

**The Benefits and Challenges to Service-Learning
with Recently Immigrated Students**

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Abstract

Despite the growing trend toward using service-learning curriculum in the classroom to promote civic participation, little research has been done regarding the benefits and challenges of service-learning for immigrant students. According to an initial survey we conducted, many immigrant students feel disconnected with the communities to which they immigrate because they feel that few people care about what they have to say as newcomers and consequently, they may feel little responsibility toward the community. Therefore, this study uncovers some of the benefits and challenges of using service-learning with newly immigrated English Language Learners through qualitative data such as student reflection papers, classroom observations, and participant-observer observations and reflections. The analysis of this data shows that service-learning with immigrant students: (1) helps students discover their identity, (2) allows students to serve as a bridge between the larger American culture and their communities, and (3) validates academic learning as applicable to life. However, there are challenges such as time and funding. This study will contribute to future research on this topic, potentially leading to a shift in teacher education about the value of service-learning and funding from the government to carry out such projects.

Nestled in the armpit of the Manhattan Bridge, sits an indiscriminate yellowing building on Flatbush Avenue Extension. The building, painted by the fog and fumes of rush hours that seem to last the entire day, houses a small community called the Brooklyn International High School (BIHS). Appropriately, this high school is situated near a bridge, as it serves to bridge a community of recently immigrated English Language Learners (ELLs) into the culture, education system, and communities of the United States.

A heavy brown door separates these polluted sites and sounds from a community of learners. BIHS, located on the fifth and sixth floors of an eight-story building, sandwiched between two other schools, has a mission organized around a few core principles. The first is heterogeneous classes. Teachers and administrators group students in classes of mixed languages and academic capacities in order to support language learning through a collaborative model. Second, teachers create a curriculum, that fosters experiential learning, that follows the philosophy that knowledge acquired through “doing” coupled with listening or reading reinforces learning. Third, all of the classes at Brooklyn International High School have the goal of teaching language through a content area, so students learn language in context and gain academic language skills. In order to strengthen this language learning, teachers design interdisciplinary project-based units that will help students make thematic connections between content from class to class as well as to help them improve their English language skills. Also, Brooklyn International High School functions in teams, meaning a group of five to six teachers all have the same students so that it is easy to identify students who might be struggling and in this manner

teachers are able to support each other and the students more efficiently. Also, this makes it easier to create interdisciplinary projects. In addition, the BIHS administrator, teachers and staff believe that the students' native language skills should continue to progress while they learn English. For this purpose, teachers group students according to their native languages for some class projects. Ultimately, the school's goal is to help students maintain a balance between their native culture and language and adapting to U.S. culture and the English language.

In order to better serve English Language Learners, Brooklyn International High School only admits newly arrived immigrants who have been in the country less than four years. Additionally, the goal of the admissions counselors is to accept no more than twenty percent of students from one language group, to maintain heterogeneous classes. Students come from about twenty different countries and represent multiple languages. Typically, BIHS students are not from English speaking countries and tend to come from developing nations.

Not only are students diverse in ethnicity and language, but they come to BIHS with varied abilities in both literacy and math skills and English language development. Some students have no English when they arrive. On the other hand, some students have studied English extensively in their country of origin. There are also some students who have had very little or no formal education (SIFE). BIHS teachers design differentiated, project-based, collaborative lessons to accommodate all of these students in one classroom.

We, the Government and English teacher-researchers, conducted this study with the twelfth grade consisting of four classes of approximately twenty students, ranging

from 16-20 years of age. These students study five subject areas including: Government, English, Science, Art, and Math. There are eight language groups represented on our team (Figure 1).

Figure 1:

Languages Spoken by Students:

Spanish	26
Chinese	22
Haitian-Creole	11
Arabic	8
Bangla	4
French	3
Urdu	2
Russian	1

Last year, in order to foster both students' native language skills and their English language development, we designed a project that we believed would connect students to their communities while they worked on their English language skills. Organizing students in their native language groups, we asked them to research an immigrant group during the Progressive era (1890s -1920s) and produce bilingual walking tour brochures of the Lower East Side of New York City. Students willingly completed the project; however when we asked them to disseminate the brochures to their community members, we found many of the brochures with soiled footprints strewn about the stairwells and on the floors of our classroom shortly after we had distributed them. From this experience

and from speaking to students informally, we learned that students did not feel that their community members would want to learn about these immigrant groups or the Lower East Side. In addition, this school year we conducted a survey, (to be discussed later in the paper), in which a majority of students reported that they did not feel they could make a difference in their communities. Therefore, we began seeking ways to make future projects more meaningful to our students and investigating why students feel they cannot make a difference in their communities.

Keeping these two challenges in mind, we began designing projects using a service-learning approach, which current research suggests increases civic participation. According to Learn & Serve America, part of the independent federal agency Corporation for National and Community Service, “Service-learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities,” (Service-Learning Is..., 2005-2008). Also, according to the Pennsylvania Service-Learning Alliance (2002), practitioners should use five steps to service-learning projects including: preparation, service, reflection, evaluation, and celebration. The preparation and service is where much of the learning takes place. Students realize what they have learned during reflection and evaluation. Finally, participants are valued for their contributions during the celebration.

As we learned more about the service-learning approach we also learned that despite the growing trend toward using service-learning curriculum in the classroom to promote civic participation, little research has been done regarding the benefits and challenges of service learning for newly arrived immigrant students. This information, as

well as our previous experience with the Lower East Side walking tour brochures, and our desire as educators to improve our students' civic participation in their communities, prompted us to investigate the following question in this study: what are the benefits and challenges a service-learning curriculum presents to newly immigrated students? This ethnographic study aims to answer this question and to contribute to the research on how service-learning impacts newly immigrated youth whose first language is not English.

Review of Literature

Current research shows that there are more benefits of conducting service-learning projects in an academic setting than there are challenges. Service-learning engages students in a meaningful way to encourage them to become more active participants in society. According to Anderson (1999) service-learning is different from community service in the sense that community service has a "giver" and a "receiver" of service, but with service-learning, both parties should gain something from the service with equal focus on both the service that will be provided and the learning that will occur. This is done as participants apply their classroom knowledge and skills to complete a service. Furthermore, they gain knowledge from the service, which they might not have otherwise gained from the classroom setting.

Service-learning, although not formally known as such, has a long history in the United States, beginning with John Dewey in 1905, to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal programs in the 1930's, followed by John F. Kennedy's creation of the Peace Corps in 1961. In 1989, President George Bush created the Office of National Service in the White House and in 1990, Congress passed the National and Community Service Act, which established Learn and Serve America, awarding grants to schools (History, 2005-

2008). Currently, service-learning is a growing trend in best practices in schools across the country and there is much research dedicated to this topic.

In the *Journal of Adolescent Research*, Seider's study (2007) used twenty in-depth interviews of college students from middle class suburban communities to find out what led these students to develop such a deep commitment to service. Only 14% of Americans and 5% of college students report volunteering six or more hours per week while these students volunteer from ten to twenty hours per week. Fifteen of the twenty students interviewed stated that they had an "academic experience" that changed their worldview. For example, Ester talked about having participated in volunteer organizations in high school but it was not meaningful because she did not form relationships with those she worked with. It was not until college, when she participated in the voluntary Freshman Week Service Program that service had a purpose for her. After evening lectures and discussions about gender oppression, racism, and homelessness, Ester described herself as getting very angry, saying, "Oh my gosh. I really have to do something"(p.620). Ester's experiences illustrate the impact of service-learning and how it differs from community service. In high school, when there was no "learning" or "reflection" attached to the service, it was not meaningful. However, in college, when Ester expanded her worldview through knowledge and reflection, she realized that she had a role in the world, which led to her high level of commitment to meaningful service.

The goal of service-learning is to create more active citizens, so service-learning with recently arrived immigrant students is more complex. Joan M. First (in Pereira, 1993) wrote, "Young immigrants enter the United States classrooms with cultural scripts

modeled on the material and social environments of their homelands. Their behavior norms stem from lives they are no longer living but cannot forget. To survive, they must integrate old scripts with their new environment” (p.1). Pereira goes on to explain that students and their families may have immigrated from very different political systems than the United States. An example from our baseline survey shows that three students answered they could not make change in their communities because they feared danger. One student explained that she saw people getting killed for that in her own country. Thus, students need information and experiences in the U.S. political system if we want to see them actively involved in it.

In addition to promoting civic participation, service-learning helps strengthen academic content knowledge. In a business school, students participated in various service-learning projects and Govekar and Rishi (2007) collected data through student journals, essays, and evaluations. Results from this study show that 80% of the participants indicated improved understanding of financial topics because, “...being able to and in fact explaining a concept to somebody else truly enhances your own comprehension as well” (p. 5). Furthermore, 89% reported that their experience at an adult and teen learning center had enhanced personal understanding of general economics.

Service-learning also has many psychological benefits for youth. Evans (2007) claims that young people feel a sense of belonging to a community when they feel that they have opportunities to express their voice or opinion. The researcher states “An opportunity to have voice in contexts also builds young people’s identity as a relative equal in the community and helps develop an expectation for active participation as the

norm” (p. 700). However, Gilligan (1982) cited in Evans (2007) says in order for young people to fully feel a sense of voice they must get a clear signal that their contributions are being taken into consideration. She describes this concept as resonance. Therefore, providing students with service-learning opportunities through which they can experience voice and resonance allows them to become fully active participants in society, which is particularly beneficial for newly arrived immigrants who may feel that they cannot be active members of their new environment due to cultural and language barriers.

Despite all of the documented benefits of service-learning it appears that not all student populations are the givers of service. In Grassi, Hanley and Liston’s (2004) study of the Colorado Learn and Serve service-learning programs from 2000-2001 the researchers found that 92 percent of students conducting service-learning projects in a sample of sixteen programs with 672 youth participants were English only speaking. Their study also found that most of the programs sought to address diversity issues; however these efforts led to ethnic minorities as the “receivers” of service rather than the “givers” of service. This they go on to say “...places minority youth and SLL [Second Language Learners] in positions of “receiving aid,” and does not give these youth the opportunity to “give” of their culture and language” (p..96). This is a significant point as newly immigrated students are often trying to maintain a balance in identity between their new American culture and their native culture.

If newly immigrated students are given the opportunity to be leaders in service-learning not only is their sense of self and identity validated, but also their learning in the classroom is validated, keeping students in school. Grassi, Hanley and Liston (2004) upon analyzing disaggregated data for English Language Learners (ELLs) also found that

these students felt that participating in service-learning helped them do better in school because it helped them gain academic skills, involved them in school, improved their communication skills and increased involvement in their communities. Additionally, Duckenfield (1992) cited in Grassi, Hanley and Liston (2004) states that one of the primary reasons for at-risk students dropping out is feeling alienated from school and the community. Since newly immigrated students often have to work after school to support their families, they can run the risk of not completing their studies and dropping out of school. If they truly feel a sense of purpose in their education, students might be more likely to stay in school.

Alienation seems to be a common problem for ESL (English as a Second Language) students. Russel (2007) claims that “cultural differences often cause ESL students to feel alienated from their schools and community”(p.777). After integrating a year-long service-learning project of students designing Spanish/English phrasebooks based on the local Spanish speaking communities needs in Nebraska into her curriculum, the participant-researcher felt that the ESL students in her class were more connected to other students in the school as well as to the surrounding community. The service-learning initiative also increased students’ leadership and problem-solving skills while developing their English language skills. In addition to their English language skills, students were able to have authentic experiences with native speakers outside of the classroom, thereby improving their native language skills. Russel’s action research strengthens the case to conduct service-learning projects with newly immigrated students, as it demonstrates how service-learning can provide a useful way of teaching academic

content while facilitating the social and emotional well-being of English Language Learners.

Overall, current research indicates that service-learning is a beneficial means of improving young peoples' civic engagement which results in a sense of voice and resonance. Research also shows that for newly arrived immigrants and ESL students service-learning initiatives can help create a bridge between students' native cultures and new American cultures. According to Evans (2007) many neighborhoods and government structures are not equipped to facilitate youth involvement in decision making. Schools are primarily facilitating this involvement. This research study will focus on how schools in partnership with communities can help facilitate service-learning opportunities for newly arrived immigrants including them as "givers" of service and not just "receivers" of service.

Design of the Service-Learning Projects

Based on the goals of service-learning and our school's core principles we developed two projects to research how the twelfth grade team responds to service-learning projects: an interdisciplinary, native language and English newspaper and a community based research project in their Government class. Grouped into their eight native language groups for the native language and English newspaper project, students conducted a community survey to learn what their communities would like to read about in a community newspaper. Using the information from the survey results, students then designed a newspaper submitting articles they wrote in their Government class on voting and the upcoming elections, English class on lessons learned from a recently arrived

immigrant, Science class on consumer chemicals, Art class on museum reviews, and Math classes on comparing the prices of the various types of metro cards available.

For the research project, students worked in heterogeneous language and academic ability groups to help each other write individual papers in the Government class. In this research paper they identified a problem or need in their community, investigated the root causes and history of the problem and then took action steps to begin solving the problem. Actions ranged from students developing websites to educate community members about the effects of pollution to visiting homeless shelters. Both the newspaper project and the research project followed the five steps of service-learning which included preparation, service, reflection, evaluation, and celebration.

Data Collection

Throughout these five steps of service-learning we collected data from our classes as participant observers along with student work and reflections, and outside observers whom we invited to triangulate our data. Our first method of data collection was a baseline survey in which we asked students several questions about how they felt working with their communities and whether or not they felt like they could make a difference (Figure 2). Students completed the survey in class where they were instructed to be as honest as possible and reassured that this survey would not affect their grades. Furthermore, these surveys were completed at the beginning of the unit, before we taught much of the content or discussed the idea of service learning in depth, so we could later compare these answers with students' thoughts in reflection papers written to culminate the unit.

Figure 2:

Baseline Survey:

Service-Learning Survey
Directions: Please take a few minutes to answer the questions below.
Provide as much detail as possible.

1. What is service-learning?
2. Who do you consider to be part of your community?
3. What does a person in your community value learning about?
4. Do you feel you can change things in your community? Why or why not?
5. How do you feel about working with your community?
6. What questions do you have about doing a service learning project?

Our second type of data is participant observations from both researchers. We both kept a journal and took notes while teaching relevant content around the service-learning project. One such lesson included students debating the articles they would include in their final newspapers, which was part of the preparation of service-learning. Furthermore, some lessons were observed by educators who are not involved in teaching these particular students. One observer saw the same lesson mentioned above, while the other observer watched a class discussion about how students feel about working with community. The latter created a sociogram to record the movement and body language of the students and how it changed with the content of the discussion, which was also recorded on video for further study.

To conclude the project, and to extend the service, reflection, evaluation and celebration components of service-learning, students exhibited their projects to graduate students and professors at Teachers College (TC), Columbia University and celebrated

their accomplishments thereafter. After exhibiting the projects at TC, students verbally debriefed their experiences. This served as another piece of data. During this reflection session students discussed two questions: 1) What did you learn from your experience at TC? 2) How was presenting at TC different from presenting at school?

Other types of data are two reflection papers from students about service learning projects. The first reflection paper corresponds with the native language newspaper project while the second is about the action students took after researching a community problem in the research paper.

Our last piece of data was a post-project survey where we asked the students again, if they felt they could make change in their communities. This survey was done approximately two months after the TC event, long after the conclusion of both projects.

We chose these methods of data collection to give a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data. Additionally, we wanted our data to be triangulated so that it is a mix of participants, researchers, and outside observers with the goal of removing bias and preserving the integrity of the data.

Data Analysis Methods

After the collection process, we analyzed and coded the data looking for patterns and themes. Five themes emerged from this process including: sense of community, voice and resonance, choice, skills, and challenges. Looking at the data through the lens of sense of community three sub-themes emerged: 1) students questioning who their community is; 2) students learning more about the people and the resources in their communities; and 3) students serving as a bridge connecting their immigrant communities to a larger American community. Next, we defined the lens of voice and

resonance based on Evans (2007) and Gilligan's (1982) in Evans (2007) definitions as students' having the opportunity to give input and that input being acknowledged by others. The idea of giving students choice in how they served their community emerged as a third theme. We define the fourth theme as skills gained by the students during the service-learning projects, and lastly we categorized the challenges faced by both the students and the teachers when designing and implementing service-learning projects.

This study aims to analyze the qualitative data through the lens of ethnography. Therefore, the voices of the students captured in this study represent the group studied; however, they may also help us draw conclusions about a wider population of newly arrived immigrant students who are also ELLs. An example of how we coded the data for these categories while trying to retain students voices are represented in Figure 3 below. The names of students have been changed to protect their identity.

Figure 3:

Coded Data Sample:

Sense of Community:	Voice & Resonance:	Choice:	Skills:	Challenges:
From participant observers notes (1-11-08)	From a student reflection paper (3-28-08)	From a student reflection paper 3-28-08	From participant observer and outside observer notes (2-7-08)	From an outside observers notes (10-26-07)
Class B had a heated debate during the fishbowl reflection of the newspaper project about identity. Yousef said he considers himself American and his classmates argued that he was betraying his native Pakistani culture.	Ahmed a student from Algeria said "Some people in my community they don't even know how to vote, and where they can get the papers for voting and that's what makes me want to do actions to make a difference." In the future he would like to talk to Arabic speaking	Mina, a student from Yemen said about her research paper and action: "However, the reason why I chose my middle school to do my first workshop is because I faced discrimination while attending. So I thought it would make a difference if I started there."	Lorena, a student from Mexico said during the reflection session at Teachers College that she feels like her English skills at our school have plateaued; however this event pushed her and the other students to speak with native speakers of English, which she	Jean, a student from Haiti said that illegal immigration and Haitians being afraid to identify as Haitians for fear of discrimination are problems in his community; however these problems were not addressed in the newspaper project.

	people about how important voting and getting involved in the law is “because by voting it make their voices heard and their feeling share with other people that they share their daily life with.”		felt challenged and improved her English.	
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For the quantitative data, we analyzed the baseline survey choosing the most salient questions based upon these themes. For example we looked at question number 4, which asks: “Do you feel you can change things in your community? Why or why not?” We chose this question because it is relevant to voice and resonance. We analyzed the question by counting those who felt they could change things and those who felt they could not, and those who were not sure. Then we categorized their explanations so we could qualify their answers. We used the same approach for the post-project survey, which asked the same question.

Continuing our analysis of the qualitative data, we read our notes, outside observations and student reflections looking for evidence to support the themes we identified. We color-coded data corresponding to these themes, and used a different color to code each theme. These methods helped us draw conclusions about the benefits and challenges of using service-learning projects with newly immigrated students.

Findings

After analyzing the baseline survey, we found that only 39% of the students surveyed, felt they could make a change in their community. The post-project survey was given approximately six months later, after the conclusion of both projects and 68%

of the participants felt they could make a change. Furthermore, after the baseline survey, 55% of the students thought they could not make change while 6% were not sure, but in the post-project survey 11% answered no while 21% said they were not sure.

Figure 4: Pre and Post Surveys



Many students who answered no in the first survey felt that they could not make change because they were only teenagers or nobody would listen to an immigrant. Several students also felt fear because they witnessed tragic events in their own countries when people tried to make change. In the post-project surveys, there was a shift in thought. Many students no longer felt fear or that nobody would listen to them. Most students felt they might be able to make change but that they couldn't do it alone. This suggests that students don't feel they can make change when they are not given the opportunity, but once they completed projects, most students felt they had the power to make a difference, and if they couldn't do it alone, they could do it if they worked as a group.

The baseline survey served as the impetus for this research and the post survey allowed us to measure our goals. However, the findings are based largely on the qualitative data, because the research is a collection of student voice through reflection and observation.

Qualitative data from this study suggest that there are many benefits to service-learning projects because they build a sense of community, and give students voice, resonance, choice, life-skills and language skills. This study supports Evans (2007) research that in order for students to engage as civic participants, they first need to feel a sense of community. Gilligan, (1982) in Evans (2007) claims that this is accomplished when students have voice and resonance, meaning that they feel not only a sense of being heard, but that their ideas are being actively considered. Furthermore, a key finding was that students feel resonance when they have a sense of purpose, a real audience. As a result of influencing others, students feel a sense of accomplishment, which will hopefully lead them to continue to contribute their ideas. Additionally, giving students choice increases engagement because it makes service more meaningful and gives students a sense of ownership. Moreover, since service in this study took place outside of the classroom, it allowed for students to gain both networking and language skills. All of these benefits lead students to self-efficacy, defined by Bandura (1994) as, "...people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave" (p.71). Therefore, positive self-efficacy will motivate students to engage in civic participation.

Building a Sense of Community

In order for students to feel a sense of community, they first need to identify with their community. While most teenagers are trying to figure out their role in the world, it is more complex for immigrant students who subconsciously question, "Where do I fit in now that I am in America?" Service-learning helps students address this question. For

example, Francisco, a student from the Dominican Republic, discussed his struggle to feel a part of a community. This was during a classroom activity called a fishbowl, where Francisco was in the inner circle debating and the students in the outer circle were listening. When Francisco mentioned that in the past two years he had moved three times, therefore making it difficult to be part of a new community, the class was very engaged as evidenced by the sudden change in their body language as documented in a sociogram recorded by an outside observer. This suggests that students empathize and perhaps identify with Francisco's dilemma. Many immigrants feel transient and unsettled, thus making it difficult to feel part of any community. So it is important for teachers to engage students in service-learning projects that foster a sense of community. If it doesn't happen in school, it is likely many immigrant students will never have the opportunity to feel part of a community, part of something larger than themselves and the few family members surrounding them.

Other students feel settled, but struggle with the idea that they must choose a community and have a false sense that their native community and American community are mutually exclusive. In another classroom conversation, Yousef, a Pakistani student, said that he considered himself American. This comment started a heated debate where his classmates argued that he was betraying his native culture by identifying himself as American. However, through this debate, some students later came back to this theme and realized that they also feel American and have had guilt for feeling this way. This suggests that many immigrant students identify with and are loyal to their native culture. Yet other data suggests students don't always feel that they are part of their native community in America. Interestingly, Saleh, a Yemeni student, wrote about his Arabic

speaking community in a reflection, “This is my community I once believed I no longer belong to.” So he felt that he lost touch with his Arabic community by being in America but because of this service project, he realized that he could still be part of it. Similarly, another Yemeni student, Mina, wrote about the challenge of defining her community due to her neighborhood, which is primarily African American and Hispanic. She feels disconnected to the Arabic community because she doesn’t live around Arabic speaking people. She reconciled this by redefining her community as those who share her beliefs, which she feels are not only culturally binding. This struggle to identify community is the first step in feeling a sense of community which leads to civic participation. If a student cannot identify her community, she is unlikely to try to help the community.

Service-learning projects not only help newly immigrated students identify with a community, but they connect students to society and allow them to learn more about their community. This helps students strengthen their identity and could lead to more civic engagement. After interviewing his father, Dev, a student from Bangladesh, learned that his father was a political dissident and came to America with his family to seek refuge. Dev had always assumed that he and his family immigrated for a better life, meaning a better education and more money. Imran, a student from Pakistan, wrote in a reflection, “I felt very good doing this project because I don’t go into my native community that much, but while I was doing that project I went more and I got to know them better.” Jean, a student from Haiti, did not know whom to give his bilingual newspaper to, so he was on the street thinking about it when a Haitian person noticed his newspaper bearing the name “Haitians of Today” and asked him about it. Not only did this stranger love the newspaper, but he connected Jean to a tutoring center where he started volunteering. Suki

and MeiAng, two Chinese students wrote that their feelings changed about service-learning because they learned that Chinese people don't only care about money, as they had assumed, but they wanted to read more about entertainment.

Uniquely, service-learning creates opportunities for newly immigrant students to serve as a bridge connecting their immigrant communities to a larger American community. For example, Pierre in his reflection paper noted that he originally felt nervous about creating a service-learning project. He learned that the Haitian community has many interests, but fails to assimilate into American culture. So he felt that creating the native language and English newspaper would be a great way to get Haitians involved in voting and museums in order to be a part of a larger community. Bin echoed this sentiment when she said in her reflection paper that creating a native language newspaper helped to bridge a gap between Chinese speakers and the larger community in which they live. She says her community wants to know information about this larger community, but the language barrier and time prevent them from being able to access this knowledge. She explains, "As a result, creating a native language newspaper gave the community the opportunity to learn what they had missed." Therefore, she said she felt a sense of purpose in doing the project. Both of these students are filling a viable need in their communities, which is empowering the students and giving them a sense of purpose.

Mei Ang also commented in his reflection paper about one community member's reaction to his Math newspaper article on metro cards. He said after reading about subway fares in the newspaper one reader said that when he first moved to the U.S. he used his son's school metro card and as a result he had to pay a sixty dollar fine. So the reader strongly suggests giving the newspaper to people who are new to the U.S. Once

again, this student is filling a need in the community and therefore service-learning is providing him an opportunity to serve as a bridge between two communities.

Voice and Resonance

Once students identify with, and connect to their community, they are more likely to want to help them, but students need to feel that what they have to say is significant. Gilligan (1982) cited in Evans (2007) refers to this as resonance, stating that students only feel a sense of voice when the community affirms that their contribution is valuable. Service-learning projects give students this sense of voice. This idea is best illustrated by Pierre, who wrote, “As a result of this project, my ideas about social activism changed. I never concluded to myself that one person could make difference. However, my action in Darfur crisis convinced me that it could definitely happen.” Another student, Rahmuna, from Bangladesh, wrote that she felt like she did something for others and that if the community sticks together, it will provide a better community. She also said she would continue with social activism “...and let my voice heard so the people would give me the attention to hear from my point of view.” Maria, a Spanish speaker, felt that volunteering only helped a small percentage of people, so she wanted to make change by creating awareness about the homeless in order to reach a larger audience and therefore help more. She compares this to building a house, where one brick won’t be enough, but many bricks together can form a house. She goes on to explain that presenting her work at Columbia University gave her the forum to hand out her fliers, metaphorically recruiting other bricks.

These students all felt a purpose in what they were doing because someone was listening to them. Shui Qiang wrote that he felt bored at first because he had no interest in the newspaper articles he needed to write but this changed when he focused on what he had to translate because he had purpose. It changed further when he gave out the newspaper because he said his community was shocked and surprised that students created a newspaper for them. “In that moment, there was a sense of happiness grew in my bottom of my heart, not just because of their appreciation, but knowing I have ability to help my community.” Ahmed wrote, “Some people in my community they don’t even know how to vote, and where they can get the papers for voting and that’s what makes me want to do actions to make a difference.”

All of these students felt a sense of purpose because they had a real audience for their work. When asked what the difference between presenting their work at school and presenting at Teachers College, Columbia University (TC), Alec, a student from Haiti, answered that in school, people are forced to listen to the presentations whereas at TC, the audience chose to visit. Also, Francesse, another Haitian student, wrote that she felt like she was really making a difference talking with people who could do something about the problem of child soldiers. She was referring to professors at TC who could teach their classes about the issue to raise awareness to a larger audience. Ian, also a student from Haiti, wrote, “When I gave out my newspaper to a lady in church she was very excited reading it because she like seeing young adult getting involve and she took another copy to show her friends. That made me feel good because I didn’t think it would matter so much to her.”

Having this purpose and connection to a real audience gave students a sense of pride and accomplishment. Mei Ang wrote that a person he gave the newspaper to said that he has been a citizen of the U.S. and has never voted, but after reading the newspaper, he will vote in the presidential elections this year. He learned the steps of voting through the newspaper. “This makes me very proud of our Native Language Newspaper because our information was very useful to our community members.” Suki commented on a similar situation and felt successful because she taught someone to vote. Perhaps the most compelling piece of data is from Pierre who wrote, “Furthermore, when I was taking action I felt important because I was doing something positive that would affect peoples lives. Also, I felt powered knowing that I am the educator, instead of the one being taught.”

Choice

This sense of empowerment stems from having a real audience as well as students having choice in the way they execute projects. According to Russel (2007) service-learning motivates students as it helps them address problems they care about outside of the classroom. Allowing students choice in how they address issues gives them a sense of ownership and in turn motivates students to address problems in the real world. For example when students were asked to make decisions on what they would like to include in their native language newspapers Francesse said “I want mine. It’s mad nice.” Alec responded, “I think there are a lot of Haitian citizens here who don’t know how to vote, so its important to tell them.” To this comment Jean responded “That’s why we need the letter so we can tell them why its important.” This conversation was not prompted by the teachers. We asked students to make decisions on their own, and from

this conversation it is clear that students cared about what went into their community newspaper.

The idea of giving students choice in how they provide service gives them a sense of self-efficacy, and it also helps students gain problem-solving skills. For example, Mina decided that for her research project action she would conduct a workshop on bullying and discrimination. In her reflection she writes, “However, the reason why I chose my middle school to do my first workshop is because I faced discrimination while attending. So I thought it would make a great difference if I started there.” This example clearly shows when students are given choice they feel a sense of empowerment, and they can become the voice of their community more accurately addressing community needs than those who are not a part of the community.

Skills

Not only do students become community advocates through service-learning projects, but they also gain skills that they may not acquire in the classroom. Through her action research, Russel (2007) found that service-learning projects help students gain academic and problem solving skills. Our study corroborates this finding. Connecting to outside organizations while participating in service-learning projects allows newly immigrated students to strengthen their language skills. Lorena, a student from Mexico said during the reflection session at Teachers College that she feels like her English skills at our school have plateaued; however this event pushed her and the other students to speak with native speakers of English, which she felt challenged and improved her English. The participant-observers also noted that three students who normally do not speak out in class were presenting to a small group of professors and graduate students on

their own. At the beginning of the event they presented with more outspoken students, but towards the end of the event they were able to take this model of language and independently deliver the presentations. This outside event gave these students confidence they normally do not exhibit in the classroom

In addition to these language skills, we found that students gained life skills through their service-learning projects. During the exhibition at TC several students were able to network with graduate students, professors and other community members. Ali a student originally from Morocco was able to speak to a graduate student from Morocco who gave him information on future careers using his native language. At the same venue Esteban, a student from Colombia, began speaking to a representative of the Peace Corps Fellows program about internship opportunities in their office at TC. Jean also met a financial aid officer who informed him about private scholarships.

Challenges

Although there are many benefits to service-learning with newly immigrated ELLs, there are challenges both to students and teachers. Because service-learning projects provide opportunities for students to have choice, they often work independently of the teacher who can't always foresee specific skills that students will need in order to complete the project. For example, Bin reflected that it was difficult to make sure information she posted to her website was accurate in meaning and grammar. Also Xiao talked about wanting to create a video but feeling too "lazy." We question if she had the skills to create the video. Additionally, MeiAng and Suki said another challenge was that they were very shy or scared to talk to people to give out the surveys. With so many

students working independently it is often difficult for teachers to plan mini-lessons to address each student's individual needs.

While service-learning provides many academic benefits it is often also difficult to balance curricular goals with student need and choice. For example, the Urdu speakers asked about adding poetry because that is what their community is interested in reading. The teachers encouraged the students, but were unable to fully support their efforts since the project lessons were based on writing newspaper articles. Also, in his reflection Jean said that the topics of illegal immigration and Haitians being afraid to identify as Haitians for fear of discrimination are problems in his community; however these issues were not addressed in the newspaper project. This is a challenge because we wanted to be able to organically address community issues, but we learned that it is difficult to maintain a balance of overall curricular goals and meeting each student's individual needs and choice in the projects.

Because teachers must assess students formally on their projects, it is also difficult to measure authentic feelings about service. Yousef reflected about the newspaper project by saying “I felt really nice by doing this project because it made me feel more close to my community...It was a really good experience...I feel like I have some responsibility towards my community...” He added in his reflection for the research paper, “I think that I will do this work in the future again...When I sent it [a bilingual brochure about AIDS sent to Pakistan] I felt like I was doing something that might change what people think.” However, a few months later in his Media Arts class he was thinking of developing a documentary based on not helping the community and teachers not forcing students to help the community. He feels if he wants to help, it

should be his own decision. This case made us question if students feel they need to produce positive remarks in their reflections because they are receiving a grade for the project. It is difficult to determine if a student's responses are prompted by the teacher or if they are truly authentic.

Due to its experiential nature, service-learning projects require many hours of planning and executing, which poses another challenge. For these service-learning projects, teachers began planning in June before the academic school year. The projects commenced in September and the students completed the final reflection, dissemination and celebration in February. Qing a Chinese speaker reflected that when it was time to disseminate the paper, she lost interest because she had forgotten what she had written in the newspaper. Additionally, information can become obsolete with time. For example, students had created voter guides based on the fall primaries. By the time the newspaper printing company published the papers, John McCain was the Republican nominee for president.

Another challenge of service-learning is that it can require funding which exceeds school budget allocations. Students felt a great sense of pride in creating color copies of their newspaper project; however, the color copies were expensive so each student was given two to four copies to distribute depending on their the size of their native language group. MeiAng and Suki commented in their reflections that there were not enough copies of the newspaper. MeiAng said that next time he would ask people to read the paper and to email him feedback and comments. This example indicates that students really want to share their product with others, and in order to accomplish this adequate funding needs to be made available for service-learning and community outreach.

Discussion

Similar to findings by other researchers, this study shows that the benefits of designing and implementing a service-learning curriculum outweigh the challenges. This research also affirms service-learning increases students' sense of self-efficacy by providing opportunities for students to feel a sense of community, voice and resonance, and choice. Through this process students become community activists while gaining real world skills. Also newly immigrated students are not merely the "receivers" of service but also the "givers" of service, which helps students feel a sense of community and identity.

What is potentially new here is how important service-learning projects can be for newly immigrated ESL students. For these students, service-learning can be an entry-way into their new culture. These students may not have American citizenship yet; however by serving as truly active participants of their community they are realizing the American dream and building a healthy and progressive society. This approach can only continue if schools in partnership with community organizations and the local and federal government make efforts to create opportunities for young newly immigrated students' voices to be heard so they can truly join in our democratic process.

Policy Recommendations

Based on our research of the benefits and challenges of conducting service-learning with newly immigrated ESL students, we the participant researchers propose next steps to developing service-learning opportunities for this population of students. Our first recommendation is to promote service-learning by conducting teacher

workshops during monthly, required professional development (PD) meetings within New York City public high schools. This will inform teachers of benefits to service-learning and use brainstorming strategies to implement effective service-learning projects. It would be a shift in practice, so additional funds are not required. These PD sessions would be designed for the International Network of Schools as a pilot program to target ELLs. The success of this pilot could be measured through student and teacher feedback and the number of students who complete a service- learning project. If the pilot is successful, this series of workshops could be offered city-wide. Funding and implementation of this program could come through the Teaching American History grant and the Region 8 Social Studies department.

Another recommendation is that we partner with Learn and Serve America to present grant opportunities to teachers and administrators in order to encourage schools and teachers to participate in designing service-learning projects. This can be supported through a service-learning committee through which teachers could plan and execute service-learning projects with support and collaboration from each other and more experienced teachers. This committee could be directly tied to an inquiry team, to investigate the effects of service-learning on student engagement and academic performance. Since every New York City public school is required by the New York City Department of Education to have an inquiry team, funding for this is already in place. Furthermore, if research conducted at the school level shows that service-learning addresses the standards and improves academic achievement, it can be used to make a petition for additional funding from the federal government to Learn and Serve America.

Not only would we recommend in-service training for teachers, but we feel that service-learning should be incorporated into teacher education in universities. During this research, high school students who participated in service-learning projects were invited to a university class of third year students studying to be teachers who were in a five year certificate program. When asked if they knew what service-learning was, none of the university students had ever heard of it. If it was introduced at the college level, perhaps more teachers would use it. We propose starting this trend by partnering with the Peace Corps Fellows at Teachers College, Columbia University. Their program requires that Fellows complete a service-learning project as part of their AmeriCorps grant. According to their office, the faculty at TC decides what to teach, although department leadership hires certain scholars with their research in mind for course content. With this knowledge, we need to start by meeting with faculty to gain support and interest for this movement, and then include department heads. Furthermore, we would eventually like to meet with the president of the college with the goal of creating a task force to implement service-learning curriculum into teacher education.

Additionally, since service-learning provides newly immigrated ELLs with multiple opportunities to gain access to academic content, we propose that schools consider using these projects as alternative assessments for ELLs to standardized tests. Soslau and Yost (2007) have noted that service-learning deserves to be recognized as an effective strategy in helping meet NCLB standards. At Brooklyn International High School this alternative assessment is successfully in place. The students are required to defend a senior portfolio to graduate from high school in lieu of standardized tests. This past year, students presented their native language and English newspaper service-

learning project during their portfolio defense. For other schools to participate in this alternative assessment, we propose that the State of New York extend the waiver granted to Consortium schools to all schools who wish to participate.

Finally, a longitudinal study of service-learning needs to be completed with ELLs. We believe that it will show that the standards are being addressed, there is more student engagement, and consequently, improved academic achievement. If this is the case, it needs to be presented to Congress for a variety of reasons. First, it could serve as alternative assessment to standardized tests nationwide. Second, there is a lack of age appropriate materials for ELLs and the development of service-learning projects could fill that void. Lastly, the federal government needs to make more funding available to develop these enriching projects.

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