revealed that the service-learning project directly impacted their perspective on the local Spanish-speaking immigrant community and their role in society as agents of change. Even though not every intercultural interaction will result in mutual understanding (Ramirez, 2016) in this case, the participants expressed more interest in gaining a more in-depth understanding of the culture of and building ties to the local Spanish-speaking immigrant community, as well as motivation to continue participating in similar service initiatives in the future. Daisy expressed that the experience "really moved me enough to want to do service" and added that "service-learning really helps us to spark a change within ourselves." In her final essay, Daisy stated, "With this knowledge, I now understand my civic duty. Everyone deserves the chance at economic and educational opportunity, especially those who go through severe measures to reach new countries." In a similar manner, Lily mentioned developing a sense of commitment to the community and described her interest in continuing to work with the local Spanish-speaking immigrant community while recognizing the importance of preparing for the experience: "I would like to return in the future with even more preparation and tools to communicate the information." Rose also expressed her interest in getting more involved with the local community: "I want to get out into the community a little bit more and want to interact with people more […] it was inspirational." Moreover, she acknowledged the value of taking steps to become an agent of change by stating that "it showed me how important it is to be an active community member and how important it is to be aware of issues going on in [the local community]."

All three participants expressed, on several occasions, both during the interviews and in writing, their interest in continuing their involvement with the local Hispanic community even after the course had concluded. This aligns with indications of socially responsive development (Altman, 1996; Kayser, 2017), which consists of educating students about current social issues while facilitating first-hand experience opportunities. It can be posited that the participants' direct contact with members of the Spanish-speaking immigrant community helped them awaken an interest in the culture beyond the course content discussed in the classroom.

Limitations and Future Research

Limitations of this study emerge from the service-learning experience itself. The service-learning project was a requirement and designed based on the objectives and evaluation methods of a culture courseabout Hispanic population mobility across international borders. Moreover, students' service-learning experience involved limited exposure to the Hispanic community, which could have constrained the strengthening and further enhancement of intercultural competence and student engagement. These limitations, however, did not prevent us from extrapolating practical implications for the development and implementation of similar projects in higher education institutions.

The present study complements existing literature on service-learning practices, particularly research done in connection to foreign languages and culture programs. The findings aim to provide faculty and administrators in higher education institutions with valuable information that could contribute to effective pedagogical strategies to enhance students' intercultural competence. This could lead to more effective and culturally relevant service-learning opportunities within the local community in which everyone could benefit. Service-learning experiences that intentionally aim at creating a connection between undergraduate students and the Hispanic community can be used as strategies to facilitate the achievement of course-specific learning goals more meaningfully. To expand on the impact of service-learning opportunities on intercultural competence, future research could emphasize the experiences of heritage speakers when exposed to local Hispanic communities and the impact of such exposure on their intercultural competence and sense of civic duty. Future studies could also expand the scope of the service-learning project by including opportunities to explore more specific issues faced by the Hispanic community, such as access to help services, professional/career development opportunities, food insecurity, and acculturation processes. Additionally, more emphasis could be given to deepening effective methods that allow for assessing students' intercultural competence once the service-learning experience is completed.

Conclusions

In this study, we argue that the integration of purposeful service-learning experiences facilitates meaningful learning by providing experiences that cannot be replicated in a traditional classroom setting. Three main themes emerged and proved of great relevance: civic engagement, cultural interaction, and lifelong learning. When service-learning activities are conducted, as in this case, in a Spanish-speaking community, the interaction between the students and the community members fosters the development and expansion of the students' intercultural competence. Research literature has highlighted service-learning projects as one of the multiple experiential-learning practices used in higher education institutions for the development and strengthening of students' intercultural competence. Despite the fact that the information collected in the journals, a reflection essay, and interviews did not encompass every potential component within intercultural competence, the findings support a connection between community engagement and the expansion of intercultural competence. In the case that concerns this study, language played an important role since the interaction was favored by the fact that the participants had an intermediate level of Spanish. Language in this case was part of the cultural knowledge and sociolinguistic skills that facilitated the intercultural exchange. The findings also support that participants perceived the service-learning experience as an effective way to understand and raise awareness of the Spanish-speaking immigrant community's needs and contributions, and a better understanding of their own culture. Based on the participants' responses, we can determine that academic projects that include deliberate interaction with communities that are culturally different can help learners develop intercultural competence while also leading them to develop empathy and a sense of advocacy. Participants demonstrated empathy especially when they acknowledged their own

privilege and expressed interest in continuing to engage in service initiatives even after graduation.

References

Abbott, A., & Lear, D. (2010). The connections goal area in Spanish community service-learning: Possibilities and limitations. *Foreign Language Annals*, *43*(2), 231-245. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2010.01076.x

Adams, C. E. (2015). Service-learning projects: What students' reflections reveal. *Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education, 4*(1).

Altman, I. (1996). Higher education and psychology in the millennium. *American Psychologist, 51*(4), 371-378. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.51.4.371

Baker, L. (2018). From learner to teacher assistant: Community-based service-learning in a dual-language classroom. *Foreign Language Annals*, *51*(4), 796–815. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12363

Barreneche, G. I. (2011). Language learners as teachers: Integrating service learning and the advanced language course. *Hispania, 94* (1), 103-120. https://doi.org/10.1353/hpn.2011.a424432

Belpoliti, F., & Pérez, M. E. (2019). Service learning in Spanish for the health professions: Heritage language learners' competence in action. *Foreign Language Annals*, *52*(3), 529–550. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12413

Bettencourt, M. (2015). Supporting student learning outcomes through service learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, *48*(3), 473–490. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12147

Bloom, M. (2008). From the classroom to the community: Building cultural awareness in first semester Spanish. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, *21*(2), 103-119. https://doi.org/10.1080/07908310802287442

Boulden, K. (2022). Black Student Experiences with Study Abroad Marketing and Recruitment. *Frontiers (Boston, Mass.)*, *34*(2), 205–234. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v34i2.524

Boyer, Ernest L. (1996). The scholarship of engagement. *Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*. *49*(7), 18-33.

Brandell, A. (2016). Effects of study abroad and service-learning on intercultural competence. Culminating projects in English, 42. St. Cloud State University.

Bringle, R.G., & Hatcher, J. A. (1995). A service-learning curriculum for faculty. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning,* 2, 11-122.

Caldwell, W. (2007). Taking Spanish outside the box: A model for integrating service learning into foreign language study. *Foreign Language Annals*, *40*(3), 463-471. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1944-9720.2007.tb02870.x

Celeste Gaia, A. (2015). Short-term faculty-led study abroad programs enhance cultural exchange and self-awareness. *International Education Journal*, *14*(1), 21–31.

Collopy, R. M. B.; Tjaden-Glass, S., & McIntosh, N. A. (2020). Attending to conditions that facilitate intercultural competence: a reciprocal service-learning approach. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *26*(1), 19–. https://doi.org/10.3998/mjcsloa.3239521.0026.102

Colvin, J. W. (2020). Perceptions of service-learning: Experiences in the community. *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement*, *8*(1).

Compare, C., & Albanesi, C. (2023). Belief, attitude and critical understanding. A systematic review of social justice in Service-Learning experiences. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, *33*(2), 332–355. https://doi.org/10.1002/casp.2639

Covert, H. H. (2014). Stories of personal agency: Undergraduate students' perceptions of developing intercultural competence during a semester abroad in Chile. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *18*(2), 162–179. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315313497590

Creswell, J. W., & Creswell Báez, J. (2021). *30 essential skills for the qualitative researcher* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.

Deardorff, D. K. (2006). Identification and assessment of intercultural competence as a student outcome of internationalization. *Journal of Studies of International Education*, 10 (3), 241-266. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315306287002

Deardorff, D. K., & Arasaratnam-Smith, L. A. (2017). *Intercultural Competence in Higher Education: International Approaches, Assessment and Application*. Taylor and Francis. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315529257

De Leon, N. (2014). Developing intercultural competence by participating in intensive intercultural service learning. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *21*(1), 17-30.

Dewey, J. (1942). *Democracy and Education*. Macmillan.

Dienhart, C., Maruyama, G., Snyder, M., Furco, A., McKay, M. S., Hirt, L., & Huesman, R. (2016). The impact of mandatory service on students in service-learning classes. *Journal of Social Psychology, 156*(3), 305–309. https://doi.org/10.1080/00224545.2015.1111856

Di Pietro, G. (2020). Changes in socioeconomic inequality in access to study abroad programs: A cross-country analysis. *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*, *66*.

Drewelow, I. & Granja Ibarreche, X. (2021). Developing students' solidarity disposition: A case for translation in community-based service-learning. *Foreign Language Annals*, *54*(3), 800–822. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12573

Driscoll, A., Holland, B., Gelmon, S., & Kerrigan, S. (1996). An assessment model for service-learning: Comprehensive case studies of impact on faculty, students, community, and institution. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *3*(1), 66-71.

Ebacher, C. (2013). Taking Spanish into the community: A novice's guide to service learning. *Hispania*, *96*(2), 397–408. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23608335

Falce-Robinson, J. A., & Strother, D. L. (2012). Language proficiency and civic engagement: The incorporation of meaningful service-learning projects in Spanish language courses. *Interdisciplinary Humanities.*, *29*(3).

Gallini, S. M., & Moely, B. E. (2003). Service learning and engagement, academic challenge, and retention. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *10*(1), 5-14.

Garwe, E. C., & Thondhlana, J. (2022). Making internationalization of higher education a national strategic focus. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education*, *14*(1), 521–538. https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-09-2020-0323

Gaugler, K. M., & Matheus, C. C. (2019). Engineering engagement: Perceived L2 development and short-term service learning abroad. *Foreign Language Annals*, *52*(2), 314–334. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12393

Gregersen-Hermans, J., & Lauridsen, K. M. (2021) Higher education internationalisation as a quality driver. In J. Gregersen-Hermans & K. M. Lauridsen (Eds.), *Internationalising programmes in higher education: An educational development perspective* (pp. 11-22). Routledge.

Halberstadt, J., Timm, J.-M., Kraus, S., & Gundolf, K. (2019). Skills and knowledge management in higher education: how service learning can contribute to social entrepreneurial competence development. *Journal of Knowledge Management*, *23*(10), 1925–1948. https://doi.org/10.1108/JKM-12-2018-0744

Hébert, & Hauf, P. (2015). Student learning through service learning: Effects on academic development, civic responsibility, interpersonal skills and practical skills. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, *16*(1), 37–49. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787415573357

Ignizio, G. S. (2018). Advanced Spanish conversation and the non-traditional student: A case study for implementing community-based learning at the urban university. *Journal of Community Engagement and Higher Education*, *10*(2), 12-21.

Kanost, L. (2014). Spanish after service learning: A comparative study. *Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education*, *3*, 64-79.

Kayser, C. (2017). Cultivating Community-Responsive future healthcare professionals: Using service-learning in pre-health humanities education. *The Journal of Medical Humanities*, *38*(4), 385–395. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10912-017-9456-2

Kubota, R. (2016). The social imaginary of study abroad: complexities and contradictions. *Language Learning Journal*, *44*(3), 347–357. https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2016.1198098

Liu, R.-L. & Lin, P.-Y. (2017). Changes in multicultural experience: Action research on a service learning curriculum. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, *30*(3), 239–256. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11213-016-9395-2

MacGregor-Mendoza, & Moreno, G. (2016). Connecting Spanish heritage language students with the community through service-learning. *Heritage Language Journal, 13*(3), 405–433.

Martínez, G. (2010). Medical Spanish for heritage learners: A prescription to improve the health of Spanish-speaking communities. In S. V. Rivera-Mills & J. A. Trujillo (Eds.), *Building communities and making connections* (pp. 2–15). Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Martinsen, R. A., Baker, W., Dewey, D. P., Bown, J., & Johnson, C. (2010). Exploring diverse settings for language acquisition and use: Comparing study abroad, service learning abroad, and foreign language housing. *Applied Language Learning*, *20*(1-2), 45-69.

Menard-Warwick, J., & Palmer, D. (2012). Bilingual development in study-abroad journal narratives: Three case studies from a short-term program in Mexico. *Multilingua*, *31*(4), 381–412. https://doi.org/10.1515/multi-2012-0018

Mobley, C. (2007). Breaking ground: Engaging undergraduates in social change through service learning. *Teaching Sociology*, *35*(2), 125–137. https://doi.org/10.1177/0092055X0703500202

Molderez, I. & Fonseca, E. (2018). The efficacy of real-world experiences and service learning for fostering competences for sustainable development in higher education. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, *172*, 4397–4410. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2017.04.062

Murray Brux, J., & Fry, B. (2010). Multicultural students in study abroad: Their interests, their issues, and their constraints. Journal of Studies in International Education, 14(5), 508-527. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F1028315309342486

Mthethwa-Sommers, S. (2020). Critical service-learning: Vehicle to social justice education. In *Handbook of Research on Diversity and Social Justice in Higher Education* (pp. 105-116). IGI Global.

Nickols, S. Y., Rothenberg, N. J., Moshi, L., & Tetloff, M. (2013). International service-learning: Students' personal challenges and intercultural competence. *Journal of Higher Education Outreach & Engagement*, *17*(4), 97–124.

O'Grady, C. R. (Ed.). (2012). *Integrating service learning and multicultural education in colleges and universities.* Routledge.

Otten, R., Faughnan, M., Flattley, M., & Fleurinor, S. (2022). Integrating equity, diversity, and inclusion into social innovation education: a case study of critical service-learning. *Social Enterprise Journal*, *18*(1), 182–200. https://doi.org/10.1108/SEJ-11-2020-0101

Pak, C. (2018). Linking service-learning with sense of belonging: a culturally relevant pedagogy for heritage students of Spanish. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education*, *17*(1), 76–95. https://doi.org/10.1177/1538192716630028

Palpacuer Lee, C., Curtis, J. H., & Curran, M. E. (2018). Shaping the vision for service-learning in language education. *Foreign Language Annals*, *51*(1), 169–184. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12329

Paras, A. & Mitchell, L. (2017). Assessing intercultural competence in experiential learning abroad: Lessons for educators. *Experiential Learning & Teaching in Higher Education*: *1*(8), 45-64. https://nsuworks.nova.edu/elthe/vol1/iss1/8

Pascual y Cabo, D., Prada, J., & Lowther Pereira, K. (2017). Effects of community service-learning on heritage language learners' attitudes toward their language and culture. *Foreign Language Annals*, *50*(1), 71–83. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12245

Penn, E. B., & Tanner, J. (2009). Black students and international education: An assessment. *Journal of Black Studies*, *40*(2), 266-282. https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0021934707311128

Pereira, K. L. (2015). Developing critical language awareness via service-learning for Spanish heritage speakers. *Heritage Language Journal*, *12*(2), 159-185.

Petrov, L. A. (2013). A pilot study of service-learning in a Spanish heritage speaker course: Community engagement, identity, and language in the Chicago area. *Hispania, 96*(2), 310–327. https://doi.org/10.1353/hpn.2013.0033

Pinto, S. (2018). Intercultural competence in higher education: academics' perspectives. *On the Horizon*, *26*(2), 137–147. https://doi.org/10.1108/OTH-02-2018-0011

Ramirez, E. R. (2016). Impact on Intercultural Competence When Studying Abroad and the Moderating Role of Personality. *Journal of Teaching in International Business*, *27*(2-3), 88–105. https://doi.org/10.1080/08975930.2016.1208784

Rauschert, P, & Byram, M. (2018) Service learning and intercultural citizenship in foreign-language education, *Cambridge Journal of Education*, *48*(3), 353-369, https://doi.org/10.1080/0305764X.2017.1337722

Riley, T., & Douglas, S. R. (2017). The Multicultural Café: Enhancing Authentic Interaction for Adult English Language Learners Through Service Learning. *TESL Canada Journal*, *34*(1), 25–50.

Rodríguez-Izquierdo, R. M. (2020). Service learning and academic commitment in higher education. *Psicodidáctica, 25*(1), 45-51. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psicod.2019.09.001.

Rodríguez-Izquierdo. R. M. (2021). Does service learning affect the development of intercultural sensitivity? A study comparing students' progress in two different methodologies. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *82*, 99–108. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2021.03.005

Salam, M., Awang Iskandar, D. N., Ibrahim, D. H. A., & Farooq, M. S. (2019). Service learning in higher education: a systematic literature review. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, *20*(4), 573–593. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12564-019-09580-6

Salgado-Robles, F., & Lamboy, E. M. (2019). The learning and teaching of Spanish as a heritage language through community service-learning in New York City. *Revista Signos*, *52*(101), 1055–1075. https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-09342019000301055

Schneider, J. (2019). Teaching in context: Integrating community-based service learning into TESOL education. *TESOL Journal*, *10*(1). https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.380

Soneson, H., & Cordano, R. J. (2009). Universal design and study abroad: (Re-)designing programs for access. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, *18*, 269–288. https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v18i1.266

Thompson, G. L., & Brown, A. V. (2019). Heritage language learners and Spanish for specific purposes: Bridging the gap through community service learning. *Revista Signos. Estudios de Lingüística*, *52*(101). https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-09342019000300908

Walker, D. L., & Johnson, M. W. (2022). Service-learning abroad: Identity and transformational opportunities for black male student-athletes. In *Historically Underrepresented Faculty and Students in Education Abroad: Wandering Where We Belong* (pp. 191-211). Springer International Publishing.

Wanger, S. P., Breslin, M., Griffiths, F., & Wu, T. (2020). Institutional Barriers to Study Abroad Participation: The Perceptions of Undergraduate African American Students. *International Research and Review*, *10*(1), 1-15.

Wessel, N. (2007). Integrating service learning into the study abroad program: U.S. sociology students in Mexico. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, *11*(1), 73–89. https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315305283306

Wiersma-Mosley, J. D., & Garrison, M. E. B. (2022). Developing intercultural competence among students in family science: The importance of service-learning experiences. *Family Relations*, *71*(5), 2070–2083. https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12766

About the Authors

Marianela Rivera is currently an assistant professor of Spanish and literature at Florida Gulf Coast University in Fort Myers, FL. She holds a Ph.D. in Hispanic Studies from the University of California, Riverside, and is currently pursuing a second doctorate in Education, with a double concentration in Higher Education Leadership and Multicultural/Lingual Education. She has designed and taught a wide range of Spanish courses in universities in the United States, Qatar, and The Netherlands. Her research and teaching interests include Spanish Peninsular literature of XX and XXI, film studies and media, postcolonial studies, and migration studies and cultural clashes with focus on the Middle East, Africa, and Spain. Her research interests encompass Hispanic studies, Afro-Hispanic literature, and the cultural dynamics of immigration and identity in contemporary Spanish cinema. She has also presented her work at national and international conferences. Her recent presentations include topics such as women's voices in revolutionary contexts, Afro-Boricua activism, African migration in Spain, cross-cultural learning in COIL programs, service learning, and the role of digital storytelling in enhancing students' understanding of Latino culture.
Contact: marrivera@fgcu.edu

Marta Ramos, holds a Doctorate in Education in Spanish from the University of Puerto Rico. She is currently an assistant professor at Florida Gulf Coast University, where she has taught a diverse range of courses spanning language, culture, and literature. Dr. Ramos has a strong academic interest in gender issues within contemporary Hispanic and Caribbean literature. Throughout her career, she has taken on various leadership roles and is passionate about service and community engagement. Dr. Ramos has successfully integrated service learning into several of her courses, promoting a hands-on approach to education. Additionally, she has co-led multiple study and service abroad programs, further promoting global awareness and cultural understanding among her students.
Contact: mramos@fgcu.edu

“Like a Slap in the Face, But a Good One”: A Service-Learning Project and a College Student’s Agency and Vulnerability in an After-school Fifth-Grade Writing Club

Laurie MacGillivray
University of Memphis

Bryan Walker
University of Memphis

Sarah Burson Langley
Germantown, Tennessee Municipal School District

Kimberly Owens-Pearson
Memphis Shelby County School District

Wideline Seraphin
University of Texas, Arlington

Jasmine Worthen
University of Memphis

ABSTRACT

This study focuses on a pivotal discursive interaction with a university instructor and “Roseanna,” an undergraduate situated as a writing mentor in a service-learning course centered around an after-school writing club with Black fifth graders. Course instructors sought to humanize pedagogical practices by establishing an asset-based writing club. University students and instructors regularly reflected on their interactions with fifth graders to explore how unconscious assumptions can impede one’s ability to affirm children's writing identities. The guiding question is, “How did an undergraduate writing mentor in a service-learning literacy course negotiate the positions made available by instructors in an asset-based after-school writing club?” We grounded our investigation in positioning theory (McVee et al., 2018) and mutual vulnerability (Brantmeier, 2013) to analyze Roseanna’s discourse in relation to her social identities and privilege. Our findings capture how a dialogic exchange was pivotal to her ability to reflect and act from a more humanizing and asset-based position with children in the writing club. Next steps include moving students toward a deeper understanding of systemic racism.

We live in times when social injustice and systemic racism diminish the role education can play in creating opportunities for Black and Brown students to thrive (Baker-Bell, 2020; Diehm & Hendricks, 2021; Haddix, 2009). Students in higher education have been known for being unconcerned, insular, and not committed to addressing the needs of the neighborhoods in which they are situated (Foulis & Garcia, 2022). There have been calls for college students to spend time with minoritized communities to prepare graduates to strive for equity and social justice (Mitchell, 2008).

Service-learning courses are one vehicle used to extend students’ perspectives and develop an understanding of divergent communities (Aplin-Snider & Vossos, 2022; Hallman & Burdick, 2018; Mitchell, 2008). Colleges of education have sought to address the on-going negative impact of predominately white teachers

teaching predominantly Black children by extending clinical settings beyond the walls of traditional schools (Hoffman et al., 2019). These sites for service-learning can shed light on social justice (Asghar & Rowe, 2017), reciprocity (Khiatani & Liu, 2020), and transformative learning (Christaldi-Sullivan & Bodzio, 2022; Goi et al., 2019)

Writing clubs can be rich grounds for service-learning due to the social nature of the composing process. These sites can scaffold analysis of interpersonal interactions across age, class, and race (Dunkerly-Bean et al., 2017;). As Exposito and Barillas (2009) assert, “The best writing programs challenge students to meet their potential by teaching them not only about writing but also about building caring relationships and networks inside and outside the community” (p. 63). Unfortunately, writing instructors in higher education often “forget the importance of two impulses that compel writers: the desire to speak out of [their] most intimate experiences and to connect with communities in need” (Goldblatt, 2017, p. 442). As a result, the primal power of writing is routinely dismissed in much of the college curricula.

To intentionally disrupt normative deficit practices and assumptions embedded in K-16 writing instruction, we created an undergraduate service-learning literacy course and an after-school writing club with fifth graders. The college students acted as writing mentors and as writers themselves to foster humanizing interactions with the younger students. Rather than being identified as tutors, the mentors (Hoffman et al., 2019; Sailors & Hoffman, 2019) composed alongside fifth-grade club members to foster positive writing identities. We created an intergenerational community (Haddix, 2020) which required reframing writing as a social process and prioritizing the development of writers over written products (Graves, 1983).

In the service-learning course, we explicitly discussed: (un)conscious biases (Baker-Bell, 2020), the power of vulnerability (Brantmeier, 2013), the importance of reciprocity to create a space for mutual learning (Johnson, 2014) and asset-based interactions (Frankel et al., 2018; Vetter, 2010). As instructors we [three of the authors were instructors] also analyzed our own and others’ compositions. We positioned the mentors as responsible for listening to young writers share their self-selected topics, recognize elementary students’ positive writing identities, and amplify their voices. The role of reflection is an essential component of critical service-learning, so we drew upon Schon (1983;1987) and Zeichner’s (1981) classic works on reflection. We centered “deliberate reflection” (Salam et al., 2019, p.581) by attending to agency (e.g., positioning) and mutual vulnerability (e.g., co-learning/co-disclosure) (Khiatani & Liu 2020). There was particular attention to the ways club members (undergraduates/writing mentors and instructors) positioned themselves and were positioned through the course’s community discourse as taken up by its members.

Positioning theory enabled us to examine how assumptions by and about writers can restrict and/or nurture their ability to exercise agency. Writing for some K-16 students can be “socially and emotionally risky” (Bomer & Laman, 2004, p. 456) due to the personal nature of writing and the vulnerability of sharing one’s personal compositions with others. The vignette of a pivotal interaction between Wideline, a current teacher education professor and one of the course instructors and an

undergraduate writing mentor acts as the key data point presented in this paper. The research question guiding our work is, “How did an undergraduate writing mentor in a service-learning literacy course negotiate the positions made available by instructors and community in an asset-based after-school writing club?”

Related Literature

Humanizing Pedagogy

Throughout K-16 education, a humanizing pedagogy recognizes students’ personal stories and identities as fundamental to education (Flint, 2022; Salazer, 2013; Zinn & Rodgers, 2012). Humanizing pedagogical practice is a process of becoming through a shared critical consciousness (Salazar, 2013). When teachers and students strive toward this state, they intentionally consider how they themselves along with societal forces preserve social injustice (Mapaling & Hoelson, 2022; Salazar, 2013). More specifically, Johnson and Sullivan (2020) define humanizing writing pedagogy as “a lens to view Black students' individual lives and creates opportunities for them to make personal critical connections to a world where they share a collective struggle” (p. 422).

Culturally responsive writing instruction like those associated with a humanizing pedagogy “offers teachers ways to resist and push back against deficit ideologies” (Flint, 2022, p. 85) particularly related to Black and Brown students. Whether these pedagogies are constructed in higher education or K-12 settings, “teachers and students must negotiate between the humanizing and dehumanizing discourses that circulate within their school context” (Taylor, 2019, p. 213).

Mutual vulnerability (e.g., mutual risk of exposure to failure; admitting a lack of knowledge) is considered a facet of a humanizing pedagogy which (Francis & Le Roux, 2012) “is central to educational efforts aimed at reconciliation” (Keet, et al., 2009, p. 109). Therefore, mutual vulnerability and humanizing pedagogies are intertwined. Brantmeier (2013) conceptualizes a pedagogy of vulnerability as a series of five explicit acts, “open yourself, contextualize that self in societal constructs and systems, co-learn, admit you do not know, and be human" (p. 96). In this paper, vulnerability is understood as “an act of dialogue in dialogue and through dialogue” (Brantmeier, 2020, p. 25). This perspective contrasts with the majority of afterschool programs in which the emphasis is on a one-way teaching model of tutors helping students rather than mentoring (Hoffman et al., 2019, for exception, see Goi et al., 2019) with an emphasis on co-learning.

Service-Learning

Service learning can be defined as a “mechanism for offering learning opportunities with populations they [college students] would not generally have access to in traditional courses” (Aplin-Snider & Vossos, 2022, p.1). It is typically associated with a course which values equity (Hallman & Burdick, 2018), reflection (King, 2004), and reciprocity (Asghar and Rowe, 2017 & Rowe, 2017). These courses can motivate

undergraduates to position self and others in new, agentive positions as co-learners (Assaf & Lopez, 2015; Langley & MacGillivray, 2024). For example, Foulis and Garcia (2022) placed language majors into a Spanish-speaking community setting with the explicit goal of "building empathy and practicing social justice" (p.1). The college students came away with improved interpersonal competence and were able to share in the community's successes. In Aplin-Snider and Vossos (2022), nursing practitioners visited an Appalachian community to offer health services. The students were reported to have increased critical thinking, humility, and concern for others. Drawing from aspects of critical service learning (Gardner, 2021), Kinefuchi (2010) strove for students' individual growth and an awareness of structural inequities. Their students were in traditional settings like schools, but the course time emphasized a critical perspective of service learning and on the acknowledgment of power difference, mutuality, and deliberate collaborative effort" (p. 79). They found that their students "accepted cultural differences between themselves and community members but failed to question inequities that stem from structural limitations" (p. 77). Shifts in perspectives are difficult since everyone functions in the structural inequities of society.

In education, service-learning is often situated outside of schools in "pedagogical third spaces" (Hallman & Burdick, 2011) and "hybrid spaces" (Goi et al., 2019) with many preservice teachers working in non-traditional settings striving toward "transformative practices" (Sailor & Hoffman, 2019). There is commonly a continued emphasis on instruction, although not necessarily from a prescribed curriculum (Hoffman et al., 2019). There has been a range of goals with service-learning in education ranging from envisioning curricula in new ways (Sailor & Hoffman, 2019); to teacher identity development with an emphasis on "becoming" (Hallman and Burdick, 2011); "problematizing the server-served dichotomy" (Hallman, 2018, p. 2); and "reciprocity," (Hallman and Burdick, 2011, p. 344) that focuses on the benefits for the community members as well as the preservice teachers.

Service learning potentially creates an experiential learning environment in which vulnerability and humanizing pedagogies are implemented (Gardner, 2021). These studies recognize reflection as essential to learning particularly when working with participants from marginalized backgrounds. In a metanalysis, Kurt (2018) found "reflective practice is more comprehensible, functional and productive. [yet] Only very few [studies have] attempted to define what learners (thinkers) actually produce as reflections or to explain the functions of reflections" (p. 249). We have not found service-learning courses examining humanizing pedagogy in a cross age, after-school writing club as is the focus of this research.

Theory

Positioning Theory

Positioning as a metaphor is an intricate social construct that represents the mechanisms one draws from to produce self and other (Harré & van Langenhove, 1991). This production is evident in "discursive practices such as oral and written

discourse, language use, and speech and other acts" (McVee, 2011, p.4). As Davies and Harré (1990) note, "One lives one's life in terms of one's ongoingly produced self, whoever might be responsible for its production" (p. 49). This evolving construction of self is fluid within one's discursive habits and represents one's social power within any given conversation or conversational context (McVee, 2011).

The term 'positioning' (Davies and Harré ,1990) addresses how written and oral language symbolize the agentive nature of an individual's social positions and attends to the ways discourse morphs depending on context. The emphasis on fluidity is a reaction against roles which suggest staticity. "While not deterministic, the power and agency to take up or refuse positions is influenced by a person's lived experiences" (McVee et al., 2021 p.297). For example, in a school community there are a range of positions from which members can choose to take up or not. If one's speech and other acts do not adhere to the "locally acceptable cluster of the types of behavior that define a persona, that person is bound to be treated with reserve or even suspicion" (Harré & van Langenhove,1999, p. 8). This partly explains why reflecting upon discursive practices is critical in the advancement of student agency within K-16 writing and service-learning instruction.

The implicit and explicit use of discourse in learning settings can promote or constrain student agency or students' ability to function in autonomous capacities in front of teachers and class peers (Langley & MacGillivray, 2024). Further, the identities, values, and beliefs of teachers' impact "identity constructions, instructional decisions, student engagement and learning in the classroom environment" (Kayi-Aydar & Miller, 2018, p. 8). When restrictive in nature, teachers' positioning moves (e.g., language) often: (a) disproportionately affects marginalized students (Martin-Beltrán, 2010; Yoon, 2008), (b) reflects institutional power dynamics and shapes deficit-oriented perceptions about student proficiency (Baker-Bell, 2020) and (c) could become static in nature, which threatens to counteract the inherent fluid nature of positioning (Kayi-Aydar & Miller, 2018). These limiting and dehumanizing effects are important to consider because the positional identities of learners correspond to the quality of support made available to learners by those in power (Dutro et al., 2013; Kayi-Aydar & Miller, 2018). This paper responds to Frankel et al., (2018) calls for future research to examine the language moves of literacy teachers as explicit acts of positioning that promote, limit, or deny student agency.

Context

University Literacy Mentoring Course

The service-learning course had multiple interwoven goals (See Langley & MacGillivray, 2024; MacGillivray & Curwen, 2024; MacGillivray & Worthen, 2024; Seraphin et al., 2021). One of our priorities was to create a safe, encouraging atmosphere to nurture students' (college and fifth grade) writing confidence. Our second priority as education instructors was to develop undergraduates' understanding of the possibilities and responsibilities of community work. In this case we sought to position

undergraduates to nurture positive writing identities and amplify the fifth graders' voices. The third priority was to create a relationship with a public school to partner in the creation of an after-school writing club with college students and elementary students. The school was interested in increasing test scores and students' interest in writing. However, it is important to acknowledge that they did not request a focus on writing skills or any test preparation. Our partnership was driven by a desire to develop students' confidence as writers and offer an opportunity to write for non-test-related purposes.

Using culturally responsive pedagogies (Ladson-Billings, 1995), we attempted to create a space grounded in anti-racism by addressing implicit bias and social inequities through a humanizing pedagogy that recognizes and uplifts the contributions of Black and Brown fifth-grade students (Seraphin, et al., 2020). We emphasized the agency of the undergraduates and fifth graders and instructors to co-construct a shared community/course discourse (Shiller & DeShields, 2022).

The first four course sessions took place on the university campus because there was specific emphasis placed on providing education about the community prior to entering the school. (Aplin-Snider & Vossos, 2022). During this time, instructors and undergraduate/writing mentors participated in several writing exercises to get them composing and contemplating what it means to be a writer. The focus was on the act of writing; articles and activities replaced the use of a textbook. Another focus of these sessions was to counter master narratives by examining deficit discourse, anti-Blackness, and decentering the mentors' assumptions about "good writing." We framed a "writer" as one who explores the writing process by disrupting the ubiquitous nature of whiteness as normative within writing instructional practices as well as stressing the development of positive writing identities through specific actions. The instructors created a place for vulnerability by sharing their social identity categories including "cis-gendered," "lesbian," "Black," "Female," "Christian," and "being from what Trump called a shit-hole country." Students responded with labels representing what could be considered vulnerable positions: "divorced," "Muslim," "bi[sexual]," and "Asian not Indian." These types of conversations sparked deeper discussions related to social injustice with a goal of understanding how our identities shape the assumptions we make about others and their writing (Yazen, 2019).

We drew on strategies such as valuing students' use of African American English (*AAE)* and emphasizing the position of mentors to protect the fifth-grade authors' voices and writing identities (Baker-Bell, 2020; Haddix, 2009; Muhammad, 1914). Two common conversation stems were emphasized to support mentor interactions with elementary writers. First, "I noticed..." encourages active listening and discourages generic responses such as, "Good job" and second, "I wonder" (MacGillivray & Worthen, 2024; Roller, 2019) acknowledges the primacy of the student as author and discourages mentors from assessing the nature of a child's message/text/writing identity (e.g., positioning other in a deficit-based discourse). These stems encouraged nonjudgmental conversations with students and peers about their writing. We modeled and practiced these asset-based strategies with attention to a pedagogy of vulnerability

with the mentors a) before, during, and after writing club sessions, b) in online discussion boards, and c) when providing written feedback to mentors' course assignments (Langley & MacGillivray, 2024). Additionally, we explored our own experiences with racism and privilege to understand inherent biases before working with students of color (Davies, 2008; Jewell, 2020). In order to enrich the undergraduates awareness of their own role in writing club, they completed a profile of themselves as writers at the beginning of the semester; wrote and revised "self-as-writer" creative short stories and poetry; participated in online discussions; and wrote a reflection at the end of the semester. Once the writing club began to meet, writing mentors continued to gather before and after writing club to examine writing processes, uncomfortable interactions, culturally situated practices, and ways to intentionally enhance students' positive writing identities by practicing strategies to disrupt their own preconceptions of Black students (Barnes, 2017).

The After-School Writing Club

The writing club met once a week over a ten-week period for an hour and a half at Evergreen Elementary (pseudonym) in which ninety-six percent of the students were on free/reduced lunch. English was the first language for the 11 Black writing club elementary students. All but one student was male. Unlike most university tutoring/mentoring programs, the ten undergraduate mentors were diverse (see Hoffman et al., 2019), self-identifying as Black, Hispanic, Latino/a, South Asian, and white. Two were full-time teaching aids in nearby public elementary schools. Most writing mentors were education majors averaging in age between 19 and 25. The writing mentors met before and after club sessions to review plans, discuss issues, and reflect.

Before writing club began, course instructors met with fifth graders interested in joining the club to discuss their ideas and suggestions for the after-school experience (e.g., positioning other with agency). Each writing club started and concluded with call and response affirmation chants. The instructors offered communal practice, created a shared discourse, and stressed creativity and freedom in a non-school/after school setting. Writing club members composed, discussed, and shared their writing as individuals and as a community. At the end of the semester, students shared the piece they selected to publish in the club's anthology during a "Writers' Expo" where guests including teachers and parents, listened to and celebrated each fifth-grade author.

Participant: Roseanna, a Writing Mentor

Roseanna, a 24-year-old college senior who identified as a white woman, is the focus of this paper. She agreed to participate, as did all the other students, through the Internal Review Board of the university. Roseanna was seemingly unfamiliar with introspection in relation to identities, privilege, and whiteness although she would initially assert that she was not racist (we did not ask this directly, so this is our assumption). We became particularly interested in Roseanna because of an interaction with an instructor during a routine course debriefing. Recognizing this touchstone

moment and the related growth as central to humanizing pedagogy, we focused this paper on her. The depth and breadth of her data (connecting privilege to deficit-based perspectives) further supported this decision.

The hegemonic nature of white supremacy requires we explore the dynamics of selecting a white student when there were peers of color who could have been selected for this research paper. Working to avoid "re-centering whiteness," we drew on Casey's (2022) notion of "invisibilizing whiteness [which] captures more of the actual risks and speaks to more of the actual violence that academic work can do to further limit what is possible for antiracism" (p. 6). By addressing Roseanna's whiteness and topics related to white supremacy and racism, we disrupt scholarship that continues to invisibilize whiteness (Casey, 2022).

Methods

This case study focuses on one semester of an on-going investigation over several semesters. Six researchers were involved in the data collection, analysis and/or the writing of this paper. Three of us identify as Black and three as white. Two are graduate students in literacy, one has completed her doctorate and is an RTI coach ~~teaching elementary school~~ and two of us are teacher educators. We believe equity, inclusiveness and joy are integral to P-16 education.

The data for this semester included ten undergraduates, also called writing mentors. Initially, we read through all the data from the first semester of the writing club service-learning course. This included 14 weeks of researcher observation notes and reflections, weekly online discussions, and mentor writing samples, reflections, and writing conferences. At this point we decided to focus on Roseanna because of a striking, impactful exchange she had with one of the instructors. We also had more data on her because of the degree of her participation in class, in person, and the online discussions. For Roseanna specifically, the data included nine online discussion boards, 10 self-as-writer assignments with written instructor feedback, the writing profile she submitted, field notes, post-writing club instructor reflection memos, and audio transcriptions of writing club debriefings between the instructors and undergraduates over the 14 weeks.

Once we decided to focus on Roseanna and the pivotal exchange she had with one of the instructors, three of the authors read through the transcript of the interactions separately and wrote our first reactions to the data without focusing on coding. A comment might be, "I think she is trying to bring up emotions here." Then we used descriptive coding including "reciprocity," "analyzing behaviors," and "striving to amplify" as we worked together and separately, reviewing our developing choices as a collective with "dialogical intersubjectivity" (Saldana, 2016, p.37).

Framing our inquiry within positioning theory, we analyzed the rest of the data sources iteratively with attention to how Roseanna and ourselves were "located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (Davies & Harré, 1990, p.7). Drawing from Milner (2007), we continuously

thought through how our own and the participants' "racial and cultural backgrounds influence how they [and we] experience the world" (p. 395). In the final coding stage, we noted narrative positioning analysis and considered how Roseanna was positioned within the course in relation to others, how she positioned herself in relation to others (fifth graders, instructors and the other mentors), and how she positioned herself in relation to herself.

Taking up the discourse modeled by the instructors, Roseanna used, "I notice…" and "I wonder…" in her interactions with peers, instructors, and students in the writing club. After the pivotal interaction captured in the featured vignette, Roseanna used the language of Wideline, one of the course instructors, in several contexts including when retelling writing club experiences, in online group discussions, and written assignments. Also, we completed a member check with Roseanna presenting preliminary findings and receiving her feedback in which she agreed that the findings were representative of her experience.

Our analysis of the community discourse serves as a backdrop for making sense of Roseanna's cultural identity and positioning of self and other in relation to reflection, agency, and vulnerability. It is important to note that the writing club and course afforded an opportunity to practice a range of positions. We document these positions assuming their fluidity. In other words, they are contextual snapshots of *being* rather than *becoming*. Since we gathered data in one semester, we do not know the lasting impact of the course and writing club experience.

Pivotal Interaction

This case study focuses on a pivotal interaction between Roseanna and Wideline which relates to reflection, agency, and vulnerability. When Roseanna retells an interaction with one of the fifth graders asking for input, Wideline encourages her to recognize the strength and agency of a fifth grader, Jayson (pseudonym) rather than positioning him as a victim. These insights occur during a routine debriefing with instructors immediately after one writing club session, which opens with the query, "What did you learn today? Anything make you uncomfortable?" Roseanna shares her experience writing and sharing drafts with Jayson that day.

Roseanna: Um, I noticed working with Jayson, um, his story is very personal. Um, his house got shot up. Um [inaudible] so his dad went to jail and, um, the person, I can't remember, if he got away or not. And then um so just hearing his story, and how confident he seemed- he was not afraid to share the story at all. Um it just made me so, like aware like I was just-- it almost just like I guess like a slap in the face but like in good way, like eye-opening, I guess. And so I guess like even though I live 30 minutes away, [inaudible] kids here- just everywhere- around [this town] and [this state] and everywhere- it's just they're all being affected by something. And you take your own life for granted and so ever since working with him, I have been thinking about, you know, just [inaudible] I've just been thinking about like other people, I guess. I'm more aware of how I should judge other people, and so- yeah.

Wideline: So, we're at a really powerful moment...at a juncture where we're learning a lot about our students. Some of us are learning that they have very different experiences than what we had as kids and we can go one of many ways. We can go to the route of "aw man those poor kids." And it can turn into uh- very limiting pity. Or we can go the route of "How do I continue to humanize this person and not let these narratives, um, or experiences limit um my understandings of them? Limit my imaginations for them? Limit my expectations for them?" Cuz um in my work, in my experiences with young teachers is that your heart genuinely gets broken when you hear any child experience, um, really hard things, um, particularly Black or Brown children. Your heart is just like "Ah". But we don't want that to turn into pity because they are loved, they are in a place where they can exercise agency- so we want to continue those sorts of practices with them. We don't want to start to feel sorry for them.…

Roseanna with affirming nod: Yea, yea.

Wideline: ...So, I want us to continue to think about knowing what we learn about our students, how can we continue to pull out all the pieces of them in writing. How can we continue to humanize them and not, um, characterize them by their circumstances? Not that their circumstances don't contribute to who they are, and that's uh that's the- the trick, the really rough thing to do, that balance of, "yes, this is happening to you- this is part of who you are, and this is why you're writing about it, but this is not a limitation of you. This is not my only understanding of you. Um, you are so many other things,….." But we have an opportunity for them to exercise so many iterations of themselves, so we want to make sure of that.

Drawing on her agency, Roseanna positions herself as reflective and vulnerable by sharing a moment that she was learning about. The instructor modeled reflection and agentive actions as related to the writing mentors, fifth graders, and herself.

FINDINGS

In this section, we discuss three ways that Roseanna is taking up the class discourse, by: being reflective, being agentive, and being vulnerable. The positionings are difficult to tease out because they are fluid and interconnected, however we report them separately to offer a sense of their essence. Each section analyzes facets of the interaction and ways Roseanna continued to take up these ways of being throughout the rest of the course.

Being Reflective

Roseanna's interaction with Wideline is multilayered. With the traditional opening questions "What did you learn today? Anything make you uncomfortable?" the instructor is positioning the writing mentors as reflective. This practice reveals how reflection is

embedded in the course structure. Roseanna's opening line, "I noticed..." emphasizes a listening stance. She is not officially asking a question, but rather publicly (re)thinking an interaction from a writing club session. We see her create a storyline in which she hears a fifth grader's story and gains a new awareness about her own deficit assumptions. Positioning herself as being in the act of reflecting, she concludes with, "so ever since working with him, I have been thinking about, you know, just [inaudible] I've just been thinking about like other people, I guess. I'm more aware of how I should judge other people, and so- yeah." Through tentative phrases, "so," "you know," and "I guess," she demonstrates a processing of ideas.

Clearly, being reflective does not necessarily eradicate deficit thinking. We see the perpetuation of Roseanna's implicit biases. She makes the generalization that "kids here- just everywhere- around [this town] and [this state] and everywhere- it's just they're all being affected by something." Potentially she is editing herself, wrestling with her cultural identity and realizing that her instructors and peers might perceive "kids here" as othering. She then rewords to a more expansive view to include "everywhere" with the implication that something is wrong beyond this community. Her phrase "I've just been thinking about like other people" speaks to the privilege of not having to previously think of "other" people. At one point during the instructor's response, Roseanna jumps in with an affirming, "yea, yea" agreeing to be part of the "we," part of a reflective community.

Wideline encourages the reflection by explicitly inviting the writing mentors to reflect by encouraging a metacognitive process. She shares, "We" can ask ourselves, "How do I continue to..." The communal "we" is yet another way the instructor positions Roseanna and her peers as being reflective.

Later in online discussions, Roseanna continues to practice reflective thinking through issues related to the pivotal interaction. In one written response, Roseanna contemplates, "I have learned to set aside my judgments towards the students and learn from them. One way was to not have self-pity on them. They are all wonderful and bright student who come from very different backgrounds." In her end of semester reflection, she shares, "I have learned not to only focus on what they [the fifth-grade writers] went through but to focus on how that makes them stronger." Roseanna's language echoes the Wideline's agentive language presented in the pivotal moment. As a mentor, she is expanding the way she talks about her positioning-of-self and other during personal reflection.

Being Agentive

Next, we see the practicing of being agentive. That day Roseanna is the first one to address the query, "What did you learn today? Anything make you uncomfortable?" She agentively thinks aloud about her developing understandings. Then she listens as her instructor exercises her own agency as an advocate/social actor (Francis and Le Roux, 2012) and models explicit, intentional reflection.

Wideline names the moment as “powerful” particularly because it is at “a juncture” of future interactions with students. The introduction and continued use of “we” in the pivotal interaction positions Roseanna, her peers and herself, as part of a community with shared goals. In a sense, the author explains that as a “we”, as a collective and as individuals, there is agency to reflect, examine, and strive to understand how implicit bias can restrict the agency of others. Wideline also explicitly names the potential of fifth graders when she shares, “They are in a place where they can exercise agency- so we want to continue those sorts of practices with them.” The writing mentors and the fifth graders have agency.

The instructor also positions Roseanna and her peers as agentive by naming this discussion as an opportunity to take a decisive position with Jayson~~,~~ specifically. ~~The Instructor~~ Wideline ~~-~~asserts the importance of “balance” and how it is a “really rough thing to do,” rather than minimizing the difficulty of agency. She also refers to different “routes” for the mentors’ reactions. Potentially to stress individual responsibility and her own authority, she references “my” personal experiences with “young teachers.” Rather than calling mentors’ deficit assumptions, she frames limiting our “imaginations for them” as a tendency for novice teachers of Black and Brown children. The instructor continues to stress the shared goals of the writing club and affirming the mentors current work with phrases such as, “I want us to continue to pull out all the pieces of them in writing.” The use of “continue” can be interpreted as both an affirmation of what has been occurring and a gentle challenge of what could be happening.

As the semester progresses, Roseanna takes up the agentive position encouraged in the course. She shifts her positioning-of-self and other to better understand the ways students and herself are critical decision makers in their own lives and as mentors, saying, “I have grown to be vulnerable and not mentally criticize people based on their looks or educational background.” In another instance, Roseanna explains that one student helped her spell a word for her own piece. By “allowing” the students to “help” her, Roseanna positions self and other in terms of agency and power by disrupting the conventional narrative of mentor as “expert” and student as “novice” (Hoffman et al, 2019).

Being Vulnerable

In the pivotal exchange, Roseanna is being vulnerable when she talks about her developing insights. In fact, her naivete regarding violence positions her as privileged. She reports being struck by Jayson’s “confidence... to share the story at all” which could be interpreted as her judging him and his family for being in a tumultuous situation. Juxtaposing Jayson’s confidence and her own judgmental assumptions, she reveals how much she was taken unaware of the contrast of their experiences. Her admission that it was like a “slap in the face” names the pain of insight and she asserts, “I'm more aware of how I should judge other people.” We found Roseanna developing a sense of vulnerability that fosters reciprocal learning and ways to disrupt power dynamics in

traditional mentor-mentee relationships. She negotiates positioning-of-self and other in relation to vulnerability in her online written discourse/retellings.

In an online discussion the night after Roseanna's and Seraphin's conversation, she writes she appreciated when her peer asked the instructor a question, offering, "I feel that it shows the students that it's okay to ask for help no matter who or how old you are." Again, Roseanna's discourse counters traditional academic tutoring power dynamics when she recounts How you can still be vulnerable and ask for support regardless of role/age This action reiterates to writing club participants that adults/mentors are learners too.

In her final course reflection, Roseanna wrote the following when asked what insights she would apply in future interactions:

> *Throughout this semester, I have learned to set aside my judgments towards the students and learn from them... I have grown to be vulnerable and not mentally criticize people based on their looks or educational background. This course has helped set that reminder.*

This quote reflects both insight about her growth and naivete that she has "learned to set aside [her] judgements." She identifies the problem with generalizing, citing the instructor's words. Roseanna's words could be read as a contradiction. She claims to have acquired the ability to "not mentally criticize" others- unaware that this singular experience is part of an ongoing process in understanding her white privilege. This quote captures the tenacity and complexity of privilege.

Overall, in the interaction, Wideline responds to Roseanna's experience positioning Jayson, the fifth grader, with agency. She offers an explicit and humanized response to Roseanna when she positions Jayson with agency outside of a "pity" perspective- and simultaneously positions Roseanna and by proxy her peers to consider how viewing the traumatic life events of others can either limit or amplify how we imagine what is possible for others.

Discussion

Our discussion considers the interrelatedness of pedagogies of humanity and vulnerability and how they can be successfully situated in a service-learning course. Human connections can act as catalysts for seeing the world differently. Drawing on mutual vulnerability and emphasizing co-learning has the potential to move individuals toward positioning themselves as willing and eager to participate in their own new imagining of society.

Humanizing Pedagogies and Vulnerability

Humanizing pedagogies connect vulnerability (Dutro, 2019; hooks, 2014) to critical consciousness (Brantmeier, 2013). Within the framework of the after-school writing club, asset-based positions were available to Rosanna and her peers to humanize social interactions between and among the mentors and fifth graders. Keenly aware of the many of the barriers within writing instruction for Black children (Brown, 2006; Seraphin, 2021), the instructors (Frankel, et al., 2018) created an environment for Roseanna and her peers in which to exercise agency (Vetter, 2010) and discuss vulnerable topics.

The instructors strove to develop an asset-based writing club with writing mentors rather than literacy tutors to reflect a critical stance as educators (Flint & Jaggers, 2021). Alternative mentoring models shifted the power dynamics associated with traditional tutoring approaches (Sailors & Hoffman, 2019; Tanaka et al., 2014). We defined writing as a non-linear and social process (Graves, 1983) to create space for mentors to support the development of fifth graders' positive writing identities and confidence.

The "I noticed..." and "I wonder..." sentence stems (MacGillivray & Worthen, 2024; Roller, 2019) (e.g. class discourse) further encouraged asset-based discourse and encouraged co-learning to disrupt typical power dynamics (Goi et al., 2019). Roseanna strives to recognize her implicit, deficit-based assumptions through listening and wondering. Making wondering statements based on attentive listening appears to have given Roseanna a deeper sense of understanding how to recognize and affirm the sources of strength and agency-the fifth-grade writers possessed (Brown, 2006; Exposito & Barrillas, 2009).

Service-learning

This course served as a vehicle to extend students' perspectives and develop an understanding of divergent communities (Aplin-Snider & Vossos, 2022; Hallman & Burdick, 2018; Mitchell, 2008). We created an environment in which mentors increased understandings of their assumptions about cultures other than their own (Aplin-Snider & Vossos, 2022 Hallman & Burdick, 2018; Mitchell, 2008), specifically implicit biases related to Black and Brown elementary children. However, in contrast to traditional service-learning courses which emphasize the power of serving as helping undergraduate students become more aware and insightful (Mitchell, 2008), we also focused on reciprocity. By acknowledging the power dynamics, we sought to keep the experience from being based on paternalistic and codified hierarchal power relations (Mitchell, 2008).

An explicit social justice framework (Asghar & Rowe, 2017) guided the structure and content of the course with an emphasis on reciprocity (Khiatani & Liu, 2020) and transformative learning (Christaldi-Sullivan & Bodzio, 2022; Goi et al., 2019). The instructors positioned writing mentors as learners with the expectation that they would have insights about themselves while nurturing the fifth graders' positive views of themselves as writers. The nature of a writing club lends itself to creating co-learners

sharing a community discourse. Like Kinefuchi (2010), we found that the undergraduates were able to have authentic conversations about deficit models and identify personal bias, however she did not demonstrate an ability to articulate her role in the ”structural conditions that under gird social problems” (p. 79).

Positioning theory and mutual vulnerability pedagogy

Positioning theory allowed us to analyze a white student's interactions (McVee et al., 2004) as a writing mentor in an afterschool asset-based writing club. We were able to notice the ways Roseanna positioned herself and others in relation to agency (Kayi-Aydar, 2015), vulnerability (Bullough, 2005; Tanaka, et al., 2014), and by listening and wondering (Roller, 2019) when she was situated as a writing mentor in a community-based course and after-school writing club.

Pedagogy of Vulnerability helped us establish a space for P-16 students to have a degree of writing autonomy rarely experienced in academic settings (Johnson, 2014; McKenna & Brantmeier, 2020). To encourage the reciprocal exchange of learning and counter traditional notions of power dynamics of mentoring (e.g, expert/novice) (McBride & Rentscher, 2020), instructors disclosed our sense of self as writers, shared compositions about our lives (Dutro, 2019; Goldblatt, 2017), discussed our memories of being writers, and revealed intimate details related to our social identity categories and privilege. Upon reflection, we could have talked more about systemic structures and modeled our roles in structural inequities in the stories we wrote.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to the emerging field of humanizing pedagogy in higher education (Mapaling & Hoelson, 2022) through empirical examination of a service-learning course situated in a writing club focusing on empathy and social justice (Foulis, et al. 2022). A mentor explains that realizing her own deficits was “like a slap in the face but like in a good way.” She recognizes the potential violence of learning of one's own biases even when we perceive it as “good” growth (hooks, 2014). In this paper, we analyzed how a white undergraduate enrolled in a community-based literacy service-learning course negotiated her positions as a writing mentor in an afterschool asset-based writing club with Black students. We suggest the mentor, Roseanna, tried on a more ~~human~~ empathetic position by making herself vulnerable during routine reflection and by taking up the language her instructor modeled. In the course, instructors used the structure, content, and course community of co-learners to disrupt traditional power hierarchies. We assert the importance of studying how institutions of higher learning use power to build more humanistic, critically conscious, vulnerable citizens. Next steps include moving students closer to an understanding of systemic racism and the role it plays in their own lives and interactions with others.

References

Acuff, J. (2018). Confronting racial battle fatigue and comforting my Blackness as an educator. *Multicultural Perspectives 20*(3), 174-181.

Aplin-Snider, C., & Vossos, H. (2022). Insights on the development of a service-learning course: The people of Appalachia and what nurse practitioner students and faculty learned along the journey. *Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education*, *14*.

Asghar, M., & Rowe, N. (2016). Reciprocity and critical reflection as the key to social justice in service learning: A case study. *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, *54*(2), 117–125. https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2016.1273788

Baker-Bell, A. (2020). Dismantling anti-Black linguistic racism in English language arts classrooms: Toward an anti-racist Black language pedagogy. *Theory Into Practice*, *59*(1), 8–21. https://doi-org.ezproxy.memphis.edu/10.1080/00405841.2019.1665415

Barnes, M. E. (2017). Encouraging interaction and striving for reciprocity: The challenges of community-engaged projects in teacher education. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, *68*, 220-231.

Bamberg, M. G. (1997). Positioning between structure and performance. *Journal of narrative and life history*, *7*(1-4), 335-342.

Bomer, R., & Laman, T. (2004). Positioning in a primary writing workshop: Joint action in the discursive production of writing subjects. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 38(4), 420-466.

Brantmeier, E. (2013). Pedagogy of vulnerability: Definitions, assumptions, and applications. In: Lin, J., Oxford, R. & Brantmeier, E. (eds.) Re-Envisioning Higher Education: Embodied Pathways to Wisdom and Transformation. Information Age Publishing.

Brown, R. N. (2006). Mentoring on the borderlands: Creating empowering connections between adolescent girls and young women volunteers. *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*, *4*, 105–121.

Casey, Z. A. (2022). Whiteness has never left the center. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 1-8. *36*(8), 1442-1449.

Christaldi-Sullivan, J., & Bodzio, J. R. (2022). Student benefits following an international high-impact practice service-learning experience. *Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education*, *14*.

Davies, B. (2008). Re-thinking ‘behaviour’ in terms of positioning and the ethics of responsibility. In A.M. Phelan & J. Sumsion (Eds.), *Critical readings in teacher education: Provoking absences* (pp. 173–186). Sense Publishers.

Davies, B. & Harré, R. (1990). Positioning: The discursive production of selves. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, *20*(1), 43-63.

del Carmen Salazar, M. (2013). A humanizing pedagogy: Reinventing the principles and practice of education as a journey toward liberation. *Review of Research in Education*, *37*(1), 121-148.

Diehm, E. A., & Hendricks, A. E. (2021). Teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical beliefs regarding the use of African American English. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools*, *52*(1), 100–117. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_lshss-19-00101

Dutro, E. (2019). *The vulnerable heart of literacy: Centering trauma as powerful pedagogy.* Teachers College Press.

Exposito, S., & Barillas, M.D. (2009). Writing their way to success. *Educational Leadership, 66*(7), 62-63.

Flint, A. S. (2022). " See, that's me. I'm proud": Manifestations of a humanizing and culturally sustaining writing pedagogy for young writers. *Language Arts*, *100*(2), 83-95.

Flint, A. S., & Jaggers, W. (2021). You matter here: The impact of asset-based pedagogies on learning. *Theory Into Practice*, *60*(3), 254-264.

Foulis, E., & García, C. (2022). Building empathy and practicing social justice: Partnering with Latina/o/x communities in the Midwest. *Journal of Service-Learning in Higher Education*, *14*.

Francis, D., & Le Roux, A. (2012). Using life history to understand the interplay between identity, critical agency and social justice education. *Journal for New Generation Sciences*, *10*(2), 14-29.

Frankel, K. K., Fields, S. S., Kimball-Veeder, J., & Murphy, C. R. (2018). Positioning adolescents in literacy teaching and learning. *Journal of Literacy Research*, *50*(4), 446-477.

Goia, E., Hoffman, J. V., Modesto, H., Ngomane, J., Sailors, M., & Sitoe, A. (2019). Reimagining primary teacher preparation in Moçambique: Literacy Mentoring in Hybrid Spaces as a Transformative Practice. *Global Education Review*, *6*(2), 10-32.

Goldblatt, E. (2017). Don't call It expressivism: Legacies of a "tacit tradition". *College Composition and Communication*, 438-465.

Haddix, M. (2009). Black boys can write: Challenging dominant framings of African American adolescent males in literacy research. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *53*(4), 341-343.

Haddix, M. M. (2020). This is us: Discourses of community within and beyond literacy research. *Literacy Research: Theory, Method, and Practice*, *69*(1), 26-44.

Hallman, H. L., & Burdick, M. N. (2018). Service-learning, writing and reflection: A Bakhtinian analysis. Changing English, 25(4), 331-350.

Harré, R. (2012). Positioning theory: Moral dimensions of social-cultural psychology. In Jaan Valsiner (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Culture and Psychology* (pp. 191-206). Oxford.

Harré, R., Moghaddam, F. M., Cairnie, T. P., Rothbart, D., & Sabat, S. R. (2009). Recent advances in positioning theory. *Theory & psychology*, *19*(1), 5-31.

Harré, R., & Van Langenhove, L. (Eds.) (1999). Positioning Theory. Wiley-Blackwell.

Hoffman, J.V., Svrcek, N., Lammert, C., Daly-Lesch, A., Steinitz, E., Greeter, E., & DeJulio, S. (2019). A research review of literacy tutoring and mentoring in initial teacher preparation: Toward practices that can transform teaching. *Journal of Literacy Research 51* (2), 233–251. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086296X19833292

Hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.

Huizing, R. L. (2012). Mentoring together: A literature review of group mentoring. *Mentoring & Tutoring: Partnership in Learning, 20*(1), 27-55. doi:10.1080/13611267.2012.645599

Johnson, E. (2014). Reconceptualizing vulnerability in personal narrative writing with youths. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *57*(7), 575-583.

Johnson, L. P., & Sullivan, H. (2020). Revealing the human and the writer: The promise of a humanizing writing pedagogy for Black students. *Research in the Teaching of English*, *54*(4), 418-438.

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2015). Teacher agency, positioning, and English language learners: Voices of pre-service classroom teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*,*45*, 94–103. https://doi-org.ezproxy.memphis.edu/10.1016/j.tate.2014.09.009

Kayi-Aydar, H. (2019). Language teacher identity. *Language Teaching, 52*(3), 281-295. doi:10.1017/S0261444819000223

King, J. T. (2004). Service-learning as a site for critical pedagogy: A case of collaboration, caring, and defamiliarization across borders. *Journal of Experiential Education*, *26*(3), 121–137. doi.org/10.1177/105382590402600304

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). But that's just good teaching! The case for culturally relevant pedagogy. *Theory into practice*, *34*(3), 159-165.

Langley, S. & MacGillivray (2024, April 11-14). *Service-learning and an under-graduate's agency and vulnerability in an afterschool writing club with fifth graders* [Conference presentation]. American Educational Research Association 2024 Convention. Philadelphia.

MacGillivray, L. & Curwen, M. (2024, December 3-7). *Self as superhero: Using imagination in the (re)construction of self and the world* [Conference presentation]. Literacy Research Association 2024 Convention, Atlanta.

MacGillivray, L. & Worthen, J. (2024, December 3-7). *"I feel that wonder is sweet to the soul": Agentive undergraduates noticing and wondering in online discussions regarding a cross-age writing club with Black students* [Conference presentation]. Literacy Research Association 2024 Convention. Atlanta.

Mapaling, C., & Hoelson, C. N. (2022). Humanising Pedagogy within Higher Education: A Ten-Year Scoping Literature Review. *Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in the South*, *6*(3), 68-81.

McBride, M., & Rentscher, M. (2020). The Importance of intention: A review of mentoring for writing center professionals. *Praxis*, *17*(3), 74-85.

McKenna, M. K. & Brantmeier, E. J. (2020). "Pedagogy of vulnerability: Roots, realities, and the future." In *Pedagogy of vulnerability* (pp. 1-21). Information Age.

McVee, M. B. (2011). Positioning theory and sociocultural perspectives: Affordances for educational researchers. In M. B. McVee, C. H. Brock, & J. A. Glazier (Eds.), Sociocultural positioning in literacy: Exploring culture, discourse, narrative, and power in diverse educational contexts (pp. 1-21). Hampton.

McVee, M. B., Silvestri, K. N., Barrett, N., & Haq, K. S. (2018). Positioning theory. In *Theoretical models and processes of literacy* (pp. 381-400). Routledge.

McVee, M. B., Silvestri, K. N., Schucker, K. A., & Cun, A. (2021). Positioning theory, embodiment, and the moral orders of objects in social dynamics: How positioning theory has neglected the body and artifactual knowing. *Journal for the theory of social behaviour*, *51*(2), 192-214.

Milner H. R. (2007). Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and unforeseen. *Educational Researcher*, 36, 388-400.

Mitchell, T. D. (2008). Traditional vs. critical service-learning: Engaging the literature to differentiate two models. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *14*(2), 50-65.

Muhammad, G. G. (2014). Focus on middle school: Black girls write!: Literary benefits of a summer writing collaborative grounded in history: Detra Price-Dennis, Editor. *Childhood Education*, *90*(4), 323-326.

Roller, S. A. (2019). Noticing and wondering: A language structure to support mentoring conversations. *Mathematics Teacher Educator*, *7*(2), 44–56. https://doi.org/10.5951/mathteaceduc.7.2.0044

Saldana, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers.* Sage Publishers.

Seraphin, W., MacGillivray, L. Owens-Pearson, K. (2021). The spirit of writing: A culturally diverse after-schooling writing club. *Literacy Today,* 42-43.

Shiller, J. T., & DeShields, I. A. (2022). Meet students in the middle: A culturally responsive, near-peer literacy program. *Phi Delta Kappan*, *104*(2), 17-21.

Tanaka, T.D., Farish, M., Nicholson, D., Tse, V., Doll., & Archer, E. (2014). Transformative inquiry while learning ~~t~~eaching: Entry points through mentor-mentee vulnerability. *Journal of Transformative Education, 12*(3), 206-225.

Taylor, L. A. (2019). Negotiating discourses of curriculum and time: Tensions of humanizing and dehumanizing discourses in an urban elementary school. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *52*(2-3), 312-326.

Vetter, A. (2010). Positioning students as readers and writers through talk in a high school English classroom. *English Education*, *43*(1), 33-64.

Author Information

Laurie MacGillivray, Ed.D. Laurie is a professor of Literacy in ICL at the University of Memphis. Email: lmcgllvr@memphis.edu

Bryan Walker, Doctoral candidate. Bryan is a middle school ELA teacher and a doctoral candidate in Literacy in ICL at the University of Memphis.
Email: bwalk901@gmail.com

Sarah Burson Langley, Ed.D. Sarah is an RTI coach at Farmington Elementary School in Germantown Municipal School District. Email: sarah.b.langley@gmail.com

Kimberly Owens-Pearson, Ed.D. Kimberly is a 20+ year high school English educator with the Memphis Shelby County Schools District.
Email: Kimberlyowenpearson@gmail.com

Wideline Seraphin, Ph.D. Wideline is an Assistant Professor of Literacy Studies in Teacher and Administrator Preparation at the University of Texas, Arlington.
Email: widelineseraphin@uta.edu

Jasmine Worthen, Doctoral candidate. Jasmine is a doctoral candidate and an adjunct instructor in the Literacy program in ICL at the University of Memphis.
Email: jwrthen1@memphis.edu

Language Learning and Career Readiness Outcomes of an Undergraduate Speech Pathology Service-Learning Project

Lesley Graybeal
University of Central Arkansas

Sunjung Kim Thao
University of Central Arkansas

Mikelle Porter
University of Central Arkansas

Madeline Sims
University of Central Arkansas

ABSTRACT

Examinations of service-learning in the context of preparing students for health professions in speech-language pathology have been limited (Bushman et al., 2021; Cooper et al., 2013; Diego-Lazaro et al., 2020; Kaf et al., 2011; Kong, 2014; Pace et al., 2019; Pakulski, 2011; Peters, 2011). This study examines outcomes from a service-learning partnership between an undergraduate speech-language pathology course and a local childcare center providing language development programing for preschool children. Data were collected through language learning session recordings as well as surveys and focus groups of the undergraduate students. Outcomes for preschool children included improved language skills in two of three measured areas of language development (total utterance and idea units); outcomes for college students included reinforcement of career goals, exposure to a professional setting, and development of career-related skills.

For speech-language pathology students, service-learning provides the necessary hands-on educational experience to prepare them for their future careers in the health professions. Particularly, through service-learning, students can provide support for and get to know clients in a naturalistic setting outside of the more decontextualized clinic environment. Language activities and therapy for children should be contextually based and educationally relevant (Ukrainetz, 2006), and service-learning offers a natural fit for fostering authentic learning opportunities in contextually valid environments. While Kimberly Peters (2011) offered a detailed model for implementing service-learning in undergraduate communication sciences and disorders curriculum, relatively few studies of the efficacy of service-learning pedagogy in this field have been published since that time.

Examinations of service-learning implementation at the graduate level in speech-language pathology have found positive effects on application of course material (Kong, 2014), collaboration with peers (Kong, 2014), career outcomes (Bushman et al., 2021), cultural awareness or understanding of diversity (Diego-Lazaro et al., 2020; Kaf et al., 2011), civic attitudes (Pace et al., 2019), and self-efficacy (Diego-Lazaro et al., 2020; Pace et al., 2019). As Anthony Pak-Hin Kong (2014) has identified, further research is

needed on how service-learning as a form of problem-based learning can be applied to teaching communication sciences and disorders. Additionally, the field of service-learning scholarship more broadly has identified the need for more focus on community outcomes relative to student outcomes, and few studies of service-learning in speech-language pathology have engaged partners or community members as research participants alongside university students. This study addresses a gap in the literature examining the experiences of undergraduate students completing service-learning experiences within pre-professional speech-language pathology programs, as well as documenting the outcomes of service-learning projects for community partners.

In this study, 36 senior undergraduate students participated in the Strengthening Kids' Language and Literacy (SKILLs) project in Spring 2023. The students visited an early childhood learning center once per week to provide language learning sessions with 26 children of preschool age. The college students received faculty-led language therapy training over a two-week period. Subsequently, the students developed a semester plan and session plans, as well as creating language improvement goals and activities for individual children. Over the course of nine weekly sessions, the college students collected pre- and post-intervention data to monitor the children's progress. Following the completion of the nine sessions, students completed a survey and participated in a focus group discussion to reflect on their service-learning experience and perceived outcomes.

To measure outcomes for the children's language learning progress, the researchers analyzed the total utterance, idea units, and temporal lexicon recorded in the language learning sessions. The total utterance refers to the number of words the child uses in each utterance, while idea unit encompasses subjects and predicates in single words or phrases. Temporal lexicon includes vocabulary indicating time difference in events or actions. Analysis of the session recordings for these three criteria revealed a significant improvement in both total utterances and number of idea units before and after the intervention. Additionally, several key themes emerged from the outcomes college students reported themselves to have gained from the service-learning experience: (1) reinforcement of their career choice in speech-language pathology, (2) development of skills relevant to their career, (3) exposure to a professional environment, (4) improved peer collaboration, (5) the opportunity to practice working with children, and (6) the opportunity to apply classroom learning in an authentic setting. Students additionally reported an awareness of how their chosen career in a health profession is responsible for social outcomes in their state and local communities.

Literature Review

Community-Based Learning in Speech-Language Pathology

Active learning is an essential component of the curriculum that prepares both undergraduate and graduate students to enter health science professions, with such strategies ranging from episodic use of simulations to semester-long clinical placements. Recent scholarship has demonstrated that students value and provide positive feedback on active learning experiences, especially when they receive clear instruction about the purpose of the learning activities, the out-of-class time commitment and expectations, and the evidence of teaching and learning effectiveness of the activities (Shilling et al., 2023). At the undergraduate level, active learning strategies have not only increased student engagement with complex course material, but also improved sense of belonging in the discipline (Roberts & Lemoncello, 2023). Kong (2014) documented that graduate students in speech-language pathology perceived project-based learning as an effective method of developing collaboration skills, learning course material, and applying course concepts.

Studies of service-learning as one type of active, project-based pedagogy have documented positive impacts on both the graduate students' learning and the community partner or clients. An empirical study of graduate students in communication sciences and disorders who participated in a service-learning literacy project with children in a family homeless shelter found that the service-learning students had increased confidence in their career skills and felt more prepared for a career in speech-language pathology (Bushman et al., 2021). Graduate speech-language pathology students who implemented a program with parent education and child development workshops designed to enhance the quality of mother-child interactions perceived several positive learning outcomes related to their attitudes towards their chosen profession and knowledge of the target population, while the mothers involved in the study also indicated satisfaction with the program (Pace et al., 2019).

Service-learning experiences for speech-language pathology students have been found to benefit students' cultural awareness and development when conducted with a target population to which the student does not belong. In one example, service-learning participation increased speech-language pathology graduate students' positive attitudes toward older adults with dementia (Kaf et al., 2011), while another study found that undergraduate students in a Deaf Studies program who completed a service-learning project with off-campus partners in the Deaf community reported an increase of civic responsibility (Cooper et al., 2013). Increasingly, institutions are discovering the benefits of international experiences for students preparing for careers in health sciences, and study abroad alone, without a service-learning experience, increased graduate speech-language pathology students' cultural awareness, cultural competence, and self-efficacy (Diego-Lazaro et al., 2020). Another study of the outcomes of an international service-learning experience for graduate and undergraduate students in special education and communication sciences and

disorders from the United States in Botswana revealed perceived outcomes related to disciplinary skill development and confidence, as well as cultural competencies that included open-mindedness, boundary spanning, and cultural humility (Rose et al., 2021).

While most applications of community-based learning have been studied at the graduate level of speech-language pathology curriculum, applications at the undergraduate level have reported numerous benefits. Peters (2011) provided an early model for implementing service-learning in an undergraduate communication sciences and disorders program in which students implemented an in-school literacy program for elementary students and applied course learning through reflection on their experiences with typically developing children and children with hearing loss. This study reported positive student perceptions of learning outcomes relative to courses without the service-learning component. A study of a service-learning course in introductory phonetics (Roberts & Lemoncello, 2023) found that not only did redesigning the course to include a service-learning component provide students with opportunities to apply classroom learning and practice professional skills, but it also increased their perceived engagement with course materials and fostered a sense of belonging within the learning community.

Despite focusing on a service-learning project for graduate students, Sylvan's (2022) study of a virtual service-learning project in speech-language pathology offers a possible model for undergraduate service-learning in the field because of its deviation from the practice of involving graduate students as student clinicians. As Sylvan noted, "This deliberate shift in role seemed to provide a new perspective on K-12 children and provided an authentic context to apply course content" (p. 11). Because undergraduate students in speech-language pathology courses typically do not have the discipline-specific skills or knowledge to act as student clinicians, service-learning projects for undergraduate students also stand to benefit from an intentional focus on the learning opportunities presented by other roles and contexts related to the profession.

Career Readiness Outcomes of Service-Learning

Decades of research on service-learning outcomes for students have demonstrated the value of service-learning for supporting students' career readiness and professional skills development. Students who participated in service-learning have demonstrated a greater understanding of career decision-making (Coulter-Kern et al., 2013), improved leadership skills (Groh et al., 2011), and a greater desire for their career to have a social impact (Seider et al., 2011). Service-learning students have additionally experienced improved self-concept (Celio et al., 2011), self-awareness (Furze et al., 2011), cultural awareness (Desmond et al., 2011), intercultural effectiveness (Kilgo et al., 2015), adaptability (Desmond et al., 2011; Furze et al., 2011), and social skills (Celio et al., 2011), all of which translate to professional contexts in a variety of fields. As McMenamin and colleagues (2014) have argued, as numerous disciplines, including the health sciences, increase their focus on public service as a

career outcome for students, more exposure to service-learning in the undergraduate curriculum can help students develop professional skills within the context of a sense of public purpose for their future profession.

Methodology

Study Design

The study used a mixed methods design to answer the following research questions: (1) do weekly language learning activities with undergraduate speech-language pathology students improve the language skills of preschool children as measured by total utterance, idea units, and temporal lexicon, and (2) does service-learning in the form of weekly language learning activities for preschool children improve undergraduate speech-language pathology students' perceived career readiness and professional skills? The study used a quasi-experimental design to assess language learning over time for 26 preschool school and a post-project survey and focus group to assess the professional learning outcomes 36 senior undergraduate speech-language pathology students participating in the Strengthening Kids' Language and Literacy (SKILLs) project in spring 2023. Approval was obtained for the study from the University of Central Arkansas Institutional Review Board (IRB#23-012).

Before participating in the SKILLs project, the undergraduate students completed a two-week unit on language therapy training and worked in groups to develop a semester plan, session plans, and language improvement goals for each child. During the project, undergraduate students visited an early childhood learning center once per week for nine weeks to provide one-hour language learning sessions. The undergraduate students were each assigned three of the nine sessions to attend and worked with two preschool children at each session. During each session, the preschool children completed a sequencing comprehension activity, which included determining which action came first, second, third, and fourth when looking at picture cards, with different cards at each session. Each sequencing activity was followed by a language-infused craft activity.

At the end of the project, each child's parent or guardian was provided a final report that included the learning outcomes of the project, the child's progress on sequencing comprehension (correct ordering of the cards) and sequencing production (use of sequencing words to describe the actions depicted on the cards), and recommended activities for continuing to improve language skills at home. Following the completion of the SKILLs project, the undergraduate students completed a survey and participated in a focus group interview to reflect on their service-learning experience and perceived outcomes.

Participants

Preschool participants included 26 children ages 3-5 who attended a private early learning center in a small city in the southern United States. The undergraduate student participants included 36 students enrolled in a senior-level speech-language pathology course, with demographic characteristics reflected in Table 1. Demographic data were not collected for the preschool children participating in the study.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Undergraduate Student Participants

Characteristic	*n*	%
Gender		
Female	35	(97%)
Male	0	(0%)
No response	1	(3%)
Race		
White	28	(78%)
Black or African American	3	(8%)
Asian	3	(8%)
Other	1	(3%)
No response	1	(3%)
Major		
CSD	34	(94%)
Post-baccalaureate CSD	1	(3%)
No response	1	(3%)
Classification		
Junior	2	(5%)
Senior	33	(92%)
No response	1	(3%)

Data Collection

Data on the preschool children's utterances were collected by recording each language learning session for transcription and analysis. Each recording and transcription was reviewed by two members of the research team for reliability of data.

Data on the undergraduate students' outcomes were collected through completion of a post-project survey consisting of demographic characteristics, 10 Likert-type items, and 12 open-ended questions about their service-learning project experience, and through a focus group interview, which was recorded for transcription and analysis. The focus group interview protocol contained nine open-ended questions, as well as several probing questions to elicit more in-depth discussion. Four focus group interviews were conducted to accommodate all participants, each with a duration between 30-45 minutes.

Table 2

Focus Group Interview Questions

1. What were your personal learning goals for this community-based learning experiences? How would you describe the learning goals of the class?

2. How would you assess your experience? (Was it a success? Why or why not? What factors contributed to the success or failure of the experience? What obstacles did you encounter and how did you overcome them?)

3. Describe your interactions with the community partner organization and the children that you worked with. What role did the community partner and/or the children that you worked with have in your learning?

4. What did you learn about the community or society in general from this experience?

5. Did this community experience leave you with new questions or concerns?

6. What connections can you describe between the community-based project and the classroom discussions, required reading, assignments? (Was there a good balance of course time and community activity?)

7. What role did your instructor play in your community-based project?

8. What recommendations do you have for future community-based learning courses?

9. Do you have any other comments you would like to share?

Data Analysis

To assess the preschool children's language learning, the researchers transcribed the recorded sessions and coded them for total utterance, idea units, and temporal lexicon. Total utterance refers to the total number of words the child uses in a given instance, while an idea unit refers to the combination of a subject and predicate. Temporal lexicon includes vocabulary telling when or in what order an event or action occurred, as well as the frequency or duration of the event or action.

The researchers conducted descriptive statistics of the Likert-type survey items administered to the university students and coded the focus group transcripts and the responses to the open-ended survey questions. Initial coding produced 16 codes, and the researchers constructed memos for each code with a definition and data excerpts from multiple sources of data. The list of codes and definitions were shared with university student participants in a member-checking survey asking participants to read each of the themes that emerged from the research and rate on a Likert-type scale how similar or different the theme is from their own experience with the service-learning course. After member-checking, the researchers narrowed the list of initial codes to seven themes for discussion.

Results

Research Questions

Research Question 1: Language Learning Outcomes. Analysis of the session recordings comparing total utterance, idea units, and temporal lexicon across all nine sessions for each preschool child participating in the SKILLs project revealed a significant improvement in total utterances and the number of idea units from the first session to the final session. No significant difference was found in temporal lexicon from the first session to the final session.

Table 3

Children's Language Learning Performance

	Mean in session 1	Mean in session 9
Total number of utterance	14.5	19.50
Number of Idea Unit	2.90	3.70
Temporal lexicon	0.60	1.00

Research Question 2. Career Readiness Outcomes. Analysis of undergraduate speech-language pathology student participants' survey responses and focus group recordings revealed several key themes related to career readiness and professional skills development: (1) reinforcement of their career choice in speech-language pathology, (2) development of skills relevant to their career, (3) exposure to a professional environment, (4) improved peer collaboration, (5) the opportunity to practice working with children, and (6) the opportunity to apply classroom learning in an authentic setting. Students additionally reported an awareness of how their chosen career in a health profession is responsible for social outcomes in their state and local communities.

Table 4

Responses to Likert-Type Survey Items

Item on Questionnaire	Mean Rating
1. Doing this service learning project helped me to better connect to what I am learning in my class.	3.69
2. I feel that my time in a service learning had a positive impact on me as a person.	3.60
3. Completing this service-learning project improved my relationship with my classmates and/or instructor.	3.40
4. After completing this service-learning project, I have a better idea of what I want to do with my life.	3.97
5. This service-learning experience increased my understanding of problems or challenges other people or groups face in society.	3.11
6. I learned something new about my community through this experience.	3.49
7. My instructor and the staff at my service-learning project location helped me to understand how my work would make a difference for others.	3.69
8. I would recommend this project to other students.	3.51
9. I wish more of my other courses included service-learning opportunities.	3.29
10. Every student should have to do a service-learning in order to graduate.	3.23

Note. 4=Strongly Agree, 3=Agree, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree

Discussion

Themes

After completing member-checking of the qualitative codes and definitions with the undergraduate student participants and receiving participant feedback on the most salient codes, the researchers identified seven emergent themes, all of which related to undergraduate students' career readiness and professional skills development.

Reinforcement of Career Choice. Student survey and focus group responses on the theme of reinforcement of career choice reflected ways in which the service-learning project validated students' prior interests or intentions to pursue a career in speech-language pathology and, more narrowly, to work with a specific population. For example, as one student described, the experience confirmed a prior commitment to working with children:

> *[The service-learning project] solidified [my career choice] for me. I've always known I wanted to work with kids and so this just really confirmed it for me and kind of gave me an idea of what it would look like. You know, you're going to need to practice more patience or, you know, being flexible…stuff like that. And so I felt that was really good to have going into grad school.*

While several participants described having a previous interest in working with children underscored by the service-learning experience, others noted that they did not have an interest in working with children, and that this predisposition too was confirmed throughout the project. As one student responded to her classmate, "I'm in the same boat, but opposite sides. I never want to work in a school setting, ever…I learned that kids aren't so terrible, but I also learned that kids are not my strong suit."

Throughout the open-ended survey responses and focus groups, as students noted the usefulness of reflecting on their interest (or lack of interest) in working with children, they also shared a desire for more community-engaged projects throughout their undergraduate curriculum that would expose them to other populations and other professional settings. Respondents were aware that their service-learning project had led them to reflect on their career choice based on experience with one population in one setting, but that a variety of such experiences would benefit their career planning. As one student reflected, "I wish more of my classes personally did this, even though at times it can be kind of [challenging]. You're putting a lot of effort into it, but if you're passionate towards it and this is what your future is leading you towards, why not go more?"

Career Skills Development. Findings on the theme of career skills development demonstrated how service-learning helped students learn or practice a skill that they viewed as relevant to their chosen career. Students perceived the development of career skills prior to a formal internship or practicum placement as an intended learning outcome of the project. As one participant noted, "I think [our instructor] was looking for

us to get experience in more of a low stakes environment, just working on certain activities and tasks that we would probably use in the future as SLPs." Given that the students were undergraduates, this project was the first time that any of the students had been encouraged to practice the professional skills related to speech-language pathology in an authentic setting, with practicum and clinical experiences reserved for the graduate level curriculum. As one student explained, "I would say it was successful [in achieving this learning outcome] because I've never really had experience planning a certain amount of activities or giving even a little bit of an assessment."

Other students similarly shared that lesson planning for the language learning sessions, structured notetaking during and after sessions, and assessment were all reported as discipline-specific career skills. Students noted that lesson planning required a great deal of "room for error" to "have additional stuff prepared just in case something goes wrong." Assessment was one of the career skills for speech-language pathology that students emphasized most in their responses. Another student shared the following description of the assessment process that they followed throughout the SKILLs project:

> *So for each kid we had to document their process and start with a baseline and then where they were at the end of the semester, and describe what their experience was like in the semester, and provide them recommendations that we think that they would benefit from. And I feel like that was challenging in a good way because…I feel like this is going to make us be a little bit more comfortable and have some skills in our pocket when we're doing it for clients.*

Students recognized that challenging tasks within the service-learning project would have long-term benefits for them as they gained confidence applying the skills of their discipline.

Another skill that students focused on was adaptability to individualized client circumstances and the ability to use disciplinary and professional skills to make adjustments in the moment. As one student reflected,

> *I learned that not always will plans work out. You can have something so structured, so organized, go into it head first and be like, "Yeah, we got this!" And then you go in and it's just not that child's day. It's like everything just turns head over heels and you have to be able to think on your feet and adapt weekly to circumstances that are constantly changing.*

In addition to responding to children's personalities and moods, other participants described needing to adapt to respond to cultural differences that they had not anticipated. Several students described learning how to talk to children about family and holiday traditions without assuming that the child was part of a certain family structure or celebrated specific holidays. One student noted that "We've been taught that, you know, individualization is so important because everyone is not the same," but it was not until she had an interpersonal interaction that challenged her cultural norms that she grasped

that families “are not like what we have seen in the movies and shows…and so we’ve got to remember to be very sensitive to family structures.” Cultural agility, then, represented an important application of adaptability for several participants in the SKILLs project.

Exposure to a Professional Environment. As students discussed their service-learning experience, they reflected on how the project compared to the environment they expected to work in as professionals. Students perceived the exposure to a professional environment as another intended outcome of the service-learning project, and described the project as “a little bit of a preview of what a therapy session could look like.” As undergraduate students, few of the participants had experience in a clinical setting, and exposure to the environment increased their level of comfort. As one student summarized,

> *I think it's definitely a beneficial experience just to expose you if it was your first time. Because I think it was probably most of our first time in a clinical setting with a child. So I think that it was really beneficial and will probably make us a lot more comfortable if [we] are going on to grad school.*

Students mentioned being exposed to environmental factors that included expectations for professional behavior and demeanor, professional communication styles, and distractions in the physical environment, and they perceived being “immersed in that setting” as an important learning experience in its own right.

One student who had previous experience working with children noted the difference between how the were accustomed to interacting with children and the expectations of a professional setting, stating that the service-learning project “gave [them] a glimpse of…the more professional setting.” As she elaborated, “You’re here to do therapy with them. You’re not trying to entertain them and play and stuff like that.” Students described experiencing growth from the first session in the professional environment, when they were uncertain of what to expect, to the final session, when they felt more confidence as a result of “exposure of what to expect.” Overall, students described the professional environment as a space in which they increased their confidence through exposure and experimentation.

Improved Peer Collaboration. Students reported that the service-learning project required them to collaborate with their classmates, which they did while planning language learning activities and during a mid-semester check-in with other students paired with the same children. Students described the mid-semester checkpoint as a particularly beneficial aspect of the project, as it provided an opportunity to identify “what was working and what wasn’t working” as well as to learn from “the things that they did wrong.” Students described peer collaborations as a space where they could share mistakes, be vulnerable, and support one another.

While most peer collaboration took place in class rather than in the service-learning project setting, one student shared an example of a time when a classmate helped her adapt to an unexpected situation in one of the language learning sessions. The student recalled,

> *I know my first session, my kids were– they really wanted to do this coloring activity with [another student]. And so she allowed me and my kids to actually get involved with her kids. So it actually really helped me out because I wasn't stressing and they weren't running [around the facility].*

The lesson that the student took away from this instance of peer collaboration was "don't be afraid to ask for help." Other students echoed this sentiment in describing examples of how collaborating with classmates who were working with the same child allowed them to gain a more complete understanding of the child's personality, behavior, and background.

Experience Working with Children. Given that the target population for the service-learning project was preschool children between the ages of 3-5 years, many of the undergraduate student participants reported gaining experience working with children as one of the project outcomes. Specifically, participants gained awareness of developmental expectations for young children. As one noted, "My kids sometimes were really, really motivated to do certain activities and other times they were wanting nothing to do with any of it…it was kind of hard to keep them motivated." Participants highlighted the importance of patience and flexibility in working with children on language learning tasks in order to manage their attention spans and level of engagement with particular topics or activities. They described experiences such as "learn[ing] how to successfully redirect the students whenever they would get very distracted," using reinforcements like stickers, and "explain[ing concepts] in a way that incorporates as much action and play as you can."

Several participants shared stories of ways in which they adapted their lesson plan to accommodate children's behavior or interests and observed positive results. As one student recalled,

> *I noticed like my kids were having a hard time paying attention and staying interactive, and so something we started doing was like acting out each card [in the sequencing activity]...And then that also helped them remember, because then in the post-assessment, even though they were tired, they would like act it out as they were choosing each card.*

Another student shared a similar experience, offering,

> *I found that my two– they really liked gesturing and miming things out. So if we were discussing baseball, we would go "Whack! You hit the baseball. And then you run to the base." And they both seemed to like doing it. It's more of a game. And I think that probably helped them to learn it later.*

While participants shared many examples of lessons that they learned through failure, their repeated experiences with children provided ample opportunities to reflect, adapt, and observe success in their language learning activities.

As students frequently engaged in a process of trial and error, several of them emphasized the importance of treating children as people. One described the importance of "just getting to know the kid and them getting to know you" in order to establish rapport. Another explained the importance of being transparent with any client, child or adult, when explaining the structure of a session, stating, "They deserve to know what's coming next. It makes them more calm, cool, and collected, as much as they can be as children, and I feel like, you know, they're people and they deserve to know what they're going to be entering into."

Ultimately, students came away from the service-learning project with experience that allowed them to recognize that children are individuals who have different backgrounds, preferences, personalities, and experiences. Furthermore, students observed through experience that children might behave differently from one session to the next, and that individualizing their approach to the child and the particular session helped them achieve the language learning goals.

Authentic Application of Learning. The final theme that emerged from students' open-ended survey responses and focus group discussions was that students valued the opportunity service-learning provided to apply what they learned in the classroom in a real-world setting.

In some ways, the experience of learning through application created discomfort. As one student described, "I was kind of like doing it on the go. And so I felt like it was harder [than classroom learning]." In order to allow students to operate outside of their comfort zones and grow as a result, the instructor took a "more hands-off" approach at the service-learning site. As one student described, "I think that was her way of doing it because she wanted us to learn more," with several participants noting that the instructor remained present through each language learning session as a resource to help students troubleshoot challenges or redirect children who strayed from their group.

Students recognized that learning concepts and skills in a classroom, even with case studies or simulated scenarios, is not the same as applying them in an authentic context. In discussing the contrast between classroom learning and authentic application of assessment, one student explained,

> *[We have] learned a lot about pre- and post-assessment and intervention in our lectures and our slides. And we have done some reports and SOAP notes before, but they've always been based off fake scenarios that were given. And so it was really cool to actually do that, but with you actually taking the data and you actually doing the intervention, because it was just something we had learned all throughout our undergrad and now we're actually like doing it before we have to go to grad school and do it on an actual client. I think that was a central connection that needed to be made, and so I'm glad that we got to do that.*

Another participant emphasized the importance of learning “how it works with actual children and not just a case study.” Students expressed excitement seeing familiar concepts from the classroom come to life in their interactions with children. As one shared, seeing how children performed on language learning activities “after we’ve learned it about it for so many semesters was kind of cool to see.”

Implications for Practice

The results of this mixed methods study demonstrated positive outcomes for both the undergraduate students and the community members involved in the service-learning project, with the preschool children experiencing language learning improvement in two of the three areas measured and undergraduate students reporting perceived improvement in several areas of career readiness and professional skills development. Students also reported that the community-based project had a positive impact on their self-concept, relationships, understanding of course concepts, and understanding of the community. Students recognized and valued the role that their instructor played as a facilitator of the service-learning experience, including in managing the partnership, training students on needed concepts and skills, and structuring the students’ planning, implementation, and assessment of the project.

This study contributes to the evidence base for institutions to provide undergraduate students in pre-professional health science programs with multiple and diverse opportunities to interact with target populations and practice professional skills as they refine their career choices. Exposure to professional and community contexts allows students to move from the discomfort of unfamiliar settings and situations towards confidence in applying disciplinary knowledge, adapting to the unexpected, and learning through repeated experience. While the instructor plays a critical role in facilitating any active learning environment, students must feel empowered to learn by doing and have opportunities to seek and offer support.

Limitations and Future Directions for Research

This study used a quasi-experimental design to assess the children’s language learning and a non-experimental design to gather students’ perceptions of their learning outcomes of the service-learning project. While excluding any of the children at the early learning center from the language learning activities to create a control group was neither practical nor desirable from a partnership standpoint, the lack of a control group limits the validity of the language learning findings. Future studies of language learning might include a second community partner or recruit preschool children from the local community to participate in the study as members of a control group. Similarly, students outcomes were limited to those that students perceived and reported; future research should expand upon these findings by incorporating pre- and post-project assessments of students’ civic attitudes, career skills, or other intended outcomes in addition to soliciting open-ended responses through surveys and focus group discussions.

Conclusions

Service-learning remains an important and effective means of achieving outcomes for students, faculty, institutions, and communities. This study offers support for the use of service-learning in undergraduate speech-language pathology programs as a means for concretizing students' career aspirations, building students' confidence through experience working with target populations and in professional settings, reinforcing and extending classroom learning through application, and supporting students' development of a variety of professional skills. In addition to these and other well-documented benefits for student learning, service-learning connects faculty and students with the community through reciprocal partnerships, shared goals, collective impact. Instructors and administrators across academic programs who are interested in supporting students' career development and developing stronger communities can achieve these goals together with students and community partners through service-learning.

References

Bushman, B., Meek, S., Purpura, M., & Fagan, M. K. (2021). Story hour at a family homeless center: contribution to graduate students' preparation and confidence in preliteracy skills. *Journal of Communication Disorders, 93*, 106124. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcomdis.2021.106124

Celio, C.I., Durlak, J., & Dymnicki, A. (2011). A meta-analysis of the impact of service-learning on students. *Journal of Experiential Education, 34* (2), 164-181. https://doi.org/10.1177/105382591103400205

Cooper, S. B., Cripps, J. H., & Reisman, J. I. (2013). Service-learning in deaf studies: Impact on the development of altruistic behaviors and social justice concern. *American Annals of the Deaf, 157*(5), 413-427. https://doi.org/10.1353/aad.2013.0003

Coulter-Kern, R.G., Coulter-Kern, P.E., Schenkel, A.A., Walker, D.R., & Fogle, K.L. (2013). Improving student's understanding of career decision-making through service learning. *College Student Journal, 47*, 306-311.

Desmond, K.J., Stahl, S.A., & Graham, M.A. (2011, September) Combining service learning and diversity education. *Making Connections: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cultural Diversity,* 24-30.

Diego-Lazaro, B., Winn, K., & Restrepo, M.A. (2020). Cultural competence and self-efficacy after study abroad experiences. *American Journal of Speech-Language Pathology, 29*. 1896-1909. https://doi.org/10.1044/2020_AJSLP-19-00101

Furze, J., Black, L, Peck, K., & Jenson, G.M. (2011). Student perceptions of a community engagement experience: Exploration of reflections on social responsibility and professional formation. *Physiotherapy Theory and Practice, 27* (6), 411-421. https://doi.org/10.3109/09593985.2010.516479

Groh, C.J., Stallwood, L.G., & Daniels, J.J. (2011). Service-learning in nursing education: Its impact on leadership and social justice. *Nursing Education Perspectives, 32* (6), 400-405. https://doi.org/10.5480/1536-5026-32.6.400

Kaf, W.A., Barboa, L.S., Fisher, B.J., & Snavely, L.A. (2011). Effect of interdisciplinary service learning experience for audiology and speech-language pathology students working with adults with dementia. *American Journal of Audiology, 20*. S241-S249. https://doi.org/10.1044/1059-0889(2011/10-0025)

Kong, A. P. (2014). Students' perceptions of using Problem-Based Learning (PBL) in teaching cognitive communicative disorders. *Clinical Linguistics & Phonetics, 28*(1-2), 60-71. https://doi.org/10.3109/02699206.2013.808703

McMenamin, R., McGrath, M., Cantillon, P., & MacFarlane, A. (2014). Training socially responsive health care graduates: Is service learning an effective educational approach? *Medical Teacher, 36*, 291-307. https://doi.org/10.3109/0142159X.2013.873118

Pace, A. E., Krings, K., Dunlap, J., & Nehilla, L. (2019). Service and learning at a residential parenting program for incarcerated mothers: Speech-language pathology student outcomes and maternal perspectives. *Language, Speech, and Hearing Services in Schools, 50,* 308–323. https://doi.org/10.1044/2018_LSHSS-CCJS-18-0030

Pakulski, L.A. (2011). Addressing qualified personnel shortages for children who are deaf or hard of hearing with an interdisciplinary service learning program. *American Journal of Audiology, 20.* S203-S219. https://doi.org/10.1044/1059-0889(2011/11-0005)

Peters, K. (2011). Including service learning in the undergraduate communication sciences and disorders curriculum: Benefits, challenges, and strategies for success. *American Journal of Audiology, 20*, S181-S196. https://doi.org/10.1044/1059-0889(2011/10-0031)

Roberts, T., & Lemoncello, R. (2023). Partnering with Students to Increase Engagement and Inclusion in an Undergraduate Phonetics & Acoustics Course. *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences & Disorders, 7*(1). https://doi.org/10.30707/TLCSD7.1.1675490380.893709

Rose, A., Snyder, M., Murphy-Nugen, A., Maddox, G., MacKusick, C.I., & Molefe, B. (2021). Cultivating cross-cultural learning and collaboration among special educators engaged in international service-learning. *International Journal of Research on Service-Learning and Community Engagement, 9*(1). https://doi.org/10.37333/001c.31307

Seider, S.C., Rabinowicz, S.A., & Gillmor, S.C. (2011). The impact of philosophy and theology service-learning experiences upon the public service motivation of participating college students. *The Journal of Higher Education, 82* (5), 597-628. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2011.11777219

Shilling, T., Thayer, J., Coria-Navia, A., & Ferguson, H. (2023). Student Preferences for Active Learning and Their Beliefs, Experiences, and Knowledge. *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences & Disorders, 7*(2). https://doi.org/10.30707/TLCSD7.2.1690393489.74901

Sylvan, L. (2022). Positioning SLP Graduate Students to Meet the Needs of Vulnerable Children Virtually: Lessons from a Service Learning Project Implemented in the Fall of 2020. *Teaching and Learning in Communication Sciences & Disorders, 6*(1). https://doi.org/10.30707/TLCSD6.1.1649037808.610967

Ukrainetz, T. (2006). *Contextualized language intervention: Scaffolding PreK–12 literacy achievement.* Thinking Publications.

About the Authors

Lesley Graybeal is the Director of Living Learning Communities at the University of Central Arkansas. She can be contacted a lgraybeal@uca.edu.

Sunjung Kim Thao is an associate professor in communication sciences and disorders at the University of Central Arkansas.

Mikelle Porter is a graduate student in communication sciences and disorders at the University of Central Arkansas.

Madeline Sims is an undergraduate student in communication sciences and disorders at the University of Central Arkansas.