

TEACHER'S CORNER – SEPTEMBER 2018

SERVICE LEARNING IN THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

What comes to mind when you hear the term *service learning*? Perhaps you think of taking your students to a location outside of your classroom and completing a hands-on project. Maybe you think of having your students volunteer with a local organization. You likely think about how the work that your students do will serve the community. Undoubtedly, you also think about the impact the time spent serving will have on your students.

In his article "[Using Service-Learning as Part of an ESL Program](#)," James Minor describes service learning as "a union of community service and formal learning." This description notes that service learning has two main components: some type of community service and related classroom instruction. Though service learning can take many different shapes, these two components are essential to a true service-learning experience.

Service learning is an excellent way to engage students who are studying English because it provides a meaningful context for language practice. Students have an opportunity to use English to read and speak about topics, to write reflections, and to participate in discussions about relevant issues in their own communities. Service learning also gives students hands-on experience and a chance to address issues or needs that are important to them. In doing this type of work, students reflect on their values and develop new perspectives. Students can then use English to communicate their ideas, thoughts, and feelings about the experience and what it means to them.

This month's Teacher's Corner will present a four-step process for implementing service learning with students who are studying English. The first week will address how to choose a community issue or need as a class. Subsequent weeks will explain how to design classroom instruction, implement the service component, reflect on the experience, and share what was learned with others.

GENERATING IDEAS FOR A SERVICE LEARNING PROJECT

Every community has its own set of successes and challenges. Where you live, the needs of your local community, and the interests of your students will determine the focus of your service-learning project.

In her article “[Service Learning and Community Engagement for English Classes](#)” in *English Teaching Forum*, Aida Koci McLeod notes that there are two ways to design service-learning projects. Curriculum-based design examines the content of the curriculum to see how the material that students are learning could benefit the community. Need-based design has students observing issues in the community and brainstorming possible projects.

This week, we will take a need-based approach to lead students through an activity to generate ideas about possible service-learning projects.

BRAINSTORMING ABOUT COMMUNITY ISSUES

Time:

- Part One: 15 minutes
- Approximately 1 week for students to observe and gather information outside of class
- Part Two: 45-60 minutes

Goals:

- To define service learning for students.
- To gather information about issues in the local community.
- To observe community needs and brainstorm possible areas for service-learning projects.
- To determine one area of focus for the service-learning project by voting.

Materials: notebooks or paper (if possible, students can designate a notebook to use throughout the service-learning project for a journal and for all of the activities), pencils, whiteboard or chalkboard with markers or chalk, timer

PART ONE - INTRODUCING THE ACTIVITY

1. Write the phrase *service learning* on the board. Ask students if they know what service learning is or if they have ideas about what the term means. If you wish, write their ideas on the board.
2. After students have shared what they know about service learning, provide them with a definition (perhaps the one from this month’s Introduction) and write it on the board.
3. Allow students time to reflect on the definition and to share their thoughts about it in small groups or as a whole class.
4. Explain to the class that they will be participating in a service-learning project and their next step is to gather information about the needs in the local community. You can give examples of specific issues or ask students to share ideas.
5. Write the table below on the board and have students copy it into their notebooks to use when gathering information outside of class. If you plan to have students use a single notebook for the service-learning project, this can be the first entry.

Community Issue/Problem	Who is affected by the issue?	What is being done to help or to address the problem?

6. Tell students that they can gather information by talking to friends or family members, by reading local newspapers or publications, by interviewing community leaders, by watching news reports, etc.
7. Determine how much time students should spend on collecting information outside of class; one week was suggested in the preparation section. Alternatively, if students do not

have access to the internet or news publications outside of class, you can choose to schedule several class periods for them to do research at school.

8. Set a date for students to come to class with information about at least three issues filled in on the information-gathering table. Answer any questions students may have about the assignment.

PART TWO - BRAINSTORMING, DISCUSSING, AND VOTING

1. On the day that students come to class with their completed information-gathering tables, split the class into groups of about five students. If helpful, have each group assign roles such as recorder, timekeeper, and presenter.
2. Explain that each group member will share the community issues he or she recorded. The rest of the group should listen for any common themes, such as housing, hunger, literacy, etc. Provide students with 15-20 minutes for the discussion. Set a timer if desired.
3. After each group member has shared his or her observations about issues in the community, the group should discuss common issues or problems. Each group should create a list of the top three issues that they identified after sharing and discussion. If there are any particularly unique or interesting community problems that someone shared, those can also be noted in addition to the top three.
4. Once all the groups have had sufficient time to share and discuss ideas, each group will report their top three issues or community problems to the whole class. Depending on the size of your class, this should take 10-20 minutes. As each group names their top issues, write the issues in a list on the board. If issues are repeated, note this by making a tally mark next to the issue on the board. Any unique or interesting issues that were observed by the group can be noted on a separate list.
5. Because students have been observing and collecting information about issues in their community, some common themes should naturally emerge. Ask students to look at the list on the board and determine which issues came up the most. (Do not include the separate list of the unique/interesting issues in this part.)

6. Create a new list of the top three community problems that the class observed during information gathering. Write it next to the list of the unique or interesting issues, if any.
7. Tell students that they will vote on the community issues on this final list to determine the focus issue of the class service-learning project. Explain that after choosing the focus issue, the class will be involved in some type of community service and classroom learning related to that issue.
8. Although the class has yet to design the actual project, it may be helpful to give students some examples of what the community service component could be, such as volunteering time to tutor younger students in reading, cleaning up the environment in a part of your community, writing letters to government officials, etc. Answer any questions students may have.
9. Allow students to vote for the issue(s) that interest them the most. You can ask students to vote for only one, or you can have them rank each issue from the list according to their level of interest (1 - top choice, 2 - second choice, 3 - third choice, etc.). Students can use a small piece of paper torn from their notebooks to vote.
10. Collect all votes before the end of the class period. Count them to determine which issue your class has chosen to focus on for their service-learning project.

The activity presented this week allows students to observe the issues in their community and vote on one area of focus for the service-learning project. The next installment of the Teacher's Corner will explain how to engage students in classroom learning related to the topic they have chosen. Next week's activities will allow students to engage in meaningful use of English as they learn more about an issue facing their community.

LEARNING MORE ABOUT A COMMUNITY ISSUE

Last week, students observed issues in the local community and brainstormed possible areas of focus for a service-learning project. Now that students have chosen the area of focus, the next step is to learn more about the chosen issue.

In the Introduction to this month's Teacher's Corner, we mentioned that James Minor's definition of a true service-learning project includes both community service and formal learning. This week will present a Guided Seminar activity that will help students fulfill the "formal learning" portion of the definition. By participating in the Guided Seminar, students will learn more about the community issue they have chosen while practicing meaningful use of English.

GUIDED SEMINAR

Time:

- One class period for pre-reading and for answering key questions (This can also be assigned outside of class.)
- One class period for the seminar
- About 20 minutes of time outside of class for the post-seminar reflection

Goals:

- To have students read information about the community issue in English.
- To participate in meaningful discussion about the issue with classmates in English.
- To write a reflection in English.

Materials: article(s), videos or news clips, radio clips, or social media posts about the chosen issue; key questions (see examples in Preparation Step 2); discussion stems (see examples in Procedure Step 2); service-learning project notebooks and pencils

Preparation:

1. Choose one or two articles or news clips for students to read or watch before the seminar. All students will consume the same material beforehand in order to promote thoughtful discussion.
2. Write a few open-ended questions based on the material students are using. Give students a chance to copy these questions into their notebooks. Examples of the type of questions include:
 - a. Was any information that you found in the material surprising? What information made an impression on you as you were reading/watching?
 - b. Have you noticed the effects of this issue in our community? Where, and what have you experienced or observed?
 - c. How would you feel if this issue was a problem for you and your family? Or, if it has been a problem for your family, how has it affected you?
 - d. What do you think are some possible solutions for this problem? Who should be responsible for taking action to start solving this problem?
3. Give students time in class to read or watch the information, or assign the material for homework. Have students reflect and answer these questions in their service-learning notebooks after they read or watch the material you have chosen.
4. Talk to students about the seminar and your expectations for the discussion. Note that during a seminar, the students really lead the discussion and the teacher acts as more of a facilitator. Students usually do not raise their hands; instead, they simply begin talking, one at a time, while others listen and respond. Depending on your students, you can practice this ahead of time if it will be helpful.

Procedure:

1. If you are able to do so, arrange chairs or the students themselves in a large circle on the day of your seminar. Sitting in a circle will encourage discussion amongst students. If not, you can still conduct the seminar in your normal classroom setting.
2. Write the discussion stems below, as well as any others you can think of, on the board. If needed, provide students with examples of how to use these.

- I agree/disagree with _____ because...
 - I would like to add that...
 - I want to know more about...
 - This made me think of _____ because...
 - I would like to ask _____ about...
 - I was surprised to learn...
 - I felt _____ when I read...
 - I would like to ask <student's name> what he/she thinks about...
3. Before starting the discussion, review procedures and expectations for the seminar with your students. Remind them about the guidelines for taking turns, listening, and responding to classmates. Answer any questions that students may have.
 4. Ask students to take out the article(s) they read and the reflection questions they answered in their notebooks. Give them a few minutes to review their responses. If students watched news clips, you can replay the clips or have students chat in pairs about what they remember from the clips. While students review, you can write the reflection questions on the board.
 5. Tell students that they will participate in a guided discussion about the community issue they have been learning about. Explain that you will ask one of the reflection questions and anyone can start the discussion by sharing their thoughts or ideas. Tell students that they can refer to the article/news clips or their notes but should not read directly from their notebooks.
 6. Read the first reflection question from the board and allow students to respond. Remind students of expectations throughout the seminar if needed. Let students know that they can ask each other questions directly using each other's names. This can be helpful for encouraging all students to participate.
 7. Continue until all of the key questions have been addressed. Based on the discussion and level of interest of the students, you can pose follow-up questions during the seminar to further engage students with the topic.

8. To wrap up the seminar, you may choose to pose a closing question and give students time to respond with a short answer. It is helpful to share some possible answers with students before asking them to respond. Here are some examples:
 - What is one word that comes to mind when you think about this community issue? (Example answers: tragic, opportunity, hope, help, etc.)
 - Respond with one word that describes how this issue makes you feel. (Example answers: inspired, hopeless, worried, motivated, etc.)
 - What is one word or phrase that you can use to describe what is needed to improve this issue in our community? (Example answers: caring, generosity, time, money, hope, etc.)
9. Once students have had a chance to answer the final question, explain that the last step will be to reflect on the seminar in their notebooks. Because this activity is preparing learners to participate in meaningful service learning, it is suggested that you ask students to write about ways the class can engage with the community issue they have chosen to have a positive impact.
10. Write the final reflection question on the board for students to copy into their notebooks. You might write and ask “What ideas do you have for activities related to this issue that our class can do to have a positive impact on the community?” or something similar.
11. If helpful, give students time to share a few ideas with the whole class. Then, assign students the task of writing ideas in their notebooks (either as homework or during the next class period).

Extensions:

1. It should be noted that this seminar can be repeated several times over the duration of the service-learning project. Students can read or watch additional materials about the community issue and answer new questions in a seminar discussion. This activity can also be used to reflect on experiences when students are engaged in the project. More information about how to do this will be shared in Week 4.

The Guided Seminar allows students to use English to learn more about the community issue they are interested in. Learners also use English to engage in thoughtful, structured conversation about the topic, to reflect on what they have learned, and to generate ideas.

The final step in this week's activity asks students to begin thinking about how the class can engage in service related to the community issue they have selected. This will be the starting point for designing the community service component of the service-learning project. Next week the Teacher's Corner will present several ways for students to become actively involved with the community issue they have chosen.

POTENTIAL MODELS FOR THE SERVICE COMPONENT

Thus far this month in the Teacher's Corner, students have observed needs in their community, chosen an area of focus for a service-learning project, and participated in a seminar to learn more about their community issue. This week's installment will present possible types of projects for the community-service portion of the service-learning project.

Often when one hears the term *service learning*, thoughts come to mind of hands-on volunteer work and helping others, usually at a location away from school. While this is a possibility for the service portion of a service-learning project, it is certainly not the only way. It is important to note that there are many opportunities to have an impact in the community without having to leave your school's campus.

Below are several different suggestions for actions students can take as a way of serving their communities. The most appropriate model for your service will depend on what issue your class has chosen, how much time you have to offer, whether there are established agencies in your community, and what actions will have the most impact. When designing this part of the project, it is recommended that you also consider the ideas about action steps that students wrote in their reflections after last week's Guided Seminar activity.

VOLUNTEERING TIME WITH A LOCAL AGENCY

One model for a service-learning project is to volunteer with an existing agency or non-government organization (NGO) that is working in the focus area that your class has chosen. How often your students volunteer and for how long will depend on the issue being addressed. For instance, suppose your class voted to focus on early childhood literacy, and they find a local NGO that provides educational activities or services for young children. If your students wanted to work directly with the children in the program, it would likely be more beneficial for them to volunteer twice a week for an hour or two each time, rather than to visit the agency just once for six hours. Or suppose your students chose the focus area of adequate housing, and they find a

local agency that provides free home repairs or that builds affordable houses. In this case, it may be better for the class to spend a whole day or two working on a single project with that agency rather than to spread out the time over several weeks or months.

If you and your students cannot travel to the community organization to volunteer your time, there may be other ways to get involved. Many agencies can use assistance with creating brochures, flyers, or educational materials. You can contact the organization to ask about projects your students may be able to complete at your school. Additional ideas about fundraising or collecting materials to benefit a community organization are shared under *Fundraising and Collecting Items* below.

ADVOCATING AND RAISING AWARENESS

Sometimes students can be of service to people affected by an issue in the community by simply letting others know about the problem. Some people may not even realize that the problem exists because the issue does not directly affect them. There are different ways that students can raise awareness about the community need they have chosen.

Letter-Writing Campaigns

Students can write letters to newspapers, elected officials, or even celebrities about the issues in their community. If students choose to write letters, be sure that they include facts and information about how members of the community are being affected by the issue. Letters asking for people to take a specific action, such as voting for or against legislation or donating funds to a project, are very persuasive.

Often, people advocating for an issue or cause will create a form letter that others can easily sign and send to their government representatives. A form letter may not work for every situation, but if it is something that is appropriate for your students' service-learning project, they might consider doing so.

Presentations or Speeches

To raise awareness about a community issue, students may want to give presentations or speeches to others about the issue. This type of presentation is effective when students share facts about the issue, discuss how it is affecting members of the community, and offer ways for the audience to take action or get involved. One way for students to gather necessary information is to interview professionals in fields related to the issue or to interview people affected by the issue. Students can share their presentations with community groups, government officials, or even other students and teachers at your school. Students can request time to visit and present at community meetings, or ask teachers for time to come to their classrooms to share information during the school day.

Infographics and Posters

If your students are creative, they can increase awareness about their community issue by making attention-grabbing visuals such as infographics and posters.

Infographics have become a very popular way to communicate facts, figures, and key information about different topics. An excellent free resource that students can use to create infographics is www.canva.com. More information about what to include in infographics and how to get started can be found in [this webinar](#) from American English. Infographics can be used in presentations and shared on social media.

Posters are another excellent way for students to share important information about their community issue with others. The information included can be similar to that of an infographic. Students can share their posters with others by using them in presentations or putting them up around your school. Another option would be to hold a poster session where students stand near their posters and share information about the community issue with others walking around the room. Students, administrators, teachers, community groups, and government officials can all be invited to attend a poster session.

FUNDRAISING OR COLLECTING ITEMS

If financial support would benefit the community issue your students have chosen, they may choose to organize one or more fundraisers. There are many ways to do this, some that require a bit of financial investment up front and some that do not. It is always important to communicate the purpose of the fundraiser to the audience, which can be done through presentations, posters, or any other ways your students come up with. Here are some ideas for simple fundraising activities:

- Food or beverage sales: Set up a table at lunch or break times at school to sell snacks, coffee, tea, juice, etc.
- Candy-grams: Your class can collect names, information, and money from students who want to send a candy-gram (a nice note and a piece of candy) to a friend at school. They then deliver the candy-grams on a certain date.
- Change drive: Share information about the issue and the need for money, and ask every class in the school to collect spare change for a certain period of time. Offer a small reward, such as an ice cream party, for the class that raises the most money.
- School dance/event: Plan a dance or other event that interests students at your school and charge admission.

Sometimes certain items are needed to help members of the community. In this situation, students can share information about their community issue and the need for these items and involve the whole school or other community members in collecting these items. Returning to the earlier example of early childhood literacy, students could organize a book drive to collect books for an organization that serves young children. Depending on the need, students can collect clothing, blankets, toiletry items, and more to benefit those affected by the issue.

There are many factors to think about when deciding what the service component of a service-learning project could be. It is important to consider the amount of time needed, students' interests and abilities, whether your class can travel, and the area of focus. Most importantly,



make sure that the activity will benefit both your class and the community. In the final installment of the Teacher's Corner this month, we will examine ways for students to reflect on the service-learning project and share the impact with others.

ONGOING REFLECTION AND POST-PROJECT SHARING

This week's Teacher's Corner will begin with discussing how to use a reflection journal throughout the service-learning project. Writing a reflection journal will encourage students to be more thoughtful about what they are learning and experiencing, while also providing another opportunity to practice English. Finally, this week's installment will present strategies for students to share their experiences and reflections after the completion of the project.

USING A REFLECTION JOURNAL

Time:

- 15-30 minutes at various points over the course of the project (either in class or outside of class, or a combination of both)

Goals:

- To encourage students to reflect on experiences during the service-learning project.
- To write in English about experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

Materials: notebooks or paper, pencils, whiteboard or chalkboard with markers or chalk

Procedure:

1. At any point during the service-learning project, provide students with a journal prompt and have them reflect in their notebooks.
2. Tell students that it is more important that they get their thoughts on paper and not to worry about spelling or grammar for the journal entries.
3. Journal entries can be used in various ways throughout the project and after it is completed. Below are suggestions about when and how to have students use the journal.
 - a. After your students have chosen a focus area for their service learning project (after completing the vote from Week 1), ask them to write about what they know about the issue and how it affects the local community.

- b. Have students answer the reflection questions about the materials they read or watched to prepare for the Guided Seminar activity in Week 2.
 - c. During the service-learning project itself, have students write reflections regularly. If your students visit an agency or interact with others, they can write a reflection after each visit or interaction. If students are planning a fundraiser, participating in a letter writing campaign, or planning presentations, ask them to write about what they are learning, struggling with, or surprised about.
 - d. Provide students with specific questions to answer about what they are seeing and doing or about their interactions with other members of their community or school. Ask questions that prompt students to share feelings or to discuss how their ideas about the issue are evolving or changing.
4. Once the service component of the service-learning project is complete, students can look back at their journal entries to see how their thinking has changed or what they have learned about the issue.

Extensions:

1. In addition to using the journal to keep track of their experiences and thoughts throughout the service-learning project, students can also use it to participate in additional guided seminars. Students can read additional information about the area of focus (especially if it is one that is often in the news) and follow the same format of pre-reading, answering questions, and sharing ideas in seminars. A less formal approach can also be taken where students simply gather their thoughts in their service-learning notebooks and then use the seminar to share personal experiences and reflections.

SHARING THE SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCE WITH OTHERS

Final Reflective Essay

As a final activity, students can examine all the journal entries they have written over the course of the service-learning project. The entries can be used to write a final reflective essay about the

whole experience. Ask students to explain what their ideas and assumptions about the issue were before the project. Using the journal, students can choose one or two key experiences to expand upon and discuss the type of impact they had. Then, students can write about whether the project changed their thinking or reinforced things that they knew. Essays and reflections can be shared among the class or with others invited to attend a sharing session.

Poster Session

Similar to the activity presented in Week 3, asking students to create a poster about their experience and to participate in a poster session is a great way to conclude the service-learning project. If students have photos or mementos from their experience, they can include them in the poster. If you plan to do this activity only with the students who participated in the project, it is best to have students take turns standing at their posters so that they have a chance to see others' work. The class can be split in half with one group presenting their posters for the first part of the class period and a second group presenting their posters during the second part. Or schedule several poster sessions over different class periods and divide your class so that only a portion of students present each day. School administrators, government officials, other teachers and students, and professionals who work in the area of focus for your project can be invited to attend the sessions. Attendees should walk around and have a chance to look at the posters and talk with students standing at their posters.

Additional Action

After completing a service-learning project, students often want to continue volunteering or doing work in the chosen area of focus. If some of your students are interested in doing this, you can create a final assignment that asks them to write about why they feel inspired by their experience, what they plan to do to stay involved, and how or why they believe their continued involvement in the issue will be beneficial. These reflections and action plans can be shared with their peers, school officials, or community organizations.

All students will have unique experiences and interpret the service-learning project differently. The ideas above are only a few options for final projects. Providing several choices for how students can share their experiences is encouraged. Allowing students to choose how they would like to express their thoughts and present what they have learned can be very motivating and even encourage them to take risks with English in the process.

A service-learning project should have an impact on both the community and the students who are participating. For students learning English, a service-learning project is an opportunity to use the target language to learn about the issue, take part in discussions, interact with others, and reflect upon the experience.