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SERVICE-LEARNING, COMMON CORE, AND THE SECONDARY ENGLISH  
CLASSROOM: A MIXED-METHODS STUDY

A Dissertation  
Presented in partial fulfillment of requirements  
for a Doctor of Philosophy degree  
in the Department of Teacher Education  
The University of Mississippi

by

Kimual Snow

May 2020

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## ABSTRACT

The prevalence of high-stakes, standardized testing, along with the emergence of the Common Core State Standards has decreased teachers' capacity to establish and implement authentic learning opportunities for students in 21<sup>st</sup> century secondary English classroom. In a progressive literacy environment, teachers must commit to real-world learning that allows students to navigate complex informational texts without sacrificing high curriculum standards. A number of qualitative studies reveal how service-learning has been used in various classrooms to address deficiencies in student motivation and engagement, which in turn, sought to increase students' academic outcomes. However, few provide the quantitative evidence that administrators want to ensure that their investment in service-learning yields both the social and academic progress that supports high test scores and college-ready students.

This mixed methods study presented both qualitative and quantitative documentation to demonstrate the impact of service-learning on high school students' standardized English test scores and on students' mastery of college-and career-readiness standards when combined with the Common Core State Standards. The results of this study confirmed that students who participated in service-learning mastered as much content material as the non-service-learning groups and acquired 21<sup>st</sup>-century literacy skills that will help them transfer classroom theory and ideology into real-world experiences that will allow them to compete in a global economy.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to every person who patiently accompanied me through every stage of this long academic journey—first as an inquirer, then as a student, and finally as a scholar. To my husband and best friend, Norman, who gave me all the time, financial support, and space that I needed to pursue my goals, I express my deepest love and gratitude. You are truly the wind beneath my wings.

A special thank you also goes to my mother, Vickie McNeill, who kept me company on the long rides to and from class and who gave me strength and encouragement during my weakest moments. I also dedicate this dissertation to my sons, Kelvin and Corey, who have always inspired me to be a better person as I shared with them my love of learning and tried to instill in them that they can be anything in the world they want.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
CCR	College and Career Ready
CCRPI	College and Career Performance Index
CCSS	Common Core State Standards
ELA	English Language Arts
IPARC	Investigate, Preparation, Action, Reflection, and Celebration
IRB	Institutional Review Board
TKES	Teacher Keys Effectiveness System

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would not have been able to get through this process without the support, nurturing, encouragement, and energy of my extraordinary dissertation committee—Dr. Rosemary Oliphant-Ingham, Dr. William Sumrall, Dr. Phillis George, and Dr. Annette Trefzer—all of whom contributed to my growth personally and professionally.

To Dr. Rosemary Oliphant-Ingham, my dissertation chair and mentor, who challenged me every step of the way, whether I wanted you to or not. You consistently led by example and helped me realize that I am so much stronger than I ever thought I could be. You never let me waiver or stay discouraged and I am ready to go to the next level because of your caring and expertise.

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Dr. Phillis George, you came along during a time when I needed you the most. You steadied the ship many times when it felt like I was drowning. We share a passion for service-learning, and I have thoroughly enjoyed your guidance, experience, and wealth of knowledge as I have tried to flourish in this profession and cultivate that same level of knowledge. You have truly been a remarkable resource and asset during this process.

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Finally, I would be completely remiss if I did not acknowledge my two fabulous participating teachers who took in a stranger in a foreign land and said, “Of course I’ll do it.” Your buy-in for this project, your level of inquisitiveness, and your support for teaching and learning are a testimony to our profession. The time, attention, and energy that you brought to this project will never be forgotten.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

The 21<sup>st</sup> -century classroom places great demands on the secondary English curriculum where literacy functions as the cornerstone for every other discipline (Medwin, 2014). Scrutiny of educational practices, both in the United States and around the world has never been tighter (Medwin, 2014). Two major challenges currently drive education reform. The first centers on both the perceived and literal deficiencies in literacy and language skills (Murray, 2005). The second challenge focuses on ensuring that the skills students learn in the classroom are carried out and can be transferred into the real world (Hurd, 2006).

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) focus on college and career readiness by outlining the specific knowledge and skills students should have obtained throughout their K-12 training (Rust, 2012). They also provide learning outcomes for all students across the United States to graduate with the common understanding and knowledge needed to succeed in their chosen career field or college program regardless of which state they resided or which type of school they attended (Rust, 2012).

Despite its goals, which were designed to prepare students for the advanced literacy skills needed for college, career success, and competition in the global market, the Common Core State Standards have not been embraced by every state or school district. Teachers constantly seek strategies that foster real-world connections through deeper understanding and problem solving where students can readily transfer information from the classroom to the community (Rust, 2012). Instead, many teachers continue to view the CCSS as a challenge to shift their

pedagogical methods and increase rigor without any real guidance on how the standards should be implemented.

That is mainly why since the inception of the Common Core State Standards in 2010, not every state and school district has embraced them. However, one strategy for implementing the Common Core State Standards for ELA that can potentially add rigor, relevance, and real-world learning is service-learning. Service-learning, as both a pedagogical practice and a philosophy, integrates community service and academic learning to promote an increased understanding of course content while helping students develop the knowledge, skills, and cognitive capacities to transfer knowledge from the classroom to their communities (Guilfoyle, 2013).

It emphasizes meaningful student learning through applied, active, project-based training drawn from multiple knowledge sources (Guilfoyle, 2013). Still, it is important for educators and administrators to recognize that effective service-learning components integrate and enhance academic learning, not take the place of it. Because this definition underscores a clear balance between content and community, it will be the referenced definition for this study.

### **A Theoretical Approach to Service-learning**

The work of John Dewey and his philosophy of experiential education form the theoretical basis of service-learning. Like the Constructivists that he would later influence, Dewey believed that learning was a holistic process that needed to combine content with experience in real situations and contexts (Markham, 2012). This theoretical foundation is strengthened by the notion that service-learning bridges knowledge obtained in the classroom with the application to real-life problems in the community.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Service-learning, like all experiential learning, does not fit into convenient, quantifiable categories that can be easily labeled (Guilfoile & Ryan, 2013). Therefore, teachers find it difficult to translate into curriculum and instruction. Despite the growing momentum of service-learning as a pedagogical strategy, few high school case studies exist that speak directly to its impact on academic achievement (Markham, 2012). This research built on those case studies by analyzing how using service-learning to implement the Common Core State Standards bridged the knowledge that students obtained in the classroom and allowed them to apply that knowledge to real-life problems within their communities.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of service-learning as a pedagogical strategy on academic achievement in two eleventh-grade secondary language arts classrooms, using the discipline-based model for community engagement. Under this model, students used ELA course content to analyze and understand the key theoretical, methodological, and applied issues throughout their respective communities to solve real-world problems (Guilfoile, 2013).

### **Research Questions**

To adequately address the impact of service-learning on academic outcomes in the secondary English classroom, three essential questions were investigated.

1. What is the difference in academic growth on pre- and post-assessment scores on the Georgia Milestones American Literature exam in an ELA class taught with a service-learning component?
2. What is the difference in assessment scores on the Georgia Milestones American Literature exam between students taught using traditional instructional strategies and students taught in class with a service-learning component?

3. Does service-learning lead to increased content mastery of the Common Core ELA College- and Career-Readiness Standards?

### **Research Hypotheses**

With educators across the country seeking strategies that will help students read and generate complex texts independently, build strong content knowledge, and transfer the classroom curriculum to real-world issues, service-learning is a viable option for implementing the CCSS.

Thus, the research hypotheses are as follows:

1. Students who participate in service-learning will show statistically-significantly higher growth on the Georgia Milestones American Literature post-test than they showed on the Georgia Milestones American Literature pre-test.
2. Students who participate in service-learning will show a similar or a higher level of growth on the Georgia Milestones American Literature post-test than students who did not participate in service-learning.

### **Null Hypotheses**

1. Students who participate in service-learning will have less than or equal to the same level of growth on the Georgia Milestones American Literature post-test than they showed on the Georgia Milestones American Literature pre-test.
2. Students who participate in service-learning will have less than or equal to the same level of growth on the Georgia Milestones American Literature post-test than students who did not participate in service-learning.

The alternate hypothesis for this study was that the level of CCSS content mastery for English Language Arts students who participated in service-learning was greater than or equal to the level of content mastery for students who did not participate in service-learning.

## **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study had several fundamental limitations. First, the study had a limited period, lasting only one semester. Neither of the participating teachers in the study had any direct experience with using service-learning as a pedagogical strategy. The researcher, a trained and experienced service-learning practitioner, arranged both online and in-person professional development for both teachers prior to their implementing the project.

Next, the student information, including demographics and grade-point-averages, were self-reported. Neither school granted access to student transcripts or previous standardized test scores. The final limitation centered on the small sample size of one hundred and four students at two schools. Because the sample size for the study came from four classrooms taught by two different teachers, a logical delimitation of the study was that it was conducted at two comprehensive high schools in Georgia. Since the study required the researcher to conduct multiple interviews and observations, these specific high schools were chosen because of the time constraints of the study and the ease of quick physical access to the campuses.

## **Assumptions**

While an investigation of the effectiveness of service learning as a pedagogical strategy is germane for several stakeholders and disciplines, the focus of this particular study remained directly on the academic gains in standardized testing in the secondary English classroom. Throughout the entire study, it was assumed that both the treatment and control groups at both schools made every effort to complete the classroom requirements with fidelity. Since students received no external incentive for participation, there was a risk, however slight, that students neither gave a maximum effort on the assignments nor provided honest answers to certain questions.

## Terms and Definitions

Evaluating the impact of service-learning on the secondary English classroom exposed many challenges that included, but were not limited to: a lack of a consistent definition, a lack of concrete theories, complicated research designs that leaned toward qualitative rather than a quantitative analysis, and conflicting data analysis (Bilig & Waterman, 2003). To reduce these challenges, the following operational terms served as key concepts in this study:

- 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills—The required learning skillsets developed by the Partners for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, that merges core curriculum content with critical thinking, problem solving, communication, accountability, time management, information dissemination, self-directed education, and creativity skills needed in the global society of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2010)
- Academic Outcomes—“Changes involving knowledge, ability to apply knowledge, cognitive processes, and motivation to learn.” It also refers to the educational goal for each course or grade level as designated by the curriculum standards set by the governing state agency (Conway, Amel & Gerwien, 2009, p. 233)
- Accountability—Measurable proof—often shown in student achievement data—that teachers, schools, districts, states, organizations, and agencies are efficiently and effectively accomplishing their goals.
- Authentic Assessment—A form of assessment that measures students’ knowledge and skills as demonstrated through a real-world product or achievement that could serve a purpose in society.

- Character Education—Instruction in core values, proactive strategies, and practices, including responsibility, initiative-taking, and integrity.
- Community service—A form of volunteerism that is done within a defined community, which could be a classroom, school, town, or city. Typically, it does not have an intentional tie to learning and the emphasis is strictly on service.
- Community-Based Learning—A term used for any learning experience that occurs in the community.
- Curriculum Integration—The intentional tying of service activities to learning objectives.
- Education Reform—A plan to systematically change educational theory and practice.
- Experiential Education—Students learn by actively engaging in experiences that will have benefits and consequences, along with focused reflection on those experiences.
- Meaningful Service—Service with clear goals that meets genuine needs, recognizes and capitalizes on community assets, and has significant results for participants.
- Multiple Intelligences—A theory by Howard Gardner that describes the broad range of capabilities (intelligences) used by humans in solving problems and creating things and ideas.
- Place-Based Learning—Learning rooted in that which is local, including history, environment, culture, economy, literature, and art. Student work focuses on community needs and interests, and community members serve as resources and partners.

- Problem-based Learning—An instructional strategy that uses open-ended questions to provide students with the opportunity to find solutions to real-life challenges while working in groups (Gultekin, 2005).
- Reciprocal Partnerships—Productive relationships formed between the service-learning participants and other members and organizations, through which all parties benefit.
- Reflection—The processing of the service experience that is done before, during, and after service, using multiple methods to encourage critical and creative thinking.
- Rubric—A scoring guide that describes criteria for student performance and differentiates among different levels of performance within those criteria.
- Soft Skills—Skills that relate to employability attributes, such as teamwork, communication skills, and problem solving that can set a candidate apart from the norm (James and James, 2004).
- Standards—What students—and more recently, teachers as well—are expected to learn and do in the classroom.
- Technology Integration—Requiring participants to successfully use technology to enhance their service project.
- Volunteerism—The act of performing service without pay.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provided the foundation for the proposed study examining service-learning and increased content mastery with a focus on implementing the Common Core State Standards for English language arts. Journal articles, books, and digital sources were assembled and incorporated to help establish the current body of information in the areas of service-learning and academic achievement, the outcome of college majors and career choices, the cultural challenges of service-learning programs, and best practices for the secondary English language arts classroom.

This literature review will be presented in the following order. First, articles and texts providing background information on the relevant outcomes of service-learning on students' academic performance were presented. Next, the impact of service-learning on students' college majors and career choices was closely examined. Third, the cultural challenges for service-learning participants and recipients were investigated as it related to teaching diverse school factions.

Finally, best practices for implementing service-learning in the secondary English language arts classroom were examined. These four sections laid the groundwork for an investigation of how students processed and retained content material in the English language arts classroom prior to, during, and following the service-learning experience.

## **Service-learning and Academic Outcomes**

During the early 1990s, states and school districts tried to increase student achievement by developing higher standards, which led to imposing more rigorous benchmarks to measure student progress (Markham, 2012). Still, the caliber of the standards and assessments varied in each state. Ultimately, a group of bipartisan governors and state superintendents recognized the need for a shared set of rigorous, internationally benchmarked academic standards in language arts and math (Guilfoile, 2013). Thus, they developed and introduced the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in 2010.

The release of the CCSS marked a turning point in public education. For the first time, most states agreed to a common baseline for academic knowledge that would translate into students developing career- and college-readiness skills (Guilfoile & Ryan, 2013). Several school districts across the United States began an intensive curriculum redesign to help students adequately meet this new set of criteria as well as help students transfer classroom content to real-world applications (Guilfoile & Ryan, 2013).

As a result, the CCSS for English language arts focuses on communication and writing skills where students can develop intercultural competencies that prepare them to deal with the multi-cultural clientele they will encounter in college and in their careers. Moreover, the basic goal of the CCSS for English language arts was to prepare students for the advanced literacy skills needed for college and career success as well as for the competition they will face in the global market (Fuglei, 2015).

As a pedagogical strategy, service-learning emphasizes applied learning and helps students draw on multiple knowledge sources, including academic knowledge, student knowledge and experience, and community knowledge (Hurd, 2006). It also helps students confront issues and

problems in complex natural contexts, where they develop a deeper understanding of subject matter and strategies for transferring knowledge and problem-solving skills to new situations (Hurd, 2006).

Implementing service-learning to increase students' academic growth exists more prevalently now among college and secondary school teachers than previously (Richmond, 2003). The inclusion of service-learning into the secondary English classroom encourages literacy growth in a manner that invites students to relate their reading and writing skills to the "real world" that exists beyond the school walls (Richmond, 2003). This metacognitive processing functions as the key objective of both the Common Core State Standards for English language arts and the National Council for Teachers of English (NCTE) Conference on English Education (Richmond, 2003). While this allows teachers to integrate content learning into the authentic communities where students will live and work, critics continue to assess whether implementing service-learning underscores the learning portion more than it does the service segment.

Egger (2008), for example, suggested that implementing service-learning as a pedagogical strategy only conceals the educator's, and ultimately, the institution's promotion of a social agenda that wastes valuable classroom time and academic resources. His criticism rests not with the idea of service-learning itself, but with the lack of rigor and reflection that undeveloped and hasty planning allows.

Egger specifically rejects the notion of "service" for students who earn course credit or fulfill a graduation requirement. He also rejects the idea that the learning part of service-learning comes from the valuable on the job experiences that the exposure to service-learning has been given credit for providing. According to Egger, other than the lack of a paycheck, service-learning provides no more career insight that a career-related part-time job offers.

Citing that the university's sole purpose should be to train the mind, Egger equates the learning component of service-learning as more emotional than intellectual. However factual Egger's point may be for undergraduates, it does not consider that secondary students often need emotional engagement as the first step to content mastery. It also does not acknowledge that career choices are as much about passion as they are about mastery. Instead of labeling service-learning as a method for exploiting students' emotions, he should see it as an intellectual exercise in problem-solving that benefits everyone.

***Cognitive Development.*** Service-learning can assess the cognitive outcomes that students need to develop to successfully move the English language arts curriculum into the twenty-first century. Cumbo and Vodeboncover (1999) concluded in their study on the cognitive outcomes of service-learning in K-12 schools that service-learning research on the secondary level as well as for higher education, has focused for the last thirty years on the social and emotional development of students. This, according to the study, has been done at the expense of cognitive skills and academic development.

Their study focused mainly on students' cognitive development as it related to the mastery of subject-matter, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities (p. 95). Their research concluded that service-learning functioned as a powerful and effective educational experience that enhanced the social, emotional, and cognitive domains. They also stated that the problem with most service-learning implementation lies with ineffective assessments more than anything else. Regardless of how well-planned and organized the service-learning model, teachers need to develop quality assessment tools for measuring student outcomes within the service-learning process.

Based on the state and district curriculum guidelines with their massive benchmarks and sub-

standards that teachers need to cover in a short amount of time, the English language arts classroom emphasizes breadth over depth. This often discourages teachers, who feel as though they are forced to focus on discrete knowledge items rather than on re-contextualizing the content for deeper, reflective meaning (p. 98).

***Service-learning and the 21<sup>st</sup> Century classroom.*** The traditional classroom model—desks neatly arranged in rows with the teacher lecturing at the front of the room—has become increasingly a thing of the past (Guilfoile & Ryan, 2013). School administrators and teachers strive to create a more dynamic, 21<sup>st</sup> century learning environment where students collaborate to solve problems using authentic tasks on topics in which they are emotionally invested (Guilfoile & Ryan, 2013). Service-learning strategies help students meet the high academic standards of CCSS and provide practical opportunities for students to apply their learning for the good of their school and local community collaboratively (Connolly, 2012).

The increased prevalence of the application of technology and informational texts inherent in CCSS potentially gives students a snapshot of what the modern workplace looks like. Using service-learning to implement CCSS allows students to see the relevance and importance of academic work in their real-life experiences (Connolly, 2012). Service-learning can help students improve inter-personal and human relations skills which are increasingly viewed as the most important skills in achieving success in professional and personal spheres. Technology integration permeates the Common Core State Standards with its emphasis on practical applications of what students have learned in the classroom and escalates the expectations for students to be college-and career-ready after high school (Markham, 2012).

Even though service-learning has been a part of the American K-12 educational landscape for more than thirty years, it is found in less than thirty percent of K-12 schools in the United States

(Furco and Root, 2010). Furco and Root contribute its lack of traction in secondary educational environments to a paucity of evidence concerning its effectiveness on students' academic outcomes. In fact, their research cites sixty-eight studies in the K-12 service-learning literature, with only twenty-five percent of it evaluating student learning.

Among the evidence that Furco and Root cited to prove the success of service-learning in the K-12 classroom was a 1998 study by Weiler, LaGoy, Crane, and Rovner that assessed the differences in reading and language arts performances between 775 primary and secondary students enrolled in twelve classes who participated in service-learning and 310 students enrolled in eight comparable classes who did not (p. 17).

The researchers collected students' scores on subject-matter achievement tests and surveys assessing students' attitudes towards school and community service, as well as observations of classroom practices (Furco and Root, 2010). Their findings revealed statistically significant differences between the two groups' scores on the California Basic Skills Test. The service-learning group not only received higher test scores than the non-service group, but also self-reported better content mastery in their service classes than in their non-service classes.

Furco and Root's study also cited limited, but positive content mastery increases from a large sample of high school students who participated in classes with service-learning components. Data from a National Educational Longitudinal Study, or NELS (n=15, 340) evaluated the relationship between high school students who participated in service-learning and their performance in their math, reading, history and science classes (Davila and Mora, 2007). Davila and Mora's study arrived at two conclusions.

First, they attributed service-learning to small, but positive academic achievement gains in math, science, and history, although service students made no statistically significant gains in

reading. Still, it can be argued that strong reading skills contributed to the gains in history and science. The study also revealed that students' participation in community-based experiential learning activities exposed them to other factors involved in increasing academic achievement which included, but was not limited to—developing autonomy, developing collegial relationships with adults and peers, and boosting both their self-esteem and their sense of self-efficacy (Furco and Root, 2010),

***Content Acquisition.*** Regardless of the academic discipline, service-learning places the acquisition of content learning in a social context where teachers can facilitate the socially responsive knowledge that forms the heart of the Common Core State Standards. Conway, Amel, and Gerwin (2009) offered a meta-analysis of how service-learning affected students using four outcome categories: academic outcomes, personal outcomes, social outcomes, and citizenship outcomes.

Using 103 independent samples reported in seventy-eight separate sources, they analyzed the types of outcomes, along with the moderators of the effects of service-learning. Their primary hypothesis which stated that they would find evidence of an increase in students' academic, personal, social, and citizenship outcomes was based on the theories of Kolb (1984) and Yates and Youniss (1996). These theories stated that service-learning works because it supports the construction of knowledge through student reflection on the service experience, the development of new conceptualizations, and the opportunity to apply the new conceptualizations in an authentic setting (Conway, Amel, and Gerwien, 2009).

The evaluation of participants' academic outcomes included cognitive and academic increases in knowledge as well as their ability to apply that knowledge. Personal outcomes assessed students' thoughts and feelings about their motives and values. Social outcomes emphasized

participants' relationships and interactions with those they served. An analysis of citizenship outcomes centered on three major areas: personal responsibility, actively improving the community, and confronting injustices. Of all four categories, academic outcomes showed the greatest gains between service and non-service classes. Personal outcomes, social outcomes, and citizenship outcomes recorded increases, but had much smaller gains than academic outcomes.

**Academic gains in higher education.** The beneficial outcomes of service-learning for students in higher education have been well documented. Astin et al (2000) performed a longitudinal mixed-methods study on the effects of service-learning on eleven outcome measures: academic performance, values, self-efficacy, leadership, career choices, and plans to participate in service after college. Data collected from 22,236 college undergraduates, 76% of whom participated in service-learning, yielded significant results.

Again, benefits associated with course-based service-learning were strongest in academic outcomes, especially writing skills (Astin et al, 2000). Service participation also appeared to have the strongest effect on students' decisions to pursue careers in service-related fields. This effect occurred even when the students' career choices during their freshman year in college had been service, non-service, or undecided (Astin et al, 2000).

As with previous studies, both the quantitative and qualitative results suggest that reflections serve as a powerful tool for connecting the service experience to the academic course curriculum. This study reinforced that giving students the opportunity to process the service-learning experience with each other provides a powerful component to service-learning as a pedagogical strategy.

**Contextual assessments.** The students' academic outcomes as they relate to service-learning often depend on the quality and context of the service-learning assessment itself. In a 2006 study

that advanced the theoretical and practical framework for designing community service-learning research, Cooks and Scharrer challenged the way practitioners approached both the process and outcomes of assessing service-learning.

Their research extended Astin's argument concerning the individual's internal values which consist of cognitions, values, and beliefs and the individual's external actions or outcomes when placed in the context of the institution's culture and values. In other words, when learning is viewed as a communicative process rather than as an individual activity the assessment must follow that same pattern if it will have more meaning. Cooks and Scharrer pointed out that if learning is situated in ways that students make meaning of their experiences, then how can teachers understand, much less assess, the learning that has occurred? (Cooks and Scharrer, 2010).

Through interviews, focus groups, journal assignments, and videotaped interactions, the researchers evaluated service-learning assessments from a social approach based on Dewey's concept that situates learning as acting into experience (Dewey, 1922). Their research results indicated that teachers who participate in service-learning as a pedagogical strategy recognize that it is messy and unpredictable. Yet, this is also why they deem it valuable. It encourages a view of teaching and learning that goes far beyond the individual measurement of predicted outcomes (Cooks and Scharrer, 2010).

Educators generally define assessment as the process of documenting student achievement in measurable terms with specific values. Cooks and Scharrer argued for an alternative approach to service-learning assessments to include evaluations that exceed the measurement of individual cognition. While they do not devalue traditional assessment measures for service-learning, they posit that the depth and richness of the experience itself gets lost in a focus on outcomes where

learning happens in social contexts and assessments do not (Cook and Scharrer, 2010).

### **Common Core and Multiculturalism**

With the English language arts classroom having more diversity than ever, the Common Core State Standards address multicultural teaching and learning on a broader scale. In addition to service-learning's association with important civic learning outcomes, students participating in service-learning reported a greater understanding of social problems, greater knowledge and acceptance of diverse cultures and races, a greater ability to get along with people from different backgrounds, and an increased awareness of their own biases (Hurd, 2006).

Since the 1990s, literacy instruction has placed emphasis on the impact of race and class on reading and writing, especially as 21<sup>st</sup>-century literacy dominates the landscape. Literacy instruction, much like service-learning, attempts to move students from individual spaces to social ones, as Dewey constantly referenced (Adler-Kassner et al, 1997). While both Dewey's and Kolb's theories provide prominent examples of service-learning models, earlier theories laid the groundwork for this study's connection to a contemporary service-learning model that potentially closes the achievement gap between mainstream and minority students (Stevens, 2003).

These roots to service-learning, though not specifically labeled as such, incorporated the educational ideals used by African American social activists, women's groups, and educators who championed social justice and community empowerment. Early African American educators, such as W.E.B. DuBois and Ida B. Wells-Barnett, used various educational procedures and social welfare initiatives to promote racial pride as well as social change (Stevens, 2003).

While much of the previous research focused on what the students from various social, racial, and ethnic backgrounds learned, few research studies addressed how those teachers who implemented service-learning understood what learning about diversity in the contemporary English language arts classroom looks like. Multiple aspects of the Common Core State Standards make it easy for teachers to introduce multicultural literature into the lessons. Because Common Core also prioritizes informational and nonfiction texts, teachers can introduce social justice content that appeals to students from diverse backgrounds (Machado, 2014).

One example includes a 2007 study by Bell, Horn, and Roxas that examined how teachers became multi-culturally competent by evaluating what teaching for social justice looks like. The researchers for this study fully acknowledged that answering these thought-provoking questions concretely goes beyond the scope of a 15-week diversity course for twenty-five teachers. They also agreed that investigating how pre-service teachers dealt with multiculturalism in the context of service-learning provided the best opportunity to deepen their understanding about the complex issues surrounding diversity (Bell, Horn, and Roxas, 2007).

Two major questions formed the bulk of their study. The first question addressed what pre-service teachers learned from two different versions of the same diversity course. The second question analyzed the connection between the service-learning component of the course and the pre-service teachers' learning (Bell, Horn, and Roxas, 2007). The study defined diversity as “the ways in which social differences such as race, class, gender, and ability, too frequently become the basis for inequality in schools and in society” (Bell, Horn, and Roxas, 2007). Given the non-traditional power dynamics, out-of-school contexts, and curriculum connections inherent in service-learning, it seemed the optimal place to begin answering those questions (Bell, Horn, and Roxas, 2007).

To understand the connection between teacher learning and the service-learning experience, the researchers sampled three sections of a Diversity 200 class. Two sections required a service-learning experience that focused on urban issues. Pre-service teachers mentored students one-on-one at a local elementary school. Other than the service-learning component, all three sections had similar pre-service teachers, course instructors, and course readings (Bell, Horn, and Roxas, 2007).

Data collected over a 15-week period included pre-and post-surveys, analytical essays, journal responses, and autobiographical essays. The main two sources the study drew from to determine whether pre-service teachers learned anything included course assignments and written surveys. Teachers allowed students to become the experts while they focused solely on students' learning.

The study provided evidence of teacher's increased cultural diversity on both a conceptual and a pedagogical level. Paine's framework, on which the study was based, allowed the researchers to view teacher learning from a conceptual level (Bell, Horn, and Roxas, 2007). The pedagogical aspect reinforced that teachers' ideas and their experiences helped them understand how to relate to diverse populations better. Despite the insight that the study offered on the development of pre-service teachers, it had several limitations.

First, it did not evaluate how pre-service teachers of color might learn from the same service-learning opportunities. Also, the idea that service-learning significantly influences teachers' perceptions of diversity was limited since it was not developed across various teacher education programs and did not include diverse teacher groups. Finally, the study conceded that service does not necessarily equal learning. Neither the teachers nor the students can expect to grow simply by serving. Therefore, the connection between service-learning and cultural growth must

be continued, documented, and researched more thoroughly before any of the questions can be answered with fidelity.

### **Service-learning and Student Retention**

In addition to the academic and cognitive benefits credited to service-learning, some research credits service-learning with increasing student retention on the secondary and undergraduate levels. Student retention remains a priority for all colleges and universities. Because some college programs perceive service-learning as a vehicle for enhancing students' learning and academic engagement, colleges also credit service-learning experiences with students' satisfaction with school and ultimately, with retention (Bringle et. al, 2010).

A 2010 study by Bringle, Hatcher, and Muthiah examined service-learning's role on the retention of first-year students. They cited three primary reasons for the weight placed on student retention. First, a decline in the overall enrollment results in lower tuition income. Also, colleges and universities have an ethic responsibility to try to optimize student success. Finally, high student attrition could lead to high faculty attrition. Student interaction within the college environment is one of the three main factors that influence student retention (Bringle et. al, 2010).

The theoretical framework behind the research of how service-learning affects the retention of first-year students to the second year is based on the theory of student departure developed by Tinto (1997) who described classrooms as the crossroads between academic and social systems. His push for colleges and universities to incorporate retention efforts into the academic experiences of students makes service-learning a viable option for achieving that objective.

The research for this study focused on several questions related to service-learning and retention. The first question researchers addressed was whether first-year students enrolled in a

service-learning course report significantly different outcomes than students not enrolled in a service-learning course. Also, they evaluated whether enrolling in a service-learning course the first semester influenced students' intention to return to that same campus the next semester. Finally, the study investigated whether service-learning could be linked directly to student re-enrollment the next year (Bringle, et. al, 2010).

The data analyzed came from a larger set of data. Researchers used only those portions relevant to the research questions concerning retention. Eight hundred and five first-year students from twenty-two courses participated. University faculty members distributed questionnaires at the beginning and end of the semesters to the control and treatment groups. The pre-course questionnaire measured students' "intent to graduate." The post-course questionnaire measures the quality of the learning environment including peer and faculty interaction, course satisfaction, perceived learning, and personal relevance (Bringle, et. al, 2010).

Eighty-five percent of the participating students re-enrolled. Students in service-learning courses were more likely to state that they would return and graduate from the same campus. Moreover, taking a service-learning course positively correlated with re-enrollment the following year. The correlation between intentions to continue and graduate from the campus at the end of the fall semester was significant (Bringle, et. al, 2010).

This research took an important step to answer why first-year students return to college campuses. It also broached the important question concerning what campuses can do to increase the likelihood that the first-year students return. One key limitation to the study was the considerable variability in the quality of service-learning courses. Based on the study's findings, service-learning has emerged as a pedagogical strategy with great potential for enhancing academic success, personal growth, and civic growth (Bringle, et. al, 2010).

**Dropout Prevention.** The importance of service-learning to student retention has been evaluated on the secondary level as well as on the post-secondary level. A 2008 research study by Brigeland, Dilulio, and Wulsin identified service-learning as a viable strategy to address both a lack of learning and a lack of service that they believe are crucial to high school dropout prevention. The study acknowledged that despite the momentum of service-learning over the past thirty years, a large divide continues to exist between the students who want service-learning and those with access to it, particularly among minority students.

This study presented both original and secondary research that revealed the ability of service-learning to address some of the principal causes of students' dropping out of school. Based on a national survey of 807 high school students including 151 at-risk students, the research also included the results of focus groups of service-learning teachers. These teachers provided specific examples of service-learning's impact on their students, in addition to students' perspectives on service-learning programs (Brigeland et. al, 2008).

According to the study, service-learning improved almost every aspect of education that has a direct impact on high school graduation rates. This includes attendance and engagement, two of the most significant predictors of students dropping out of school. In fact, the study cited that 82% of students who participated in service-learning and 80% of the at-risk students not enrolled in a service-learning program believed that their attitudes concerning high school either would be or become positive as a result of service-learning (Brigeland et. al, 2008).

Forty-five percent of service-learning students, including 38% of at-risk students believed service-learning classes would be more relevant and worthwhile than classes without a service-learning component (Brigeland et. al, 2008). Seventy-seven percent of service-learning participants stated that service-learning motivated them to work even harder in class. The study

also credited service-learning with increasing students' academic performance, leadership skills, and sense of empowerment. A high school dropout epidemic exists in America with dangerous consequences to individuals, the economy, and the nation (Brigeland et. al, 2008).

These findings upend the myth that students drop out of school because they failed, were expelled, became distracted by drugs, or became parents. The 807 participating students were between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. Thirty-seven percent of them lived in a city, 20% lived in the suburbs, 31% lived in small towns, and 13% lived in rural areas (Brigeland et. al, 2008). The diverse student group was 16% Hispanic, 61% White, 14% African American, 4% Asian, and 5% other (Brigeland et. al, 2008).

The researchers conducted two 90-minute telephone focus groups among service-learning teachers. They also conducted one-on-one interviews with students chosen by the teachers. Based on the findings, schools need to make classes more relevant and engaging to enhance the connection between school and the real world. Schools must also improve instruction and access to support systems for struggling students to ensure that students have a strong relationship with at least one adult in the school. Service-learning helps students advance toward each of these goals and should be an essential tool in any dropout prevention strategy (Brigeland et. al, 2008).

### **Service-learning, college prep, and career training**

Interest in how service-learning programs impact students' decisions on college majors and careers continues to surge. A study by Michelle Vanderhoff (2005) highlighted Virginia Commonwealth University which offers its physical therapy students a few service-learning opportunities to help students acquire firsthand knowledge of the profession that traditional classroom lectures cannot provide.

Many of the Virginia Commonwealth University physical therapy students who participated

in service-learning remained actively involved in either volunteering or pro bono work after they graduated. Although service-learning components at the university vary in community needs, curricular structure, setting, and educational objectives, they all focus on reciprocity where the students' needs are as important as the community's needs (Vanderhoff, 2005). In fact, Virginia Commonwealth University promotes its service-learning component by emphasizing its merits over the traditional classroom lecture.

These merits included the functions of the community agencies, exposure to patient populations, and a manner to practice their skills without the pressure of a formal clinical experience. Moreover, service-learning helps both physical therapy and physical therapy assistant students keep up with the profession's growing needs. Service-learning at Virginia Commonwealth continues to spread as it partners with nonprofits to determine clear learning and service objectives (Vanderhoff, 2005).

Furthermore, students are graded on what they produce academically, not on the services that they provide to those they serve. The university requires students to complete a portfolio and write their reflections on the nature of their activity. The study relied on both qualitative and quantitative methods to measure student progress, including surveys, teambuilding scales, and reflective journals (Vanderhoff, 2005).

Vanderhoff's assertion that service-learning benefits students' career decisions was echoed in a 2013 quasi-experimental study that examined the impact of service-learning on improving high school students' career decision-making. Technology and globalization have made deciding on a career path a daunting task. The researchers selected fourteen college students from two upper-division psychology classes at a small Midwestern college. All but one of the students was a female. All students, which consisted of eight seniors, three juniors, and three sophomores, were

psychology majors (Coulter-Kern et. al, 2013).

Every participant completed a packet with a consent form, a values inventory, and a demographic questionnaire. After the service-learning project they completed a post-test career knowledge and confidence in career decision-making assessment. As a service-learning project, undergraduates met with high school students attending a college visit day. All students, each undecided about his or her college major, completed the same Self-Directed Search (SDS) that the undergraduates created (Coulter-Kern et. al, 2013).

The undergraduate students scored the assessments and paired with another student from ninety minutes to two hours to discuss the results. They discussed selecting a major, adjusting to college life, and choosing a potential career. The goal of the study was to compare the learning achieved by college students participating in the service-learning project with that of students who received career instruction only (Coulter-Kern et. al, 2013).

Researchers performed an independent sample t-test to compare the scores of the treatment and control groups on the Career Knowledge Questionnaire. The scores of students who participated in service-learning were significantly higher than those who did not participate in service-learning. Students who participated in service-learning also had significantly greater knowledge of RIASEC (Realistic, Investigative, Artistic, Social, Enterprising, and Conventional) theory and work environments than students who did not participate in the service project (Coulter-Kern, et. al, 2013).

The research results offered several possible explanations for why service-learning helped students better recall career-decision-making material. One possible explanation was that students who participated in the service-learning experience took additional time to reflect on the material and viewed the material as more important by the time they were finished with the

service project (Coulter-Kern, et. al, 2013).

In retrospect, the researchers believed that a good addition to the study would have been a pre-test that measured students' knowledge of the SDS and RIASEC models prior to participation. However, there is no reason to suspect that either group of psychology majors had more exposure to the SDS or RIASEC theory than the other one. The researchers also believed that randomly assigning students to the treatment and control groups would have been a great addition to the study (Coulter-Kern et. al, 2013).

Overall, the researchers' findings were consistent with previous research noting benefits related to service-learning. Through the current study, psychology majors were able to share what they learned about their own career interests with others. Moreover, they also reported that they were glad to have an opportunity to apply information from the classroom in a practical way. Service-learning equipped them with the skills to make effective career decisions (Coulter-Kern et. al, 2013).

**High school and career exploration.** Another study examined how incorporating service-learning into a high school biology class influenced students' college major choices. The study initially evaluated students' misconceptions about science and scientists. The researchers' initial findings and observations confirmed that students knew very little about what a career in science entails or what scientists do. Most students viewed scientists in a stereotypical manner, as "elderly white men performing dangerous experiments in white lab coats (Wyss and Tai, 2012).

Once the researchers collected and analyzed the data, they recommended that secondary teachers find ways to help students view scientists as individuals in various settings and roles. Other researchers posited that once students changed their views of science and scientists, the

likelihood of them pursuing science coursework or entering science-related careers would increase (Wyss and Tai, 2012).

A 2012 study by Wyss and Tai suggested that adding a service-learning component to science classes makes science more personally relevant and exposes them to a more diverse range of career opportunities. Service-learning studies specific to high school science courses are limited. However, the few studies that do exist reveal that service-learning had a positive influence on participating students' intentions to pursue science professions (Wyss and Tai, 2012).

Although several of the participating students opted not to pursue a career in science as a result of service learning, the researchers still viewed that as positive. They believed it to be valuable because students will not waste time in a degree program where they may not continue or be unhappy (Wyss and Tai, 2012). Wyss and Tai's study collected surveys from 8,178 students enrolled in introductory biology, chemistry, and physics courses and 2,201 students in introductory English classes across thirty-six public and nineteen private institutions from thirty-one different states.

Results of the study showed mixed or conflicting results. Outcomes specific to service-learning in science demonstrated that students' enjoyment of science class increased with service-learning. However, service-learning did not necessarily improve their grades or attendance. Furthermore, it does not give irrefutable evidence that service-learning influences students' intentions of pursuing undergraduate STEM careers (Wyss and Tai, 2012). Still, it is important to note that specific details of the service-learning experience were not accounted for in this study.

**Workplace literacy.** Service-learning has proven, however, to be an effective vehicle for teaching undergraduate public health courses and developing public health literacy. While

relatively new to public health, service-learning meshes with its focus on social justice and ensures that undergraduates can contribute to developing healthy communities (Cashman and Seifer, 2008). Lauding public health literacy as a “worthy social goal,” two researchers working with the Institute of Medicine identified service-learning as a viable option for teaching undergraduate public health.

A 2008 study by Cashman and Seifer evaluated the effects of service-learning on public health literacy through students placed in community organizations. These strategic placements formed meaningful partnerships between the academy and the community. Not only does the immediacy of the service-learning experience make the curriculum meaningful and personal, but also service-learning establishes multiple stakeholders where reciprocity allows everyone to gain something useful (Cashman and Seifer, 2008).

In fact, the Institute of Medicine added a service-learning component to each of its courses to emphasize and reinforce learning through action and reflection. Although service-learning at the Institute of Medicine has several nonlinear components that they have labeled the “spokes of a wheel,” establishing the community-campus component should be the first step. Once that has been established, educators articulate the learner outcomes and competencies (Cashman and Seifer, 2008).

Educators must then select the resources, plan the course activities, design the evaluation, and build the course infrastructure. The Institute of Medicine described public health as “an essential part of the training of citizens.” Thus, they concluded that all undergraduates should become literate in public health. Despite the overall newness of service-learning to health care literacy and the health professions, it was lauded as a strategy for successfully merging schools and communities (Cashman and Seifer, 2008).

These benefits have been documented across a wide range of institutional and community contexts through the Health Profession Schools in Service to the Nation program, the only national demonstration program of service-learning in the health professions. The researchers reported that service-learning opportunities in health and in many other community-based health organizations exposed students to the issues of health disparities and the nation's goal to eliminate them. With its emphasis on reciprocal learning and reflective practice, service-learning can help ensure that students who pursue public health studies as undergraduates enter their adult lives prepared to make positive contributions to the nation's health professions (Cashman and Seifer, 2008).

### **Service-learning and the ELA Classroom**

Service-learning as a part of an inquiry-based unit can provide a framework that increases student engagement with writing tasks, and ultimately, can increase students' content mastery of the Common Core State Standards for writing. A research study by Pytash and Morgan (2013) explained how inquiry-based learning provides a solid framework for teaching and improving students' writing skills and develops academic momentum in students. In fact, the study revealed that an inquiry-oriented or service-learning based writing experience allows students to develop and practice the types of writing they will encounter in college and in the workplace.

Moreover, it provides students with opportunities to actively study and inquire about real-world writing within genres that people often use in those two areas (Pytash and Morgan, 2013). The report places emphasis on the importance of academic momentum which, according to Strahan (2008) "represents the strength of a student's engagement with learning." With this academic momentum, students approach new assignments with confidence, recognizing the range of skills and strategies they already have at their disposal that can be applied to new tasks.

When exposed to an inquiry-based or service-learning unit, students can dissect genres as they develop the skills to “read like writers” and study how various authors craft their writing. Teachers lay the foundation for optimal learning by defining the characteristics of specific college and workplace genres. Through immersion, close study, and mini-lessons, students explicitly read the texts they will emulate (Pytash and Morgan, 2013). In other words, they get to view and model strong examples of good writing.

Thus, inquiry-based writing supports student growth as writers in single- or multiple-subject areas as recommended in the Common Core State Standards for Language Arts. Students see the value of writing in multiple disciplines and study how to communicate within the typical discourses of each field. Therefore, content that is integrated and relevant shows students the connections throughout various topics (Pytash and Morgan, 2013).

**Community service writing.** A more advanced Stanford University study by Ross and Thomas (1999) identified the importance of community service writing for first-year students as part of the university’s interdisciplinary freshman writing program. Students undertook internships with local nonprofit organizations where they researched and wrote practical documents in real-world contexts. These opportunities engaged students in problem-based learning where academic and real-world writing converged for developing content mastery and extending classroom knowledge to the community (Ross and Thomas, 1999).

Ross and Thomas (1999) noted that perhaps the greatest irony of a capitalistic society is the idea that individual success and an equal society grossly contradict each other. Since society in the United States consists of the “haves” and “have-nots” where the government has an inherent duty to care for everyone equally, the advantaged are often looked upon to care for the disadvantaged. Stanford’s brand of composition pedagogy allows students to write outside of the

academic setting.

The writing that students compose in community service writing is like the types of writing students will encounter throughout their careers. During the service component, instructors set aside five or six weeks of the academic quarter for community service writing. Stanford's status as a private, elite university, along with its geographic location, contrasts starkly with the surrounding community, giving it the literal and figurative Ivory Tower label (Ross and Thomas, 1999).

Community organizations appreciated the students' undertaking of the backload of writing projects and were pleased by the quality materials they received. This reinforced the reciprocal benefits of service-learning where the relationship benefitted both the community and the students themselves in their roles as citizens and real-world writers. Ross and Thomas (1999) posited that where there is a real task and purpose for writing, students thrive. Rather than a theoretical problem to address with tangible consequences, students work harder and learn more effectively regardless of how grade-conscious they may be.

The study concluded that students who participate in the community service writing program do more than give to others. They bring their knowledge and skills from the community back to the classroom. This speaks largely to genre study. Whether in the academic or community setting, genre refers to both the purpose and the form of writing (Ross and Thomas, 1999). Genre knowledge, a key component of the Common Core State Standards, is essential to any community discourse. What students learn about the research, organization, analytical aspects, and forms of the writing process informs students' approaches to these tasks in school as well as in the community. Initially, students in community service writing see the teacher and the organization as "other." However, over the course of the service-learning experience, students

realize that their writing connects them with a diverse group where they can craft their writing skills and serve the community at the same time (Ross and Thomas, 1999).

**Media Literacy.** With the Common Core State Standards' growing emphasis on technology in the classroom, teachers must reinforce media literacy in addition to the standard literacy elements found in the curriculum. A 2011 study analyzed the correlation between a surge in service-learning and a surge in media literacy, evident by an increase in the rise of educational practices seeking to enhance media literacy (Paradise, 2011).

Current research indicates that media literacy education enhances students' knowledge levels, analytical abilities, and critical thinking skills. Research for this study involved the Media Literacy Partnership which enabled high school seniors in a Mediated Communication Theory course to partner service-learning and media literacy to an inner-city after-school program. The increasingly complex media landscape made the community partnership between the participating college students and the K-12 students a natural fit (Paradise, 2011).

The Media Literacy Partnership, a semester-long project, allowed students to witness the link between theory and practice as they educated K-12 students on media literacy. College students, in small groups, facilitated lessons covering a wide range of media topics, including media consumption, advertising, media representations, and media effects. Throughout the semester, students reflected on their service-learning experience and connected it to course readings and discussions (Paradise, 2011).

Students later celebrated the service-learning partnership through an on-campus, end-of-semester capstone event where all stakeholders celebrated the collective benefits of service-learning. The primary challenge for the service-learning project was logistics, including finding a community partner and determining the appropriateness of that partnership (Paradise, 2011).

Despite these and other obstacles, the researcher, teacher, students, and partners all concluded that the benefits outweighed the obstacles. Students remarked that they watched theories that they learned in class come alive. They also reported that teaching literacy skills to the children helped them internalize and master the content better (Paradise, 2011). Therefore, they put what they had learned to good use.

**Service-learning and ESOL students.** Research also shows that service-learning in the English classroom benefits English second language learners, a group of students that have become more prevalent in large urban and suburban classrooms. According to a 2007 study by Mollie Hand Steinke, an ESOL instructor in a community college in Wyoming, service-learning in the ESOL classroom serves two purposes. First, it fulfills the language-learning needs of the students. Also, it helps students overcome some of the common problems they face as they struggle to master Standard English in both academic and professional settings.

Steinke used service-learning to immerse students in the very language that they will have to navigate to keep up and deal with the high-level assignments they will face, not only in the secondary classroom, but also in college and the workplace. She also used service-learning to combat the homesickness and culture-shock that ESOL students confront (Steinke, 2007). Steinke's research addressed how adult ESOL learners struggle with applying linguistic rules while steering a new cultural environment.

The Wyoming Community College, attended by 1,000 students annually, has civic engagement as its core purpose and heavily encourages student participation through service-learning. During the fall of 2007, eight ESOL students, consisting of three males and five females, participated in Steinke's service-learning study. A standardized ESOL language mastery placement exam placed five of the students at the beginning level, two students at the

intermediate level, and one student at the advanced language level (Steinke, 2007).

The first four weeks of service-learning, students learned English by engaging in American games. During the remaining twelve weeks, they participated in service-learning while completing weekly quizzes and essays. Students also had to complete a twelve-page paper and keep a weekly journal. All the students had several opportunities to engage in their communities and study American culture (Steinke, 2007).

Eventually, five out of the eight students overcame their anxiety concerning what they perceived as their lack of language competence. They ultimately did more than the instructor required. One of the limitations of the study Steinke cited was having students deal with multiple organizations instead of focusing on just one. This would not only have created a stronger connection with the organization, but also would have advanced the classroom discussion based on a common experience (Steinke, 2007).

Overall, Steinke concluded that implementing service-learning in the ESOL classroom improved students' language skills by providing relevant, real-life speaking, reading, and writing opportunities. It also helped them overcome depression and culture shock by involving them in their communities. Furthermore, the communities benefitted from the students' assistance. Steinke cites the research's major strength as its ability to be replicated at larger colleges and universities (Steinke, 2007).

## **Summary**

An extensive review of the literature involving the impact of service-learning on students' content mastery of the CCSS for ELA revealed that a mixed-methods study adds a magnitude and dimension that would be hidden by a wholly qualitative or quantitative analysis. Although service-learning as a pedagogical strategy continues to gain momentum, it is still a new study

characterized as lacking both rigor and reliability (Furco & Root, 2010). High school administrators' attitudes regarding service-learning often mirror many researchers' perceptions of service-learning as a legitimate discipline.

Because testing is the main objective for many schools, most researchers and secondary administrators call for more quantitative studies for the data-driven classroom to validate student learning. However, many compelling service-learning outcomes are difficult to quantify (Furco & Root, 2010). In fact, many of the skills taught in the secondary ELA classroom are not easily quantifiable. For example, writing skills and literary analysis engage the cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains.

While limited research on the impact of service-learning on various disciplines on the secondary and postsecondary levels exists, an examination of how service-learning as a strategy for implementing and enhancing the Common Core State Standards in English language arts is needed for further study.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides a detailed description of the proposed participants, procedures, instruments, data collection procedures, and data analyses of this mixed-methods research design. The proposed study examined and described individual student experiences before, during, and after participating in a service-learning program in two North central Georgia high schools. The primary focus for the study included increased scores on end-of-course exams and increased mastery of the Common Core College and Career Readiness standards.

Despite its burgeoning momentum in colleges and universities, service-learning continues to be an undeveloped area on the secondary level. Stakeholders and scholars criticize what they perceive as a lack of rigor for service-learning research. To address the continuous challenges of service learning, four qualitative data collections methods were used, in addition to the quantitative foundation. Using multiple data sources and methods to study a single phenomenon provided robust triangulation that intensified the study (Johnson et al, 2007).

#### **Research Design**

To investigate the relationship between service-learning, English language arts content mastery, and test performance, the researcher utilized a mixed-methods design that examined the qualitative and quantitative data simultaneously (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). This method

allowed the researcher to obtain different, but complementary data on a topic in order to understand the research problem using a broader, more pragmatic approach (Creswell, 2011). This interpretation promoted student ownership of both the project and the process as they developed a close interaction with a community partner to produce a deliverable product, as opposed to merely logging a certain number of hours.

The researcher identified potential service-learning classes for inclusion in the study in two ways. First, high school administrators were contacted via a letter requesting permission to conduct the study (Appendix A). Next, the eleventh-grade English teachers from both schools were contacted via a letter requesting consideration of inclusion of their students in the study (Appendix B). Immediately following the service-learning component, both participating teachers were interviewed for an inside perspective on how students developed during the service-learning experience (Appendix H).

Upon the approval of the identified high school administrators and English teachers of the identified service-learning classes, the researcher visited each service-learning class prior to the teachers' implementation of the service-learning component. Although the researcher introduced the service project to the students, the teachers solicited student participation for the study. Once the teachers identified interested students, they scheduled a focus group to discuss the expectations and assumptions for completing the service-learning project.

The teachers then distributed and collected parent consent forms (Appendix C) for students participating in the study. The consent forms outlined what the study entailed and what the students were expected to do throughout the project. At the conclusion of the focus group, the teachers contacted the students via email and had the students complete the Office of Community-Engagement & Partnerships (OCEP) pre-service-learning survey administered

online through Qualtrics.

Participating teachers then administered a mock end-of-course assessment to both the treatment and control groups to determine the baseline of knowledge for both groups prior to the service-learning experience. Once a week during the service-learning component, the researcher conducted formal field observations chronicling the students' interactions, behaviors, and dialogue during the service-learning experience. After completing the service project, students took the OCEP post-survey online. Individual student and teacher interviews were completed within ten days of finalizing the service project.

### **Mixed-Methods Research Design**

Creswell & Plano Clark (2011) emphasized the value of a mixed-methods research model for a comprehensive analysis of any study. Thus, a mixed methods approach provided the most thorough and rigorous study for examining service-learning. This approach also utilized a constructivist perspective, which allowed the researcher to explore students' individual viewpoints (Patton, 2002). The triangulation method, which was also incorporated into this study, attempted to merge the findings of different methods into one cohesive unit (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Given the different stakeholder groups that had a vested interest in the outcomes of the research, the researcher addressed three fundamental matters with a mixed-methods design. First, the researcher determined whether one method would carry more weight than the other one; then the researcher determined whether the quantitative and qualitative components would be conducted concurrently or sequentially, and; the researcher decided at what point both components would merge (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). The weight of the study determined

whether the qualitative and quantitative data had equal importance or whether one had greater priority than the other one (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

Furthermore, three primary design structures represent mixed-methods studies. The QUAN-qual, or explanatory model, gives importance to quantitative data. The QUAL-quant, or exploratory method, places more weight on the qualitative data. Finally, the QUAN-QUAL method, or triangulation model, does not preference either data type (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2006). Since the data for this mixed-methods study was collected concurrently and the results of one were not valued over the other one, the QUAN-QUAL method was used for this study.

In this QUAN-QUAL mixed design, the quantitative portion focused on numbers and statistical analysis from an objective viewpoint while the qualitative component utilized narratives and artifacts to support the numerical data (Johnson & Onwuebuozie, 2004). Applying both methods maximized the strengths of both designs while reducing the inherent weaknesses found in each. Both data sets were collected during the same time frame and had equal weight (Creswell, 2009).

Quantitative research was used to test the hypotheses quickly as well as to analyze possible cause and effect relationships between variables (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Qualitative research, on the other hand, provided a broader description of how the affective and cognitive domains worked together throughout the entire service-learning experience from various contexts. This supported a more comprehensive analysis of the study, including any changes that might take place during the actual research (Creswell, 2009).

Along that same vein, qualitative data produced evidence that the quantitative data often missed since quantitative data primarily focuses on simply testing the hypothesis (Johnson & Onwuebuozie, 2004). Qualitative research provided a richer description of the events that took

place, allowing the researcher to be both cognizant of the circumstances surrounding the research and capable of developing a responsiveness to any changes in the study (Johnson & Onwuebuze, 2004). Ultimately, a mixed methods research design provided a more comprehensive picture of what occurred during the service-learning process and provided a broader view of the areas that service-learning enhanced. Thus, those qualitative areas that could not be quantified easily still provided important insight (Johnson & Onwuebuze, 2004).

### **Unit of Analysis**

Since this study involved two different sites using a few potential variables, the most pragmatic unit of analysis was the individual student. Given public education's increased emphasis on student-centered learning, analyzing the impact of service-learning on the individual experience as well as on the student's academic performance allowed for triangulation employing multiple data sources (Furco, 2003). Service-learning has as its foundation John Dewey's concept of experiential education which purposefully engages students in direct experience and focused reflection. This helps students increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and ultimately, contribute to their communities (Shellman, 2014).

### **Population and Sample**

The participants of this study consisted of 104 students from four eleventh-grade English classrooms at two large suburban high schools in North central Georgia. The high schools chosen for this study were grades 9-12 public high schools with no previous exposure to service-learning as a part of their instructional practices. Each high school had two standard eleventh-grade English classes with each functioning as a treatment and control group. Both classes in each high school were taught by the same teacher.

The facilitating teacher at the first school had four years of teaching experience, including

three as an adjunct instructor of freshman composition at a local college. She also served as the English department chair for her school. The facilitating teacher at the second school had ten years of teaching experience, all at the high school level. Both teachers neither had prior service-learning experience nor had they taught anywhere except at their respective schools. The researcher held no authoritative or supervisory position over the participating teachers. At the first school, English 11 classes were taught by one other instructor. At the study's second high school English 11 classes were taught by two other instructors. All classes were completely autonomous.

The participating teachers facilitated the treatment groups using the IPARC model, a structured approach for introducing and implementing service-learning with the English language arts curriculum. IPARC is an acronym for the various stages of service-learning— investigation, preparation, action, reflection, and celebration/demonstration. Students used the IPARC model to employ a form of Community Engaged Writing, known as “writing for the community,” where students address an organization’s professional writing needs. This format has generally been used to aid community organizations and prepare students in crucial ways to use literacy beyond high school, particularly in college and careers.

The sample population for this study at both high schools was 51% African American, 37% Hispanic, 6% Caucasian, and 2% Asian. The total eleventh-grade population for the first high school typically consisted of between 325-410 students with 86% of the entire population qualifying for either free or reduced lunch under the conventional Title I guidelines.

The total eleventh-grade population for the second-high school consisted of between 300-350 students with 90% of the entire population qualifying for either free or reduced lunch under the conventional Title I guidelines. Both sets of numbers closely represented the overall population

of the schools. Students in the population were between the ages of 16 and 18. In the first high school, 52% of the participants in the study were female and 48% of them were male. In high school number two, 57% of the participants were female and 43% are male.

### **The Role of the Researcher**

As a veteran educator, I have a long-standing personal and professional interest in service-learning that spans more than fifteen years—long before service-learning became a part of most school districts’ curricula. I have taught as both a full-time and adjunct college English instructor in addition to teaching high school and middle school English. I have also implemented service-learning in my classes on all three levels.

As an adjunct instructor, I recognized the importance of integrating skills that made students college-and career-ready and I was able to transfer that experience into helping students become college-and career-ready in the secondary English classroom. Oddly enough, my interest in service-learning started in a non-traditional academic setting where at-risk students practiced real-world strategies with the goal of eventually preparing them to transition into traditional college and career settings.

That non-traditional setting introduced me to service-learning, a non-traditional strategy at the time for implementing the curriculum. The two-day professional development session held at the University of Memphis trained teachers from various school districts in the state to construct service-learning lesson plans specific to their disciplines that aligned with their academic goals. The high-level of student engagement and academic success of those and subsequent courses piqued my interest in how service-learning could be used to facilitate content mastery and implement the English language arts standards prior to the development of the Common Core

State Standards for English language arts.

Despite my strong personal and professional conviction on the outcomes of service-learning, I did not allow my own experiences to influence the data collection process. I do, however, believe that my extensive experience allowed me to comprehend and to appreciate nuances that developed as the service portion of the research developed. That foundation added significant dimensions to collecting and synthesizing the data before, during, and after the entire service-learning process.

### **Service-Learning Teacher Training**

To ensure that the service-learning component addressed the five core phases of a quality service-learning project—investigation, planning, action, reflection, celebration/demonstration—the participating teachers completed two online professional development webinars conducted by Marcus Penny, Digital Engagement Manager, for the National Youth Leadership Council. The webinars focused on the IPARC method for developing and implementing service-learning projects in all disciplines. Besides the professional development webinars, the web site furnished free downloadable books and packets to assist k-12 teachers with adding service-learning components to their courses.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions helped guide the study.

- Does implementing service-learning in the ELA classroom lead to a statistically significant increase on the Georgia Milestones American Literature exam?

- What is the difference in assessment scores on the Georgia Milestones American Literature exam between students taught using traditional instructional strategies and students taught in a class with a service-learning component?

### **Qualitative Procedure**

The qualitative phase of this research followed the phenomenological design, which was used to understand the meaning that the students and teachers placed on the service-learning experience (Creswell, 2009). The phenomenological design gave the researcher the flexibility to observe how treatment groups and teachers implemented service-learning to develop a broader understanding of how students transferred classroom theory to real-world issues through their mastery of the Common Core ELA and CCR standards.

The qualitative phase of the research began at the same time as the quantitative phase, beginning with both teachers introducing an inquiry-based reading and writing unit. Students from all groups participated in literature circles where they were responsible for the same content material. However, the treatment groups identified a community need based on one of the central themes in their selected novel. They then constructed both a grant proposal that addressed a need for their chosen organization and a multimedia presentation where they pitched their ideas to representatives from their chosen organization. This extended teaching and learning beyond the classroom and allowed students to apply literacy standards to an authentic task, audience, and purpose.

Using literature circles where students examined young adult literature to prepare them for their service-learning experience had several advantages. First, it embodied cooperative learning where students could make choices about their learning. This student-centered approach led to

deeper engagement, increased intrinsic motivation, and an opportunity for guided decision-making (Kaye, 2010).

Second, combining both pedagogical strategies made students feel connected to the school and the community while giving them positive interactions with their classmates. Also, both strategies promoted powerful experiences for struggling and reluctant readers. Students saw combining these strategies as a fun way to interact with the curriculum since they provided both civic and social experiences. Finally, connecting literature circles and service-learning provided structure while reinforcing differentiation with intellectual autonomy (Kaye, 2010).

As students in both the treatment and control groups prepared for the literature circles, teachers placed them randomly into one of five groups where they chose an adolescent literature novel from a teacher-generated list. Students in each group filled one of the following roles—Discussion Director, Diction Detective, Bridge Builder, Artful Artist, and Illuminating Investigator. Each role played an important part in helping students explore the universal themes in adolescent literature that validated their experiences and helped them make meaning out of them (Kaye, 2010).

These themes also helped the treatment groups explore potential community needs for the service-learning component of their literature circles. Once all students had completed their literature circles, students in the treatment groups implemented the service-learning component throughout the five stages of the IPARC model, as outlined by the K-12 Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice—investigation, planning, action, reflection, and celebration (NYLC, 2008).

Students in both the treatment and control groups completed weekly journal responses at the end of each phase of service-learning. A detailed outline of the weekly journal prompts can be

found in Appendix D. Each student reviewed, refined, and typed their journal entries. By the end of the project, students submitted the handwritten and typed journals for the researcher to review and code themes and patterns.

***Focus group.*** After the literature circles, a focus group was conducted with the treatment groups prior to their implementing the service-learning component. The focus groups allowed the researcher to examine the group dynamics which presented a guideline for later field observations. The participating teachers prepared students for the service-learning experience by laying the ground rules, clarifying expectations, answering questions, and briefly outlining the process. The following were proposed discussion prompts:

1. Do you feel prepared for this service-learning experience? Why or why not?
2. What personal strengths do you expect to bring to this experience?
3. What do you believe are the important qualities of a good volunteer?
4. Regarding your service site, explain how they are a partner in your service and/or learning experience?
5. How are you preparing yourself for this experience?
6. What personal challenges do you think you will encounter at your service site?

A comprehensive focus-group script can be found in Appendix E. The discussion was recorded using a hand-held device and stored in a secure place. Recordings of each focus group were transcribed verbatim within one week for analysis. Pseudonyms were used to maintain students' privacy and confidentiality. The original data will be destroyed permanently once the mandatory five-year waiting period elapses.

Prior to the investigation stage, students in the service-learning classes were placed randomly into one of five general groups. They then completed a learning profile created by the Tennessee

Department of Education as part of their work-based learning and college-readiness implementation guide for service-learning. Tennessee, which is not only a large proponent of service-learning, created a service-learning K-12 curriculum with resources that could be adopted by service-learning practitioners in other states, since it implements Common Core. Teachers initiated the service-learning component by having students define the term “community” and create a list of different communities based on themes from their selected literature circle texts.

After the teachers collected the lists and student profiles, they introduced the students to the service-learning concept, which they connected to their literature circle themes. Students identified which community issue they will address by completing a community map (Appendix F). Students used the community map activity to collect data about their community issue, to evaluate the assets and resources already available in the community, and to brainstorm a list of potential partners that currently address their issue.

Once students chose their leaders and identified their community partners, participating teachers introduced them to the grant proposal structure using a ten-page document on grant preparation for foundations, including the general elements of a proposal and how proposals are assessed (Griffith et. al, 2006). They received copies of two successful grant proposals to serve as writing models. Groups also completed the Service-learning Action Plan Form to determine the most critical area within the organization that needs to be addressed. Field observations began during the preparation phase and continued throughout the action phase.

***Field Observations.*** The next qualitative piece of the study, the field observation, took place at the service-learning sites during the action phase of the project. The researcher spent one day each, observing each group at their respective chosen sites. This allowed the researcher to

examine the interactions between the service-learning groups and the organizations they served. The researcher functioned as an unobtrusive, non-participant in the service-learning component to minimize observer effects (Patton, 2002). During visits, the researcher took detailed, descriptive, and reflective notes throughout the observation that were later transcribed for analysis (Creswell, 2003). The researcher also took photographs to further document the study where appropriate and necessary.

The action phase of service-learning ultimately served as the foundation for the grant proposal and the multimedia project that groups completed as artifacts to demonstrate their mastery of the Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards for reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language. Service-learning groups collaborated to determine the most effective digital format and potential funder for promoting their cause and supporting their message. Artifacts were collected and scored against a teacher-generated rubric for evidence of content mastery.

This form of community service writing also offered students immediate support in how to write well in the genre and prepared them for the writing tasks they will use in college and the workplace (Pytash & Morgan, 2013). Students were allowed input in which genre they used because it honored their voices and addressed the ideas that mattered to them. This followed the service-learning tenet for student choice and voice.

Having student groups collaborate with their community partners during the action phase of service-learning established a balance between a partnership not only where student voices and perspectives carried value, but also where the service had reciprocal benefits for everyone (McEwin & Greene, 2010). Their grant proposals connected their out-of-school lives and interests and their in-school learning experiences, a major feature of service-learning (Ray, 2006). Thus, connecting service-learning and Common Core in this manner ensured that

learning was meaningful and purposeful as students learned to write in real-world genres.

This closely followed Thomas Dean's "writing for the community" model, which shifts both audience and purpose from meeting teacher expectations to meeting the expectations articulated by the agency and the community. Through this model students used their still-emerging literacy skills by applying them to creating public awareness for pressing social problems (Adler-Kassner et al, 1997). The Common Core framework stressed how reading and writing connected as students engaged with a wide range of text types to analyze how an author's writing decisions engaged with and contributed to the structure and meaning of a text (NGA, 2010).

The reflection phase, normally indicated as the summative phase of service-learning, was ongoing throughout the lesson through the students' weekly journal entries. It informed the service-learning process and increased students' self-awareness as they engaged their multiple intelligences and modalities to assess how they felt about what they had learned and experienced at each stage of the service-learning component (Ray, 2006).

Finally, during the celebration/demonstration phase, service-learning groups presented formal proposals and digital messages to their community partners in a schoolwide assembly. These proposals and presentations demonstrated how they used their academic curriculum and content writing skills to meet the community's needs. This writing assignment captured the totality of the service-learning experience and underscored how well students combined curriculum and community (Rief, 2007). Service organization representatives, along with the participating teachers, assessed the presentations to give students a more authentic audience and purpose.

***Student Interviews.*** After the celebration/demonstration phase of service-learning, individual interviews with two students from each treatment group helped the researcher gather information about the students' experiences. The participating teachers chose which students

would be interviewed. A combination of standardized open-ended, reflective questions and informal conversational interview techniques served as the overall structure of the interviews.

The fifteen semi-structured, proposed questions included:

1. How was this class like or different from other English classes that you have taken?
2. What challenges did you face in your service-learning experience? Were they overcome or were they left unresolved?
3. How did your participation in service-learning benefit the organization or the people with whom you partnered?
4. As a result of service-learning, how do you view your own ability to make a difference in your community and in the world?
5. Do you believe service-learning helped you understand the content for your English class? How or why not?
6. Compared to traditional classroom assignments (such as research papers and tests), how useful was participating in service-learning in helping you understand course material?
7. What was the most important thing you learned during your service-learning experience?
8. How did this learning relate to the course objectives?
9. Talk about at least two aspects of language arts or literacy learning that you understand better as a result of your service-learning experience.
10. How will you use this learning in the future?
11. Did your service-learning experience increase your appreciation for cultural diversity or decrease any stereotypes that you had? Explain.
12. What skills did you discover that you never knew you had as a result of your service-learning experience? Which skills or roles did you utilize?

13. Have you decided on a major or a career based on your service-learning experience?

14. Were you able to apply classroom material to your community-based activity? If so, how?

15. Did your service-learning experience empower you as a student? How or why not?

A comprehensive interview protocol can be found in Appendix G. The interviews were recorded using a hand-held audio recording device and stored in a secure place. Each student interview, which lasted approximately forty-five minutes, was audiotaped, transcribed verbatim within a twenty-four-hour period of the interview, and reviewed with the students within forty-eight hours of the interview for content verification. Student pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality and the transcripts will be destroyed at the end of the five-year waiting period.

***Teacher Interviews.*** At the end of the service-learning unit, the researcher interviewed the participating teachers to examine their perceptions on how service-learning impacted both their implementation of the Common Core English language arts curriculum and their students' mastery of the English language arts content. The participating teachers also completed a fifteen-question survey that complemented the interview questions and gave a comprehensive picture of how they viewed the overall service-learning experience. The interview consisted of the following questions:

1. Did service-learning help you grow as a teacher? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Identify a strength your service experience revealed that you never knew your students had. A weakness.
3. Name something new that you learned about your students overall as a result of service-learning.

4. How did service-learning most impact students in your standard English class?
5. What would you deem some of the benefits of implementing service-learning? The obstacles?
6. How do you think service-learning either benefitted or hindered classroom instruction?
7. What might have helped link your service experience and the course content better?
8. What differences, if any, in academic growth did you observe between the service-learning group and the non-service-learning group?
9. To what extent did the service-learning experience either meet or not meet your expectations?
10. How did your service-learning experience either illuminate or challenge your theories about teaching and learning?

A detailed protocol for the teacher interview as well as a copy of the teacher survey can be found in Appendix H and Appendix I. The interview was recorded using a hand-held device and transcribed verbatim within a forty-eight-hour period of the interview. The transcripts were reviewed with each of the participating teachers to determine the accuracy of their statements.

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

For the quantitative portion of this study, participating teachers and the school's testing coordinator administered the mock computer-based Georgia Milestones American Literature pre-test developed by the Georgia Department of Education to the treatment and control groups prior to implementation of the service-learning component. Each assessment was electronically scored with an analytical breakdown of the standards that students did and did not master for later comparisons.

The participating teachers and the testing coordinator also administered the mock computer-based Georgia Milestones American Literature post-test immediately following the service-learning unit. Both tests, labeled Discovery Test A and Discovery Test B were designed to evaluate students' understanding of the eleventh-grade English language arts concepts for the Common Core State Standards. The outcomes were classified according to the Common Core State Standards end-of-course objectives on the Georgia Milestones assessment.

The internal validity of the Georgia Milestones American Literature assessment stems from two sets of evidence—content and construction (Creswell, 2011). The tests were developed and reviewed by a group of language arts curriculum test development experts, giving validity to the content. Also, mean comparisons done on both tests showed a statistically significant increase in scores after language arts instruction.

Discovery Test “A” functioned as the pre-test prior to service-learning instruction in early September and Discovery Test “B” functioned as a summative assessment in mid-December after the unit. The test was secured in the testing room where neither the participating teachers nor the students had access until the completion of the study. Each student used his or her district-assigned lunch number as a signature on the answer sheet to ensure anonymity.

The post-test used the same identifying number at the end of the unit. All makeup exams were given at a pre-determined time, if necessary. The pre-test and post-test scores on both assessments for students in the treatment and control groups were compared to identify any significant differences using a paired T-test with an alpha level of .05. The researcher then ran an ANOVA test to determine if service-learning caused more statistically significant growth for the treatment group than it did for the control group.

## **Instrumentation**

The instrument used to collect quantitative data was a combination of two Georgia Milestones American Literature pre-and post-tests developed by the Georgia Department of Education (Appendix K). These tests addressed the competencies outlined by the English 11 curriculum for the Common Core State Standards. These tests were used to evaluate students' understanding of the ELA concepts that they would be tested on during the actual exam.

The exams, labeled Discovery Test A and Discovery Test B assessed students' mastery levels for eleventh-grade English both before and after formal teacher instruction. Every public high school in the state of Georgia uses these tests to obtain data for how students will be expected to perform on the Georgia Milestones assessment prior to each testing cycle—winter, spring, and summer. Each Georgia Milestones American Literature test contains sixty questions, including a constructed writing response and an extending writing response. The tests have a reliability measure of .89 and a validity measure of .90.

The pre-test developed a baseline of students' pre-existing knowledge from both the treatment and control groups prior to implementing the service-learning component. The post-test evaluated any content mastery gains made during the course by the treatment and control groups. The tests were administered by the testing coordinator at each school. All English 11 students took the pre-test in early September and they took the post-test in mid-December at the end of the literacy unit. Both tests measured identical concepts with different questions to prevent any chance of residual memory.

## **Summary**

This research proposal addressed teachers' and administrators' criticisms concerning the difficulty of implementing the Common Core State Standards with fidelity while increasing

student achievement. This proposal created a flexible, reproducible study that may impact service-learning in other academic disciplines. A considerable amount of data was collected and analyzed both qualitatively and quantitatively. This mixed-methods study constructed an authentic and credible study that will benefit several crucial stakeholders.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF DATA

This chapter presents an analysis of the data collected from 104 eleventh-grade students and two ELA teachers from two public high schools in North central Georgia using both qualitative and quantitative collection methods, along with a summary of the findings.

Participating students completed a mock Georgia Milestones American Literature pre-and post-test labeled Discovery Test A and Discovery Test B, developed by the Georgia Department of Education. The examination data was used to test both hypotheses included in this study.

The qualitative data given answered the final research question. The chapter includes two primary sections. Section one outlines the qualitative data analysis, explanation, and summary. The qualitative section consists of four sub-sections: Focus Group Data, Student Interview Data, Field Observation Data, and Teacher Interview Data. Section two outlines the collection method for the quantitative data.

#### **Demographic Information**

This mixed-methods study focused on four American Literature classes in two North central Georgia public high schools taught by two different teachers. Each teacher supervised two classes where one class served as the treatment group and the other class served as the control group. The treatment and control groups from the first high school were labeled Class A and Class B respectively. The treatment and control groups from the second-high school were labeled Class C and Class D.

Both participating teachers chose their own control groups based on logistics and on the specific learning outcome of increasing students' test scores in specific domains. Thus, although students were placed in classes randomly, the assignment of treatment and control groups was not completely random. All four groups accurately represented the total student population in their high schools and therefore, served as accurate baselines for comparing and assessing the verifiable effects of service-learning. Teachers wanted a more concrete way to determine if service-learning caused an increase in test scores or if the students would have improved on their own regardless of other variables.

The second participating teacher also decided to assign her classes in the study randomly to minimize the notion that either class size or some other latent variable unduly influenced the results. Because all four groups were demographically similar, the final analysis of the magnitude of the effect of service-learning would allow for a more meaningful comparison. Since teaching to the standards is emphasized and reinforced heavily in Georgia public schools, students in all four groups were drilled on the learning targets and standards daily. Class not only began and ended with various students reciting the standards out loud, but also participating teachers consistently referenced the standards throughout the work period, a major component of the teacher evaluation protocol.

Class A, the first treatment group, had eleven males and fourteen females, a percentage of 44% and 56% respectively. The control group, Class B, on the other hand, had ten males and eighteen females, yielding percentages of 35.71% and 64.39%. In high school number two, Class C, the service-learning group had fourteen males and ten females, a percentage margin of 55.33% to 41.67%. Lastly, Class D, the non-service-learning group had thirteen males and fourteen females, a percentage of 48.15% and 51.85%, respectively. Students in all four groups

completed the sixty question mock Georgia Milestones American Literature exam prior to the study and a second mock exam as a summative assessment at the end of the unit.

Table 1

*Student Demographics—Class A*

Gender	n
Male	11
Female	14
Total	25

Table 2

*Student Demographics—Class B*

Gender	n
Male	10
Female	18
Total	28

Table 3

*Student Demographics—Class C*

Gender	n
Male	14
Female	10
Total	24

Table 4

*Student Demographics—Class D*

Gender	n
Male	13
Female	14
Total	27

Students' self-identified demographic information from the pre-and post-survey revealed that the ethnic distribution for Class A was 72% African American, 20% Hispanic, and 8% Asian. The ethnic makeup for Class B was 71.43% African American and 28.57% Hispanic. Class C's ethnic makeup included 83.33% African Americans, 12.5 Hispanic, and 4.17% Asian. The final group, Class D, which proved to be the most diverse of the four groups, was 66.6% African American, 25.93% Hispanic, and 7.4% Asian. There were no Caucasian students in any of the participating groups.

Table 5

*Student Demographics—Class A*

Ethnicity	n
African American	18
Hispanic	5
Asian or Pacific Islander	2
Caucasian	0
Total	25

Table 6

*Student Demographics—Class B*

<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>n</u>
African American	20
Hispanic	8
Asian or Pacific Islander	0
Caucasian	0
Total	28

Table 7

*Student Demographics—Class C*

<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>n</u>
African American	20
Hispanic	3
Asian or Pacific Islander	1
Caucasian	0
Total	24

Table 8

*Student Demographics—Class D*

<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>n</u>
African American	18
Hispanic	7

Asian or Pacific Islander	2
Caucasian	0
<hr/>	
Total	27

Participating students in Class A and Class B contained eleventh grade and twelfth-grade students with the eleventh-grade students in the majority. Class A had twenty-two juniors and three seniors, a percentage of 88% and 12% respectively. Class B had twenty-six 11<sup>th</sup> grade students and two seniors, a calculation of 93% and 7%. Class C and Class D included all first-time eleventh-graders. Three students in Class A were repeat test-takers and two students in Class B were repeat test takers. One senior in Class A had never taken the end-of-course examination at all.

Table 9

*Student Demographics—Class A*

Grade	n
11 <sup>th</sup>	22
12 <sup>th</sup>	3
<hr/>	
Total	25

Table 10

*Student Demographics—Class B*

Grade	n
11 <sup>th</sup>	26
12 <sup>th</sup>	2
<hr/>	
Total	28

Table 11

*Student Demographics—Class C*

Grade	n
11 <sup>th</sup>	24
12 <sup>th</sup>	0
Total	24

Table 12

*Student Demographics—Class D*

Grade	n
11 <sup>th</sup>	27
12 <sup>th</sup>	0
Total	27

Participating students' ages ranged from 16-18, with the majority in all four classes being sixteen years old. In Class A, 80% of the students were sixteen, 12% were seventeen, and 8% were eighteen years old. Class B reported 75% of the students were sixteen, 17.86% were seventeen, and 7.14% were eighteen. In Class C, 92% of the class was sixteen and 8% were seventeen. Finally, in Class D, 64% of the students were sixteen and 36% were seventeen. Neither Class C nor Class D had any 18-year-old students.

Table 13

*Student Demographics—Class A*

Age	n
16	20
17	3
18	2
Total	25

Table 14

*Student Demographics—Class B*

Age	n
16	21
17	5
18	2
Total	28

Table 15

*Student Demographics—Class C*

Age	n
16	22
17	2
18	0
Total	24

Table 16

*Student Demographics—Class D*

Age	n
16	18
17	9
18	0
Total	27

Students' grade point averages from the previous term provided significant insight into their overall classroom performance levels prior to the teachers implementing the service-learning unit. Table 17 reveals that in Class A fifteen students, the class majority, ranged from 2.6-3.0, with seven students scoring at or below 2.5 and three students scoring at or above 3.1. Thus, the

mean grade-point average for Class A, the treatment group, was 2.496, a solid “C” average for the entire class with the majority reading on grade level.

Table 17

*Frequency Distribution of Previous Term’s GPA- Class A*

GPA	n	%
1.0 – 1.5	0	0%
1.6 –2.0	2	8%
2.1 – 2.5	5	20%
2.6-3.0	15	60%
3.1 – 3.5	3	12%
3.6-4.0	0	0%
Total	25	

An evaluation of Class B’s GPAs from the previous school term revealed that nine students each scored in both the 2.6-3.0 and the 3.1-3.5 ranges respectively, forming most of the group’s population. Ten of the twenty-eight students scored below 2.6. By comparison, the average grade point average for Class B, the control group, was higher than the average grade point average for Class A, the treatment group, by .356 points.

Table 18

*Frequency Distribution of Previous Term’s GPA—Class B*

GPA	n	%
1.0 – 1.5	0	0
1.6 – 2.0	4	15%

2.1 – 2.5	6	22%
2.6 – 3.0	8	30%
3.1 – 3.5	9	33%
3.6 – 4.0	0	0%
<hr/>		
Total	27	

A review of the previous term’s GPA from participating students in Class C showed that twelve students had numbers ranging from 2.6 through 3.0 with six of the students falling below 2.0. Six of the twenty-four students fell between 3.1 and 4.0. Based on these raw numbers, most teachers might interpret this as being able to “teach to the middle” since there are more average or standard students than there are above average or below average students. This issue with that analysis is that when teachers “teach to the middle” and hope for the best, they are not taking advantage of the opportunity to differentiate the instruction wholly and with fidelity in a way that will reach all students.

Table 19 *Frequency Distribution of Previous Term’s GPA—Class C*

GPA	n	%
1.0 – 1.5	0	0%
1.6 – 2.0	2	8.3%
2.1 – 2.5	4	16.7%
2.6 – 3.0	12	50%
3.1 – 3.5	4	16.7%
3.6 – 4.0	2	8.3%
<hr/>		
Total	24	

Finally, an examination of the prior term's GPAs for Class D revealed that fourteen of the twenty-seven students in the class were between 2.1 and 2.5 with six students falling below 2.1. Only three of the students fell above 3.1. Thus, the data frequency for Class C, the service-learning group and D, the non-service-learning group closely resembled each other although the average GPA for Class D was slightly higher than the average GPA for Class C by .016 points.

*Table 20 Frequency Distribution of Previous Term's GPA—Class D*

GPA	n	%
1.0 – 1.5	0	0%
1.6 – 2.0	4	15%
2.1 – 2.5	4	15%
2.6 – 3.0	14	52%
3.1 – 3.5	3	11%
3.6 – 4.0	2	7%

*Table 21 Participants' Average GPA by Class*

Class	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Class A (Treatment)	25	1.6	3.6	2.496	1.579
Class B (Control)	28	1.8	3.5	2.768	1.664
Class C (Treatment)	27	1.6	3.6	2.825	1.681
Class D (Control)	24	1.8	3.8	2.840	1.685

## Qualitative Data Coding and Analysis

Robert Yin's (2009) six sources of evidence for triangulation, applied to this investigative study are illustrated in Table 22.

Table 22

*Triangulation: Six Sources of Evidence* (Yin, 2009)

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Documentation	Students' notes, graphic organizers, and templates
Archival Records	Student journal prompts and entries
Interviews	Student interviews and focus group transcripts
Direct observations	Weekly researcher field notes
Participant Observations	Teacher interviews
Physical Artifacts	Proposals, video footage, and photographs

### Student Interviews

Interviews with teacher-identified service-learning group leaders started on December 7, 2018, to assess their attitudes concerning the service-learning experience and their perception of its impact on their mastery of the English Language Arts standards. The interviews began at the end of the service-learning activity immediately following the celebration/demonstration phase. The researcher conducted the interviews after school at each participating high school over a four-day period, using a series of questions that were developed prior to the service-learning activities. The research questions included:

1. How was this class like or different from other English classes that you have taken?
2. What challenges did you face in your service-learning experience? Were they overcome?

- or were they left unresolved?
3. How did your participation in service-learning benefit the organization or the people with whom you partnered?
  4. As a result of service-learning, how do you view your own ability to make a difference in your community and in the world?
  5. Do you believe service-learning helped you understand the content for your English class? How or why not?
  6. Compared to traditional classroom assignments (such as research papers and tests), how useful was participating in service-learning in helping you understand course material?
  7. What was the most important thing you learned during your service-learning experience?
  8. How did this learning relate to the course objectives?
  9. Talk about at least two aspects of language arts or literacy learning that you understand better as a result of your service-learning experience.
  10. How will you use this learning in the future?
  11. Did your service-learning experience increase your appreciation for cultural diversity or decrease any stereotypes that you had? Explain.
  12. What skills did you discover that you never knew you had as a result of your service-learning experience? Which skills or roles did you utilize?
  13. Have you decided on a major or a career based on your service-learning experience?
  14. Were you able to apply classroom material to your community-based activity? If so, how?
  15. Did your service-learning experience empower you as a student? How or why not?

The researcher completed the student interviews in the participating teachers' empty

classrooms employing a hand-held tape-recording device. None of the students either expressed any anxiety or objected to any aspect of the interview process. The researcher transcribed the interview notes on the day of the interview and each student reviewed his or her transcript the following day for accuracy and verification. No student received any form of compensation for his or her participation.

### **Focus Group**

Prior to the pre-test and the service-learning activity, a focus group was held with ten teacher-identified group leaders. The dates for the focus groups were October 17, 2018 for Class A and October 18, 2018 for Class C. The goals of the focus group sessions were to introduce the students to the service-learning process, to observe group dynamics, and to stimulate students' thinking about how they will connect community service to the ELA unit and the Common Core State Standards.

The focus groups were held in the participating teachers' classrooms during the treatment groups' regularly scheduled class periods. The researcher recorded the focus group session on her chrome notebook and made focus group notes in her field journal. The researcher then downloaded the files to her personal computer and transcribed the audio files. Afterwards, the researcher reviewed the transcripts with the focus groups and participating teachers for accuracy and made the appropriate observations in her journal. Neither the teachers nor the students were compensated for their involvement in this study.

### **Student Journals**

The students in the treatment classrooms, Classes A and C, and the control classrooms, Classes B and D, began keeping weekly journals starting on October 15, 2018 and ending on

December 7, 2018, when the service-learning component ended. The prompts corresponded with each phase of the service-learning IPARC model. Although the length of the journal responses remained constant, the content became more intense, expressive, and insightful.

The teachers mandated that students submit both a written and a typed copy of their journal entries for clarity and legibility. The researcher collected all journal entries on December 14, 2018, to review and code all relevant information. The researcher did not edit the entries and presented them exactly in their original form. One hundred and four journals were collected—25 from Class A, 28 from Class B, 24 from Class C, and 27 from Class D.

### **Photographs and Videos**

While the researcher took photographs to document the service-learning experience throughout the five phases, both the researcher and the participating teachers deferred to the treatment groups regarding what moments should be captured to narrate their story. This emphasized the concept of student voice and student choice—the primary tenets of service-learning. This also reinforced the standard that emphasized point-of-view and multiple perspectives as each group controlled its own narrative regarding the service-learning experience.

The photos, along with the student interviews and journals, supported the researcher's notes and perceptions concerning how the service-learning experience enabled students to take their traditional and digital literacy skills to a new level. Videos highlighted various segments of the service-learning activities, from brainstorming to post-service activities. The researcher analyzed both the photographs and the videos multiple times to identify any emerging and recurring themes.

## **Artifacts**

The researcher collected several artifacts that demonstrated student work as part of their affiliation with the particular social organization they promoted. Service-learning artifacts included a business proposal requesting funding for a need or problem within the organization, multimedia projects highlighting the English language arts standards they were applying, and student-created brochures. The researcher used this material as further documentation of emerging themes or codes.

## **Teacher Interviews**

Participating teachers one and two were interviewed on December 19, 2018 and December 21, 2018, respectively. The researcher held each interview at the end of the school day to avoid using any instructional time. The purpose of the interview was to gather each teacher's personal perspective of the service-learning paradigm and how it impacted their classroom environment. The secondary goal was to examine both teachers' perceptions and positions on whether standards and objectives were mastered in their English language arts classrooms.

Each teacher shared her own conclusions, challenges and insights about service-learning and secondary English. Interview questions were:

1. Did service-learning help you grow as a teacher? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Identify a strength your service experience revealed that you never knew your students had. A weakness.
3. Name something new that you learned about your students as a result of service-learning.

4. How did service-learning most impact students in your standard/remedial/honors English class?
5. What would you deem some of the benefits of implementing service-learning? Some of the obstacles?
6. How do you think service-learning either benefitted or hindered classroom instruction?
7. What might have helped link your service experience and the course content better?
8. What differences, if any, in academic growth did you observe between the service-learning group and the non-service-learning group?
9. To what extent did the service-learning experience either meet or not meet your expectations?
10. How did your service-learning experience either illuminate or challenge your theories about teaching and learning?

The researcher recorded both interviews using a hand-held recording device that was later transcribed and reviewed with the participating teachers for accuracy. The participating teachers collaborated during the initial planning process to ensure that they implemented the lessons with fidelity. Any emails and telephone conversations, or in-person conversations exchanged between either the two participating teachers or between the two participating teachers and the researcher were documented and included in the coding process. Both teachers had complete autonomy either to alter the assignments or to modify the lessons as needed to differentiate instruction or for logistical purposes.

## **Researcher's Field Journal**

The researcher observed the service-learning classes beginning October 17, 2018 and continued weekly for each teacher until November 30, 2018. She also attended the celebration/demonstration phase of the project on December 17, 2018. The researcher recorded her observations in a notebook with photos and notes from the researcher's surveillance of the service-learning process in both classes. The researcher used the journal during student and teacher interviews, during the focus group, and during the celebration to establish codes and emerging themes throughout the process.

## **The Coding Process**

The researcher completed coding using the open and axial coding methods defined by Corbin and Strauss (2008) and followed the constant comparative method designed by Maykut and Morehouse (2002). During open coding, the researcher studied and re-examined the student and teacher interview transcripts, as well as the focus group transcripts. The researcher also studied student journals, artifacts, photographs, and videos and created a list of themes she identified during the process.

Next, the researcher used index cards to document open codes and place cards into groups as comprehensive themes started developing. Broad categories for student interviews were recorded on a separate chart. As the researcher correlated the index cards and the transcripts, themes began to unfold. Each group of axial codes were placed on large chart paper where index cards were appropriately grouped.

This classification system allowed the researcher to grasp abstract concepts and immerse herself in the data. Later, the researcher read the transcripts again to color-code text segments

corresponding with the applicable axial code. This process, consistent throughout the examination of the qualitative data generated 416 code segments and seven extensive categories. Table 23 outlines the rules of inclusion (Maykut & Morehouse, 1997) used to sort open codes into their axial code categories. These Rules of Inclusion, used throughout the collection and analysis of the qualitative data, provided information for this study's conclusions and recommendations.

Table 23

Rules of Inclusion

Category	Attributes
Service-learning on the secondary level	Relates to student-centered learning that applies content standards beyond the classroom.
Service-learning and literacy	Pertains to how literacy is used to affect social change in the community using both print and digital texts.
Service-learning: Process and Problems	Deals with the obstacles and challenges related to implementing service-learning on the high school English classroom.
Student perceptions and perspectives	Relates to how students viewed the learning process as they completed their projects.
Student learning	Relates to the content mastered, skills acquired, or attitude adjustments as a result of service-learning.
Student Leadership	Relates specifically to the skills developed by those who led their group's efforts to establish and maintain the activities linked to the service-learning project.
Recommendations	Deals with the group leaders' thoughts and opinions on how service-learning impacted

their content mastery and suggestions on how future projects should be implemented.

Table 24  
*Data Collection Details by Participant—Class A*

Pseudonym	Focus Group	Pre-Service Survey	Post-Service Survey	Individual Interview	Proposal Project
Aaron		X	X		X
Abraham		X	X		X
Adam		X	X		X
Andrew		X	X		X
Angel		X	X		X
Anna		X	X		X
Benjamin		X	X		X
Caleb		X	X		X
Candace		X	X		X
Chloe		X	X		X
Claudia		X	X		X
Daniel		X	X		X
Deborah		X	X		X
Delilah		X	X		X
Esther		X	X		X
Eve		X	X		X
Hannah		X	X		X
Jacob		X	X		X
Joanna		X	X		X
John	X	X	X	X	X
Judith		X	X		X
Luke	X	X	X	X	X
Mark	X	X	X	X	X
Ruth	X	X	X	X	X
Sarah	X	X	X	X	X

Table 25

*Data Collection Details by Participant—Class C*

Pseudonym	Focus Group	Pre-Service Survey	Post-Service Survey	Individual Interview	Proposal Project
Abigail	X	X	X	X	X
Elizabeth	X	X	X	X	X
Gabriel		X	X		X
Jesse		X	X		X
Joel		X	X		X
Judah		X	X		X
Julia		X	X		X
Levi		X	X		X
Lucas		X	X		X
Mary	X	X	X	X	X
Matthew	X	X	X	X	X
Paul	X	X	X	X	X
Philip		X	X		X
Priscilla		X	X		X
Rachel		X	X		X
Rebecca		X	X		X
Reuben		X	X		X
Shiloh		X	X		X
Simon		X	X		X
Solomon		X	X		X
Stephen		X	X		X
Tabitha		X	X		X
Tamar		X	X		X
Timothy		X	X		X

**Service-learning sites.** Table 26 outlines the various service sites that were chosen by the treatment groups from both high schools. The service-learning component directly addressed not only the English language arts standards imbedded in the curriculum but also the social issues students found relevant in the novels they read during their literature circle activities. These sites also provided content for their student journals and their student interviews.

Table 26

Service-learning sites and locations

Pseudonym	Elective Focus	Service Site	Location
Sarah	Fine Arts	American Cancer Society	Atlanta, GA
Luke	CTE	Immigrant Hope Atlanta	Decatur, GA
John	Career Readiness	Action Ministries	Atlanta, GA
Ruth	College Readiness	AJC Watchdog	Atlanta, GA
Mark	CTE	Partnership against Domestic Violence	Atlanta, GA
Matthew	Science/Math	Gun Control	Decatur, GA
Mary	College Readiness	Children without A Voice	Atlanta, GA
Elizabeth	College Readiness	SADD	Atlanta, GA
Abigail	Career Readiness	Spread the Vote	Decatur, GA
Paul	CTE	“Me Too” Movement	Decatur, GA

**Annotated narratives.** The following narratives provide a brief description of student leaders from each of the service-learning groups, including their elective focus, their prior service experience, and any other pertinent information.

*Sarah.* Sarah is a first-time eleventh-grade student who receives chemotherapy for her thyroid cancer at least twice a month. Her literature circle group decided to support the American Cancer Society after reading John Green’s novel, *The Fault in Our Stars*. Sarah’s group elected her group leader because of her personal knowledge about the struggles of dealing with the disease as well as her strong foundation as a writer.

Sarah loved the idea of adding service-learning as part of the assignment because of its flexibility and because she felt like an expert on her group’s subject. She missed a lot of class due to her treatments but always felt connected to her group members as they collaborated on aspects of the project using technology. Admittedly, Sarah’s illness took so much of her time and energy that school had no longer served as a priority for her.

However, service learning allowed her to find her voice and help her group craft a message that gave others insight into the struggles of a patient who “simply wanted to feel like a normal student.” For the first time in any of her classes, she felt as if she had “something important to bring to the table” and she knew she could relate more deeply with her community by using her literacy skills to develop viewpoint, purpose, and audience by creating a narrative from the patient’s viewpoint. Through service learning, Sarah felt she could best serve her community by functioning as her own advocate.

As someone enlightened by the power of the written word, she believed that she had “finally found the language to articulate her fears and frustration” and believed she could help others like her do the same. Usually a grade-conscious student, her emphasis was not on what score her group would receive, but on how well her target audience received the message. She wants to use her newfound voice, message, and language arts skills to start a blog for students that match her experiences.

**Luke.** Luke is an ESL student taking American Literature for the second time. Despite his past and current struggles with ELA classes, he enjoys traditional forms of writing using technology. He generally does not enjoy group work but found solace in his service-learning group of two Haitians, two Latinos, and one Asian student. They identified with the characters in the collection of short stories, *First Crossing*, which focuses on one group of transplanted teenagers trying to join and navigate the American landscape.

Appropriately, Luke and his group decided to champion legal immigration for their service project. Luke believed that service learning gave him the opportunity for the first time to control the narrative in his own story. His group believed that the language used to tell immigrants' stories "skewed" the narrative everywhere except in their chosen text. Thus, his group decided to highlight both the benefits and the challenges of implementing cultural diversity in a monolithic culture.

As Luke and his group bonded over common experiences by working together to challenge what they call "the rhetoric of exclusion rather than inclusion," he began to view writing as a social construct with the ability to create change. He believed it would be difficult to return to traditional lectures and coursework since he now felt that he controlled the narrative and did not want to give away the "power of the pen." He soon realized that it was not a lack of knowledge of the standards that held him back, but the confinements of traditional strategies that stilted his creativity and motivation.

**John.** John is a second-year American Literature student who tends to shy away from assignments that involve extensive reading and writing. He also had not participated in any community service since, as he put it, "he never felt like he had anything to offer." He saw himself as a "beneficiary of community service, not as the donor." While he has not been

convinced of the value of all his classes, he became engaged enough to lead his service-learning group, in part, based on his identification with S.E. Hinton's, *The Outsiders*."

John developed what he considered "a deeper understanding of theme" which he identified as a "gap between the rich and the poor" along with the idea of shared experience. John's perception of the school district's emphasis on rich and poor schools, "leaving students in certain schools feeling as though they were less than," brought him to the conclusion that he identified with Pony Boy Curtis.

Just as the Greasers had identity markers, students enrolled in AP and Honors classes in poor neighborhoods had only their reputations as good students, a currency that John did not feel he possessed. When John and his group supported Action Ministries, a nonprofit organization for homeless people, John finally believed that he had a cause bigger than himself. He never believed that he had either a story to tell or a reason to care until he "saw himself in the literature and could connect it to a real-world problem." Although John is still not sure if he has found the right words, he at least acknowledges that words do matter and that stories must be told.

**Ruth.** As a 3.8 student on her way to Spelman College as a future member of the Class of 2024, Ruth felt she had very little in common with her classmates. She agreed to lead the group to guarantee a quality project that would not jeopardize her future plans to acquire a full scholarship to the college of her choice. Moreover, she felt there was little that could be done to improve her ELA performance beyond what she already knew—at least, until her group decided to research a social cause based on the novel, *The Hate U Give*.

Like the main character in the novel, Ruth felt drawn into activism as the narrative awakened the pain she felt when a classmate died at the hands of a police officer earlier in the school year. "I tried to distance myself from the idea that police brutality is real, especially since I have an

uncle who is a police officer. Still, I could not deny how putting a face on the issue changed my opinion.”

Ruth used what she learned in class about logical fallacies and rhetorical analysis to craft a multimedia presentation with her group to support the families of victims of police brutality who are often “poor urban blacks.” Ruth admitted that she was still conflicted about certain aspects of the organization that she championed because the problem was deeper and more complex than she thought.

She does, however, pay more attention to newspaper and television reports to evaluate the message and determine how biased or balanced the message is. As a result of her research and involvement, she is considering a career as a defense attorney to help give the families of police brutality victims the justice they deserve. She’ll also be the first to admit that the most important thing she learned is that words have the power to either build or tear down.

**Mark.** “My sister IS Caitlin,” was how Mark began his service-learning interview, referencing the domestic violence victim from his group’s novel, *Breathing Underwater*. While Mark is no stranger to the cycle of abuse, having experienced it through his mother and his sister, his interaction with the novel and later with the Partnership against Domestic Violence, shattered any preconceived notions Mark had about both the victim and the violator.

“The subject matter piqued my interest, but the service-learning project opened my eyes and gave me the language to express how I felt. Talking to people at the shelter, I learned a lot about domestic violence and its victims that I never knew before. For instance, poor, young women of color are not the only victims. Domestic violence victims can be any age, race, gender, or socioeconomic status.”

Mark’s group decided to research the misconceptions surrounding domestic violence and

write a proposal for creating a public service announcement and create an Instagram account or a blog to promote awareness. The two most important ELA concepts he felt that he and his group mastered were identifying audience and purpose to craft a message. They synthesized information from multiple sources to construct messages using digital media. Leveraging social media helped the group reach its target audience. Mark believed that digital media satisfied his audience's "short attention span" and added a sense of urgency to the message on several popular platforms.

**Matthew.** Matthew is a sixteen-year-old student whose neighborhood is plagued with gun violence. "Hearing the sound of a gun going off is as common as a doorbell or an alarm clock in my neighborhood. I never do community service because of the frequency of gun violence where I live." He is also no stranger to suicide or suicide attempts, including a teacher's ill-fated attempt during school hours.

Matthew's group based their service-learning project on the book, *Trigger*, by Susan Voight. The story resonated with the group which felt like gun violence is only a problem when people of means are involved. Still, Matthew convinced his group that the Parkland school survivors should not have to carry the banner for gun control alone. English was never Matthew's favorite subject and he never "cared for reading and writing." "Finally," he stated, "I saw a good reason for doing so."

Matthew sold his group on the idea of advocating for gun control when he couldn't decide which action in the novel was worse—"committing suicide successfully or attempting suicide and having to live with the consequences." The group contacted and interviewed members of the local police department to get statistical information on gun crimes in the area. They cross-referenced those numbers with other research they performed.

According to Matthew, the elements of the standards he learned the most about were outlining an argument, word choices, and tone. He saw in “real-time” how words can either “make or break your argument.” The group also spent a great deal of time on what they deemed “evaluating the misleading statements and faulty reasoning” of those who opposed gun control. The group decided to spend less time convincing others not to own guns and more of their time encouraging responsible gun ownership.

“They’re gonna have guns. Let’s make sure that what happened to Jersey doesn’t happen to another student.” “Whatever made Jersey pull the trigger, might not have happened if he didn’t have access to a gun.” Matthew and his group have vowed to continue to spread the message long after the service project. “Jersey’s incoherent speech could not express the dangers of not implementing gun control, but we can.”

**Mary.** Mary is a sixteen-year-old Puerto Rican student who used to laugh at the idea of bully prevention. “Bullying is taken too seriously at the wrong time and not seriously enough at the wrong time.” Her education in how words can do much to help or harm began when, as she stated, “she saw how teachers and principals knew how to “word” a write-up to get students suspended or expelled. Later, she understood that communicating and serving changed things.

Mary’s group championed the organization, “Children without A Voice,” a nonprofit created to help stop bullying in metro Atlanta schools. They chose to support this group as a reader’s response to the novel, *Thirteen Reasons Why* by Jay Asher. “Most people who commit suicide simply want to be heard. No one was listening to Hannah, including her guidance counselor who could have saved her life by simply listening to what she had to say.”

Although Mary volunteers with her church, she admitted to never making the connection between school and community. “I was simply doing something nice that would look good on

my college applications. But completing this project actually made me a better student.” Mary stated that her group’s book choice and ultimate service-learning project helped her understand the power of storytelling as well as the complexities of the narrative. Having Hannah and Clay serve as dual narrators strengthened the idea of the reliable narrator.

“Two other things that I came to understand better about my English class were cause-and-effect and supporting evidence. Through the audiotapes, Hannah forced everyone to hear her story. But because she had a motive and Clay was filled with guilt, I could not come to terms with whether either of them was a truly reliable narrator.” “I want to have a career where I can give a voice to the voiceless. Not everyone has someone to fight battles for them that they cannot fight for themselves.”

***Elizabeth.*** Elizabeth is a sixteen-year-old student-athlete who understands the importance of making good decisions. She changed school districts after a drunk driver plowed through the parking lot of her middle school in a neighboring county, killing two of her classmates and injuring three others. It came as no surprise that she and her group based their service-learning project on the Sharon Draper novel, *Tears of a Tiger*. Their chosen organization, SADD, which originally stood for “Students against Drunk Driving,” changed its name and expanded its brand with the revised name “Students against Destructive Decisions.”

As a student-athlete, Elizabeth is no stranger to community service although she admitted feeling no personal attachment to either it or to school. Connecting community service to the literature and experiences changed everything for her as she connected supporting SADD with expressing herself through writing. Her view of writing as a network for healing and helping the community was reinforced by “the people in the novel who wrote letters to Andy to express their grief.”

Elizabeth's group centered their service-learning on the Teen Suicide and Depression and Anxiety programs where those who were treated used writing to voice their frustrations and anxiety. "Working with service learning taught me the importance of genre. My other English teachers always used hard-to-understand novels and topics to teach lessons. I could identify with the types of stories for teenagers, especially when we actually had the chance to deal with these issues in real life."

"Knowing that a real person was reading my work made me want to do my best." I couldn't mess up because this issue was too important." "The peer-editing sessions we had for our project helped me take critiques of my own writing more seriously. I would get mad if the teacher marked up my paper, but I accepted it better from my group members because I wanted to get it right." Overall, Elizabeth was proud of the work she and her group accomplished, but she wished they had had more time.

**Abigail.** "Life is not a game, and neither is politics," according to Abigail, a sixteen-year-old student whose family recently moved to Georgia from New York where "everything is so different—our people, our politics, and our priorities." "New York is not a place where plenty of community service opportunities exist, but they don't teach it in school and students don't get involved." When Abigail accepted the responsibility to lead her group, she did so because she liked the book, they chose for the literature circle, Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games*.

Abigail and her group had never made the connection between the plight of sixteen-year-old Katniss Everdeen and modern politics. In fact, when one of the group members suggested they base their service-learning project on voter education, she resisted, thinking they should choose something more lofty or noble like poverty, illness, or drug abuse. Realizing that the ballot box was one way to influence all of those things, she and her group decided that partnering with the

Georgia chapter of “Spread the Vote,” would highlight the main theme of the story—the wealthy using their political and economic power to oppress the poor.

“This book was set in the future, so unless we start to educate people about the importance of voting, we will face that same future.” The recent controversial gubernatorial race and issues with voting machines prompted Abigail’s group to write a proposal to the state legislature to repair or replace voting machines. “The characters from District 12 had no control and were forced to suffer for their oppressor’s entertainment. The vote is the only weapon left for people without money or status to fight with.” The two ELA standards Abigail says service-learning helped her master most were the use of persuasive language and the use of tone in her writing to empower others. “Service learning taught me that art truly represents life.”

**Paul.** “The ‘Me Too’ Movement is not just for women.” That was how sixteen-year-old Paul summed up his explanation for why he and his group chose to support a local rape crisis center after reading *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson. “When most people speak of rape, they think it is simply a woman’s issue. Men are just as affected by sexual assault, especially those with mothers, sisters, and aunts.” Paul admittedly had reservations when Anderson’s novel was offered as one of the literature circle choices. However, he can relate to the idea that the main character was scared into silence because she was a freshman defending herself against the “star senior.” According to Paul, he witnesses the special treatment that athletes get not just by the students but also by the administration and the coaches.

Still, Paul also believes that “the biggest crime the main character committed was being a girl speaking against a popular guy in school.” Paul cited that the ELA standard that he internalized the most due to the service-learning project was characterization. “I closely followed Melinda’s character to track her growth as a person. Her refusal to speak reminded me of Maya Angelou in

*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*. Oddly enough, both were young girls raped by someone they knew. When they both came forward and talked about it, both Melinda and Maya became isolated because they believed that their voices were drowned out by something bigger.”

Paul and his group used their language arts skills to create awareness of sexual assault from the male perspective, a viewpoint that as they stated, “is rarely ever considered and is often taken for granted.” “Watching both Melinda and Maya grow into their voices was sort of like watching them grow into their characters. We often study the power of the written word in schools, but there is also tremendous power in the spoken word.”

## **Summary**

Following the analysis of the qualitative data from multiple sources, four dominant themes emerged concerning the impact of service-learning on the secondary ELA classroom. The first theme, *Service-learning and Real-World Applications*, examined how students in the treatment groups used the service activity to apply curriculum standards to an actual community problem, reinforcing the idea of problem-based learning as an internal motivator. The second theme, *Service-learning and the 21<sup>st</sup>-century Classroom*, provided examples of how teachers implemented the Common Core State Standards by combining technology-based strategies with traditional literacy strategies to promote critical and analytical thinking skills.

The third theme, *Service-learning and College- and Career- Readiness*, described students’ exposure to specific community issues and their awareness of how they can become empowered, professional change agents using the skills they have learned in the classroom. The final theme, *Service-learning and Social Justice*, examines students’ perceptions of their societal roles and how they see themselves as relevant, productive problem-solvers. Through these four themes, the

impact of service-learning on the English classroom and on academic achievement in general, can influence students' perceptions of how classroom content relates to society and how that knowledge can be used to increase their motivation, self-efficacy, and preparation for post-secondary education.

### **Investigative Themes Examined**

Three underlying themes developed from the data collection regarding students' perceptions of how service-learning impacted their performance both in the ELA classroom and on the Georgia Milestones standardized exam. The initial theme, Increased Cognitive Awareness, examined students' reflections on their service-learning experience and the learning outcomes they hoped to achieve as a result of their experiences.

The second theme, Increased Social Awareness, examined how students who had different levels of community service and volunteering experience throughout their schools and communities, experienced service-learning as an instructional strategy for the first time. Service-learning not only sparked a desire for social justice but also served as a vehicle for student and community transformation that encouraged students to use writing to navigate established power structures in order to get things done.

The third and final theme, Increased Personal Development and Identity, contemplated how using service-learning as an extension of an adolescent literature unit allowed students both to shift their perceptions of themselves as contributors to society and to reflect on how service-learning fundamentally contributed to their non-cognitive or affective outcomes. This newfound self-awareness practically obligated the students to evaluate their societal and future professional roles as they went beyond interacting with the text or the classroom content.

Instead, they connected with real-life content that challenged their beliefs in ways that merely reading and collaborating on the book rarely could. Affective outcomes, or non-cognitive skills, relate to a student's motivation, integrity, and personal interaction. While this aspect of student development may involve intellect, it more closely relates to students' personalities, temperament, and attitudes—all skills needed to function effectively in the average work environment. These “soft skills,” however, are neither taught in class nor tested by the states and school districts.

While the pre-test supplied a definite baseline of students' knowledge of the eleventh-grade standards, most held preconceived ideas regarding how a real-world learning culture would impact their test preparation and academic outcomes whether positively or negatively. The following review is a portrayal of students' motivations for participating in service-learning, a depiction of what they expected to gain from their experiences, and a description of what they perceived as their learning outcomes.

### **Analysis of Quantitative Data**

Prior to analyzing the quantitative data, the researcher used descriptive statistics to evaluate the mean, maximum, minimum, median, skewness, and variance. All the dependent variables used within the tested hypotheses had acceptable skewness which allowed parametric statistical testing to occur. Observing statistical conventions, an alpha level of .05 established the significance of the data on both the pre-test and the post-test. The results were used to compare not only the treatment groups to the control groups in each high school, but also to compare both treatment groups to each other. Those differences in the pre- and post-test scores for each group were evaluated.

## Results of Hypotheses Testing

### Null Hypothesis 1

$H_{01N}$  - Students do not display a statistically significant increase in academic achievement on the Georgia Milestones American Literature exam when service-learning was used to implement the Common Core ELA standards.

In order to evaluate the overall effect of service-learning on students' academic performance when integrated with Common Core, the researcher utilized paired sample t-tests to investigate the hypothesis, using the overall pre- and post-test scores on the American Literature end-of-course assessment. The researcher also examined students' individual performance scores in specific ELA content areas that were identified as determining whether students were college and career ready.

Table 27 examines the test scores for all students participating in the study, including both treatment groups (Class A and Class C), and both control groups (Class B and Class D). None of the results were skewed, either to the extreme left or to the extreme right, resulting in a nearly perfect bell curve. Since there were few extreme low or high scores, the data is symmetrical.

Table 27

*Paired Sample t-test for Academic Achievement: Pre- and Post-Test*

Test Score Increase	n	M	df	t	P	d
All						
Pre-Test	104	34.27	103	1.66	.049978**	2.244
Post-Test	104	45.67				

Class A (Treatment)						
Pre-Test	25	32.16	24	-20.95	.00001**	2.380
Post-Test	25	43.76				
Class B (Control)						
Pre-Test	28	34.14	27	1.703	.050027	1.934
Post-Test	28	44.68				
Class C (Treatment)						
Pre-Test	24	36	23	-26.327	.00001**	2.407
Post-Test	24	47.63				
Class D (Control)						
Pre-Test	27	34.85	26	1.706	.049964**	2.651
Post-Test	27	46.74				

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\*\*Significant at the  $p < .05$  level

Table 27 indicates a statistically significant increase on the mock Georgia Milestones American Literature end-of-course exam between the pre-and post-test scores for all students with a mean pre-test score of 32.16 and a post-test mean score of 46.74. Each group obtained more than a ten-point increase between the pre- and post-test scores, although Class B, the control group paired with Class A, was the only group that did not increase at a statistically significant level.

Furthermore, each of the groups received a high Cohen's  $d$  score. The service-learning group from the first high school had a larger effect size than the control group from the first high school. In high school number two the service-learning group, Class C, had a smaller effect size

than Class D, the control group. Since a statistically significant increase ( $t= 1.706, p<.05$ ), occurred in students' academic achievement based on the pre- and post-test scores from the mock Georgia Milestones American Literature end-of-course exam, Null hypothesis 1 is rejected.

Because the Georgia Milestones American Literature exam is divided into subtopics, the researcher examined the differences in student scores by specific literary concepts. The seven major areas included in the end-of-course exam include: literary texts, informational texts, types of writing, conventions of English, vocabulary, literary elements, and interpreting craft and structure.

An examination of the scores for the treatment groups revealed that a statistically- significant increase was found in the following categories: types of writing, literary elements, and interpreting craft and structure. These were the standards that both the participating teachers and the Georgia Department of Education identified as most used in the real-world applications found in their service-learning projects. It is important to note that these were the areas where the control groups showed the least amount of growth.

## **Null Hypothesis 2**

H<sub>02</sub>—Students who participate in service-learning will demonstrate a higher level of academic achievement on the Georgia Milestones American Literature end-of-course exam than students who do not participate in service-learning.

The data in Table 28 showed no statistically significant ( $t = .668, p < .05$ ) difference between the gains made in the treatment group from the first high school (Class A) when compared to the non-service-learning group from the same school (Class B). Similarly, Table 26 shows that there

was not a statistically significant ( $t = -.657, p < .05$ ) difference between the gains made in the treatment group from the second-high school (Class C) when compared to the control group from the same school. Even though the academic growth from pre-test to post-test was statistically significant when the treatment groups were compared within themselves and against each other, no significant differences occurred when each treatment group was compared to its corresponding control group.

The ANOVA test in Table 29 supports the paired sample t-test results, underscoring the finding that at least two of the groups are statistically significantly different from each other ( $t = .022, p < .05$ ). The researcher then ran a post hoc to determine which specific groups differed from each other, using a multiple comparisons test where the post-test scores served as the dependent variable. In Table 30, the data reveals that Class A and Class C, with a significance level of .034 are statistically significantly different from each other. Therefore, the researcher failed to reject Hypothesis 2.

Table 28  
*Paired sample t-test for Academic Achievement: Post-test*

Test Score Difference	n	M	df	t	p
Class A (Treatment)	25	43.76	51	1.677	.099662
Class B (Control)	28	44.68			
Class C (Treatment)	24	47.63	49	1.675	.100306
Class D (Control)	27	46.74			

\*Significant at the  $p < .05$  level

Table 29

**ANOVA**

Posttest Scores Across School

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	241.407	3	80.469	3.354	.022
Within Groups	2399.477	100	23.995		
Total	2640.885	103			

**Multiple Comparisons**

Dependent Variable: Posttest Scores Across School

		(I) Class A - D	(J) Class A - D	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
							Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Tukey HSD	A	B		-.919	1.348	.904	-4.44	2.60
		C		-3.865*	1.400	.034	-7.52	-.21
		D		-2.981	1.360	.132	-6.53	.57
	B	A		.919	1.348	.904	-2.60	4.44
		C		-2.946	1.363	.141	-6.51	.61
		D		-2.062	1.321	.406	-5.51	1.39
	C	A		3.865*	1.400	.034	.21	7.52
		B		2.946	1.363	.141	-.61	6.51
		D		.884	1.374	.918	-2.71	4.47
	D	A		2.981	1.360	.132	-.57	6.53
		B		2.062	1.321	.406	-1.39	5.51
		C		-.884	1.374	.918	-4.47	2.71

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 30

## Summary of Quantitative Findings

Parametric testing with the quantitative data received from 104 students' pre- and post-tests revealed that students can acquire a statistically significant amount of ELA content when service-learning activities are used to implement real-world reading and writing into the curriculum. Therefore, null hypothesis 1 is rejected. The researcher failed to reject null hypothesis 2 because there was no statistically significant difference in the test scores between either of the treatment groups (Class A and Class C) when compared with the control groups (Class B and Class D).

There was, however, a statistically significant difference in the test scores between both treatment groups. The researcher applied all tests at the .05 alpha level, which yielded the strictest results. Had the alpha level been raised to a .10, the area would have become significantly larger and there would have been a greater chance to incorrectly reject the null hypothesis.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The fundamental objective of this mixed methods study was to evaluate the level of increase in ELA content mastery that occurred with four American literature classes at two public high schools in North central Georgia when two of the classes incorporated service-learning into their classroom reading and writing activities. Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, the researcher found that combining service-learning with the general eleventh-grade language arts curriculum resulted in a positive effect on students' mastery of the Common Core ELA standards, particularly those related to the CCRPI.

#### **Findings**

The researcher collected the qualitative and quantitative data for this study concurrently. Prior to implementing the lesson, the participating teachers administered a mock American Literature end-of-course pre-test to both the control and treatment groups. Neither teacher had experience using service-learning as an instructional strategy. The pre-and post-tests used in the study were the state-normed simulated Georgia Milestones American Literature exams from the Georgia Department of Education.

Qualitative data from six sources were collected from students in each treatment group and from both teachers for triangulation purposes. These included student and teacher interviews, focus groups, physical artifacts, student journals, photographs, and videos. At the conclusion of

the literacy unit, students took the American Literature end-of-course post-test, labeled Discovery Test B.

### **Question 1**

What is the difference in academic growth on pre-and post-assessment scores on the Georgia Milestones English 11 exam in an English class taught with a service-learning component?

An investigation of the quantitative findings in this study found that there was statistically significant growth in both treatment groups, Class A ( $t = -20.947$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and Class C ( $t = -26.327$ ), at the end of the literacy unit. Both classes showed substantial gains in both the CCRPI standards and the GSE for American Literature when measured pre-test to post-test. After completing the unit, the two groups' mean scores were just under four percentage points of each other with Class C ( $M = 47.63$ ) scoring slightly higher than Class A ( $M = 43.76$ ). Both groups scored high on Cohen's  $d$  with Class C having a higher effect size at 2.407 than Class A at 2.380.

The one-way ANOVA, which the researcher used to determine which of the four groups were the most statistically significantly different from each other, verified that Class A and Class C displayed the most statistical significance at .034. However, there was no statistically significant difference in the mean scores between Class B and Class D, the control groups, at the end of the literacy unit. While both classes showed improvement, in the CCRPI standards and the GSE for American Literature, there was not a more statistically substantial gain from pre-test to post-test.

In addition to compiling and calculating students' American Literature end-of-course assessment scores, the researcher used qualitative data such as journals, videos, interviews, and focus groups to illustrate emerging themes as previously supported by Eyler and Jiles's (1999) study. These data demonstrate that in addition to academic growth in specific curriculum

domains, students in service-learning classes gained the technological, critical thinking, and leadership skills necessary to compete in a 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy.

Combining collaborative learning and real-world social issues with literacy and community exposure gave students the opportunity to experience genuine learning aimed at an authentic audience and for a real purpose where they took ownership of their learning. Because the service-learning component centered on student choice and student voice, students felt as if they had control of the curriculum, which increased their eagerness and motivation for learning and helped them retain information better. With community service writing, students felt both obligated and empowered to communicate effectively in their own voices.

Despite the treatment groups' lack of exposure to the formulaic teaching and notetaking methods inherent in traditional ELA classrooms, they achieved nearly the same as, or in the college- and career-readiness standards better than, the control classrooms within the same time period. Students in the treatment groups increased their ability to problem-solve, think critically, and navigate 21<sup>st</sup> century print and non-print texts.

By applying the ELA content standards to real-world concepts, the treatments groups shifted the narrative and the literary focus by learning how to form questions, not with the intent of selecting a correct answer, but to make better choices with future writing decisions. The questions shifted from, "how long does the writing have to be," to "what is the appropriate length for crafting my message?" They took pride in and embraced their role as authorities on their topics even as they dealt with materials that were slightly outside of their zone of proximal development.

## **Question 2**

What is the difference in assessment scores on the Georgia Milestones American Literature exam

between students taught using traditional instructional strategies and students taught in a class with a service-learning component?

Based on conclusions drawn from the quantitative data there was no statistically significant increase in mastering the ELA content for American Literature between either Class A and Class B or Class C and Class D. When examined by the individual standards, both treatment groups, Class A and Class C, achieved either a similar or greater level of content mastery as the control groups Class B and Class D in three notable areas.

First, the treatment groups scored higher in the “types of writing” category, which emphasized gathering relevant information from multiple print and digital sources to access the credibility and accuracy of each source and integrate the information. Treatment groups also scored higher in the “literary elements” category, which involved drawing evidence from literary and informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research. Finally, the treatment groups scored higher in the “interpreting craft and structure” category, which involved adapting speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

The treatment groups also showed an above average level of content mastery in the “vocabulary” category, where they had to apply their knowledge of the fundamentals of grammar to understand how language functions in different contexts. This helped them communicate fluently to their audiences and make effective choices for meaning or style. By supporting various organizations, they learned the importance of word relationships and nuances in word meanings as they worked with a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases that they could practice in context. These specific domains relate more to the curriculum’s college and career-ready standards.

Despite the statistically significant score increases within the treatment groups, Class C had a larger increase and a greater effect size than Class A. Several possible explanations lend themselves to the differences within the two sets of classrooms, including the second participating teacher's delivery, the extent of student voice, teacher experience, and an unwillingness to relinquish control. The first participating teacher gave more direct instruction, less student voice, and more assistance.

The participating teacher at the second-high school scaffolded the project to engage all students regardless of their ability levels. She used that scaffolding to narrow the scope of the project so they would not become overwhelmed and would address a small aspect of the issue. After completing the project, they gave a multimedia presentation about the work and the lessons they learned. After learning contextual information about their issue through the literature circles, students understood more clearly the important issues that books can teach them.

### **Question 3**

Does service-learning lead to increased content mastery of the Common Core ELA College- and Career-Readiness Standards?

The researcher examined students' test scores using paired t-tests predicated on various depths of knowledge identified by the Georgia Department of Education. The research found no statistically significant difference in the mastery of the content standards between the treatment and control groups from both high schools. However, in three of the seven areas that make up the American Literature end-of-course test, the treatment groups not only had significant score increases, but also made more statistically significant gains than the control groups.

These three areas represent what the Georgia Department of Education has labeled as a major portion of their CCRPI index, a determinant for whether students are college or career ready.

The treatment groups focused on these areas more than the control groups since they had to apply these skills to a specific task and could not rely solely on classroom theories. The treatment groups analyzed in their own original compositions the structure of an argument and whether it made their line of reasoning clear, convincing, or engaging.

As students in the treatment groups used their literacy skills to support a social cause, they developed their topics thoroughly and selected the most relevant facts to determine the extent of their audience's knowledge of the topic. Word choice also became important as they evaluated the context of language, figurative and connotative meanings of words, extended definitions, and concrete details that would make a strong impact on their audience.

Nevertheless, after analyzing the qualitative data, the researcher discerned that both treatment groups gained essential college- and career-ready proficiency in areas that are not easily quantified. In fact, both treatment groups cultivated life skills in addition to the intellectual competencies that are crucial for 21<sup>st</sup> century learners. In addition to increasing ELA content mastery, students improved on how to analyze, interpret, and synthesize information and ideas.

They also refined their language skills through reading comprehensively to evaluate evidence, engaging in community writing, and navigating digital platforms strategically and capably. By the end of the service-learning project, several students who, according to their teachers, were not known for their student leadership or their willingness to collaborate had honed their leadership, teamwork, time-management, self-efficacy, and communication skills.

Connecting participants' ethnographic stories along with the quantitative data provided a deeper, more widespread picture of the results of service-learning and its impact on academics. Students from both high schools as well as the participating teachers, noted several trials and triumphs with service-learning throughout their interviews and journal responses. Increasing

self-efficacy and student empowerment became apparent through words and phrases such as “We cannot mess this up,” “We don’t want to look bad,” or “We have to get this right.”

One of the students in the first participating teacher’s class stated that she had never taken such a personal interest in an assignment before. Another student in the second participating teacher’s service-learning class said that the connection between school and real-life had never been so clear. Their new, and in some cases, renewed fervor for ELA and their excitement about working with actual members of the community to display what they knew created buy-in for some of their classes and disdain for other classes.

Service learning forced the students in the treatment groups to think critically and analytically as they worked hard to create a plan for their causes, execute the plan, and balance the skills and personalities of their groups. They also learned the true meaning of compromise and delegating responsibility as their personal beliefs, values, and social assumptions were challenged. Some experienced for the first time the delicate balance between ideas and implementation.

Perhaps the biggest challenges for the treatment groups were the need to be flexible and inclusive, particularly when it came to planning their projects within the space allotted. Within the school structure, even on a block schedule, group deadlines had to be adjusted for various school activities, student holidays, fire drills, and teacher in-service. In addition to these obstacles, the rigid schedules of the community organization and the late school hours left little room for schedule changes, especially at the last minute. This compelled them to be resourceful and innovative as they worked through similar issues they would experience in college and in their careers.

## **Conclusions**

The qualitative and quantitative data collected from this study formed the following

conclusions: (1) Service-learning can translate abstract classroom learning where students must draw on a range of skills and integrate them into a concrete and authentic writing experiences. (2) Students involved in service-learning combined a few interdisciplinary, innovative practices within the context of ELA activities. The more students are prepared for and know about these practices, the greater their competitive edge will be in the workplace (Connolly, 2012). (3) Although service-learning does encourage a spirit of cooperation and helpfulness, it also develops the competitive spirit that can drive personal and professional success throughout the world (Kaye, 2010).

### **Service-Learning and the Cultivation of Community Identity**

The overarching goal of the secondary ELA classroom is to cultivate a positive learning community where reading and writing form the basis of lifelong skills. These critical literacy skills, particularly on the secondary level, help students learn about the world, connect with others, and contribute important opinions and ideas to their communities (Pfortmuller, 2017). However, the traditional definition of community is outdated because it hinges on the idea of a shared location—a group of people living in the same place (Pfortmuller, 2017). That characterization frames a traditional, historical definition that often functions as an abstract concept for high school students.

As a result of their service-learning investigations, students generated extended definitions of the term “community.” Their use of the term throughout the project reinforced how most students no longer look to their neighborhoods or schools as defining their cultural and social identities. In fact, many students on the secondary and postsecondary levels have shifted their ideology from being born into a community to choosing their own communities with which to

express their identities (Garber, 2017). That feeling of shared interests, goals, and attitudes often found in the traditional definition still lacks one key component—relationship (Garber, 2017).

Despite the seemingly obvious notion that a community consists of human beings, the word community has been consistently applied in abstract and dehumanizing terms. Businesses and organizations, many of which are seen as a vital part of the community, often reference and target specific communities based on their commonalities. Advertisers use the term community to imply that its relationship with consumers is greater than a transactional one (Garber, 2017). Administrators frequently reference professional learning communities as a way of fostering collaboration to improve teaching and learning.

The primary goal of technology is to make constructing and bringing together local, national, and global communities easier (Pfortmuller, 2017). Collaborating, both in person and through technology during service-learning made students acutely better at defining and building communities on their own terms. The irony is that technology, often deemed a distraction to communicating and community-building gave students focus. Students did not use technology either to connect socially or to complete an assignment. Instead, they used it to connect spiritually and morally to complete a common goal.

Unfortunately, students in urban school districts no longer identify with their local neighborhoods, making neighborhood schools an obsolete concept. Service-learning participants took abstract concepts in literature and applied them to real stories found within their chosen communities. One student commented, “I always believed that women who were victims of domestic violence chose to stay. I never knew of the many complicated circumstances surrounding domestic violence and I never understood until now how hard it would be to convince others that this is a very real problem.” Analyzing these issues gave students a strong

psychological and emotional connection that educators want them to relate to their school and learning communities.

Another student thought that working with the American Cancer Society and the people it affected every day brought their group and the community they served closer together. “We were strangers brought together who really in the end cared about each other. Their fears and triumphs became our fears and triumphs. We became passionate about our ability to use language and writing, or any subject for that matter, to effect change.”

As the service-learning project unfolded, students formed boundaries within their groups as a means of tacitly stating who belonged to their community and who did not belong. Still, anyone who shared their passion for or connection to their cause could gain access or membership. This shared goal created a level of emotional safety where students made a personal investment with their time, energy, resources, and emotions (Garber, 2017). The needs of the community and the needs of the student aligned seamlessly.

To engage or motivate individuals within a group, connections must be strong. Service-learning gave students those connections both inside of and outside of the school. Teachers don't want students to feel like outsiders and often help students try to fit in. Service-learning gave outsiders, insider status, at least for that one assignment. Students who were normally marginalized, in both their schools and in their communities, finally found their place, which made learning more important to them.

The redefined or extended definition of community evolved specifically within the treatment group at the second-high school through their meaningful interactions and discussions during the service-learning experience. Although both teachers provided structured topics to guide group discussions, the teacher at the second-high school did not try to assert as much control over the

students' interactions. Even when students appeared to stray off topic, the teacher adroitly allowed students to use these conversations to discover the hidden talents and values of their group members.

Another often-overlooked aspect of the service-learning experience is the value-added to the very communities that students are expected to serve in and become a part of beyond high school and college. Project goals must match community goals, forming a mutual trust respect between students, schools, and organizations that reinforces a more inclusive definition of community that benefits both the students and the people they serve.

These newer, broader, more meaningful definitions of community were formed by the strength of the connections that the students felt through their service and also made clearer the distinction between community service and service learning. Community service emphasizes an external output while service learning emphasizes an internal output (Diaz, 2000). Together, these three stakeholders defined learning goals, designed the service-learning lesson, and monitored the progress using collaborative assessment methods. Students expressed a similar theory in their reflections when they discerned that real change in a community has to start from within, not without.

More importantly, all three stakeholders operated much like coequal branches of government to ensure that all parties benefitted as much as possible. This underscored the notion put forth by Stewart and Alrutz (2012) that "relationship" and "partnership" are not interchangeable terms. Rather, service-learning should result in collaborative, transformative relationships where all stakeholders both address and decide jointly on what the service-learning process and outcomes should be. This shared responsibility creates a clearer vision, voice, and value of what community means.

## **Service-Learning, ELA, and Real-World Applications**

Although most secondary and post-secondary ELA classrooms have received criticism for operating in unreal, rhetorical issues, service-learning offered students opportunities to address tangible issues targeting real audiences for real purposes (Guilfoile, 2013). Still, regardless of the evidence revealed using the qualitative data, administrators and educators who are under excruciating pressure to tie the curriculum to standardized tests, want to “see the numbers.”

The quantitative data provided evidence that students who participate in an ELA lesson with a service-learning component can achieve at the same as or at a statistically higher level than students who received traditional instruction using class lectures or ordinary group work such as literature circles alone. Moreover, students who participated in service-learning acquired critical skills that are crucial for operating within a 21<sup>st</sup> century global economy using 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy skills.

All of the qualitative data, including the focus group, student interviews, and student journal entries reinforced the ELA content mastery findings while displaying elevated performances in critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration, also known as the four C’s of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills (Partnership of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, p. 10). A well-designed service-learning project helps students develop these skills regardless of the discipline, making them more marketable and employable in a global economy (Guilfoile, 2013).

The fundamental purpose of education is to prepare students to become productive citizens in a democratic society that gives equal opportunity and equal access to a quality education to all students regardless of their race, gender, social class, or ethnicity. The ideal environment and circumstances for implementing these 21<sup>st</sup> century skills through a service-learning project would be over an entire semester. This would be especially helpful for teachers and students

who are new to service-learning and who might need adequate time to experience student choice and voice.

Still, teachers can implement a collaborative, project-based service-learning activity in a limited amount of time. Today's public education system places a premium on standardized test scores to the degree that developing project-based activities where students get to practice what teachers preach, is challenging at best. Although this mixed-methods study experienced several of those restrictions, no student missed any time away from a core class, including foreign language. Students completed every component of the service-learning project within the boundaries of their American Literature course or through voluntarily collaborating with their service-learning groups after school or on the weekends.

### **Implications for the High School English Classroom**

The findings of this study include several potential implications for the secondary English classroom. First, the participating teachers suggested that when constructing a quality project-based service-learning assignment, all components of the IPARC model—investigation, preparation, action, reflection, and celebration—must be included. The following discussion addresses recommendations for high school English teachers and administrators, in addition to strategies for implementing service-learning that can be applied to any discipline. These implications indirectly impact school and community partnerships, a vital connection to the college to career platform propelled by school districts.

The execution of service-learning as a pedagogical strategy to increase ELA content mastery as well as to develop college- and career-readiness among high school students can be strengthened using the following recommendations: (1) Embed service-learning and experiential

education in general into the ELA curriculum. (2) Make service-learning accessible to students on all learning levels including students in standard, honors, AP, and interrelated classes. (3) Incorporate disciplinary understanding as a learning objective universally, and (4) Increase the number of professional development opportunities in service-learning for teachers in all disciplines.

Embedding service-learning and/or experiential education into the secondary ELA curriculum can build a foundation for transforming 21<sup>st</sup> century literacy. Developing a learning culture where service-learning can make a positive impact begins with an institutional framework supported by high school administrators—the instructional leadership—in conjunction with support for ELA instructors—the content experts—in increasing students’ curriculum knowledge.

Furthermore, when service-learning is made accessible students on all learning levels could experience the same benefits. For example, they get to develop social responsibility and intercultural relationships. They can connect with the community to increase their learning and career opportunities. Students also get to experience whether a field or industry is right for them and they get to experience moral and spiritual growth. All these assets lead to college and career success.

Disciplinary understanding, the goal of every content area instructor, builds tremendously when inserted into the curriculum on a consistent basis. Teachers tend to struggle with ways to make the curriculum relevant and engaging. Using service-learning as a vehicle to administer curriculum standards in a real-world setting answers the age-old student question, “Why are we learning this?” Once they understand the connection between what they are doing and what they will be expected to do in college and careers, students will put more effort into mastering the

material.

Finally, school districts and school administrators need to allot funding for professional development in service-learning as well as reward teachers for innovative strategies through the teacher evaluation system. Many teachers are reluctant to implement service-learning because of a lack of training and because they are preoccupied with the evaluation system that determines their livelihoods as schools are concerned about the scores that determine their adequate yearly progress (AYP).

In fact, the participating teacher from the first high school was concerned about whether implementing service-learning would interfere with her TKES score, the evaluation system used in the state of Georgia. Teachers also hesitate about trying new teaching strategies, fearing that their students might perform poorly on their end-of-course scores, particularly if they have a method that they think already works well. Because some aspects of student content mastery during service-learning can be difficult to quantify, teachers will continue to be reluctant to implement it without full support from the administration and the district.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

Despite this study's limitations to two schools and four classrooms, future research should continue from this foundation to incorporate additional ELA classes, especially those with other end-of-course components. This broader base would prove beneficial for extending evidence of student achievement in other disciplines. Additional quantitative evidence to either corroborate or contradict the academic skills obtained can be concluded using state-constructed pre- and post- practice tests, such as the ones used in this study. With service-learning gaining momentum as an instructional strategy in a variety of disciplines, more definitive evidence can

be obtained to support its impact on academic achievement.

Although most service-learning studies are qualitative in nature, there are certain aspects of qualitative research that should be expanded in future service-learning inquiries. First, more priority should be given to students' point of view by finding ways to allow them to control their own narrative. In spite of the solidarity created by common purpose and collaboration, each student had his or her own individual reaction and reality to service learning. In addition, more mixed methods studies should be conducted across disciplines in secondary classrooms to further explore the impact of service learning on content mastery in other areas. More mixed methods studies would create balance, allowing stakeholders to observe the quantifiable and non-quantifiable evidence of student achievement simultaneously

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## APPENDIX

Appendix A  
Sample Class Solicitation Letter

15 August 2018

Ms. Jane Doe  
University of Mississippi  
313 Guyton Hall  
University, MS 38677

Dear Ms. Doe:

I am currently pursuing my doctoral degree in Teacher Education at the University of Mississippi. My focus is service-learning, specifically student perceptions of whether employing service-learning to implement the Common Core State Standards leads to increased content mastery in their high school English class. I am contacting you because of the district's emphasis on best practices to improve student engagement, student achievement, and student access to 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. The study will also evaluate whether employing service-learning as a pedagogical strategy leads to college-and career-readiness. My study will contribute to the existing literature on the academic outcomes of service-learning and I would like to include your students in that study.

My dissertation chair is Dr. Rosemary Oliphant-Ingham, Professor of Teacher Education. You can contact her at (662)-915-7589 or at [ringham@olemiss.edu](mailto:ringham@olemiss.edu). Using service-learning to foster true academic achievement carries much promise for mastering language and literacy skills. The literature reveals that service-learning helped undergraduate and middle school students acquire positive academic gains and prepare for their chosen fields. Few studies, however, exist for its effects on the high school level, particularly in the English classroom. The research may produce information that will give instructors another strategy for helping students master the content standards and acquire the literacy and language skills they will need for college and careers.

The qualitative and quantitative portions of this study will be equally weighted. Therefore, an emergent study, these research questions provide the initial framework for the study and guide the qualitative portion:

- Does combining service-learning and the Common Core State Standards for ELA lead to greater content mastery as measured by the Georgia Milestones English 11 exam?
- Does using service-learning as a strategy to implement the CCSS influence students' perceptions of college- and career-readiness?
- What is the difference in assessment scores on the Georgia Milestones English 11 exam between students taught in an English class using traditional instructional strategies and students taught in an English class with a service-learning component?

The null hypotheses for the quantitative portion of the study are as follows:

- Students who participate in service-learning will have less than or equal to the same scores on the Georgia Milestones American Literature post-test as students who did not participate in service-learning.
- Students who participate in service-learning will have a positive perception of college-and career-readiness that is less than or equal to the perception of students who did not participate in service-learning.

If allowed to solicit student participation from future classes, I will implement the following research procedure:

1. Focus Group: A focus group will be conducted with the treatment group prior to the service-learning component to prepare students for the service-learning experience by laying the ground rules, clarifying expectations, answering questions, and briefly outlining the process.
2. Pre-Test: Students will take a mock Georgia Milestones pre-test to determine their initial mastery level of the English content
3. Post-Test: Students will take a second mock Georgia Milestones American Literature post-test to evaluate student academic growth and content mastery.
4. Field Observations: Students will be observed at their service sites to examine the interactions between the groups and the participating organizations.
5. Interviews: Individual student interviews within forty-eight hours after the service-learning experience and with one week after scheduling.

All five components of the service-learning process will be implemented. I will provide you with a copy of the pre-and post-test as well as the journal prompts and interview protocol upon request. All participation is voluntary and any participant can terminate the process at any time without penalty or retribution. Students will review interview transcripts to correct or remove any material. Pseudonyms will be used in the results for students and teachers.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Kimual Snow  
662-915-7063  
Kjsnow1@go.olemiss.edu

I will allow Kimual Snow to conduct her research study entitled, “Service-Learning, Common Core, and the Secondary English Classroom: A Mixed-Methods Study.”

---

Principal’s Signature

---

Date

Appendix B  
Teacher Solicitation Letter

Dear Educator,

I respectfully request your participation in a research study entitled, “Service-Learning, Common Core, and the Secondary English Classroom: A Mixed-Methods Study.” This study will examine whether service-learning as a teaching strategy leads to increased content mastery of ELA standards as well as college-and career-readiness and will last 6-8 weeks. It partially fulfills my requirements in pursuit of my doctoral degree in Teacher Education at the University of Mississippi. The study also supports the district’s emphasis on best practices to improve student engagement, student achievement, and student access to 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills.

As a participant, you will choose two of your classes to serve as the treatment and control groups. Resources and materials to carry out the service-learning component will be provided for you. Once you solicit student participation from future classes, I will implement the following research procedure:

1. Focus Group: A focus group will be conducted with the treatment group prior to the service-learning component to prepare students for the service-learning experience by laying the ground rules, clarifying expectations, answering questions, and briefly outlining the process.
2. Pre-Test: Students will take a mock Georgia Milestones pre-test to determine their initial mastery level of the English content
3. Post-Test: Students will take a second mock Georgia Milestones American Literature post-test to evaluate student academic growth and content mastery.
4. Field Observations: Students will be observed at their service sites to examine the interactions between the groups and the participating organizations.
5. Interviews: Individual student interviews within forty-eight hours after the service-learning experience and with one week after scheduling.

I will provide you with a copy of the pre-and post-test as well as the journal prompts and interview protocol. Participation for students and teachers is voluntary. Students and teachers will review interview transcripts to correct or remove any material and pseudonyms will be used in the results for both.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of participating in this research study.

Sincerely,

Kimual Snow  
(662)-915-7063  
[Kjsnow1@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:Kjsnow1@go.olemiss.edu)

I agree to participate in the research study titled, “Service-Learning, Common Core, and the Secondary English Classroom: A Mixed-Methods Study” conducted by Kimual Snow. I will comply with all aspects of the research including classroom observations, focus groups, interviews, surveys, testing, and all components required to complete her dissertation study.

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Teacher Signature

---

Date

Appendix C  
Letter of Informed Consent

13 August 2018

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled, “Service-Learning, Common Core, and the Secondary English Classroom: A Mixed-Methods Study.” This study will examine whether service-learning as a teaching strategy leads to increased content mastery of ELA standards as well as college-and career-readiness and will last 6-8 weeks. It partially fulfills my requirements in pursuit of my doctoral degree in Teacher Education at the University of Mississippi. The study also supports the district’s emphasis on best practices to improve student engagement, student achievement, and student access to 21<sup>st</sup>-century skills.

With classes that will be completing service-learning activities in collaborative groups, the researcher will conduct a class focus group, administer pre-and post-surveys, observe the service-learning classes, and conduct post-service individual interviews with service group leaders. These activities, which include the completion of a multimedia project, will be subject to audiotaping, videotaping, and photographs. Students will also take a mock standardized pre-test to determine their baseline of knowledge prior to service-learning and a mock standardized post-test to measure the level of academic growth following service-learning.

The information gathered might help teachers and administrators implement service-learning to improve student performance on standardized tests and to help students make the connection between classroom content and real-world issues. The study will contribute to the body of knowledge about how service-learning impacts students’ academic achievement. There are no foreseeable risks associated with the study and neither the teachers nor the students will be compensated for their participation. The researcher will not need access to any of the students’ academic or testing records.

While the researcher will know the identity of participating students and teachers, no identifying information, including the names of the schools or sites, will be included in the final report. Since only the researcher will transcribe the focus group and interviews, no other person will be able to identify the participants. Raw data will be available for pre- and post-tests for quantitative analysis, but all identifying data information will be removed. Pseudonyms will be used in the report and will be destroyed after five years. The surveys and transcripts will have an identification number, with the key stored separately from the actual surveys and transcripts.

You are under no obligation to take part in this study. If you begin the study and later decide that you do not want to continue, please inform Kimual Snow by e-mail, or telephone, [kjsnow1@go.olemiss.edu](mailto:kjsnow1@go.olemiss.edu) or 662-915-7063. Your decision either to participate or not participate will not affect either your grade or class standing. You and your parents have the right to have access, upon request, any instruments or materials related to the study within a reasonable period of time after the request is received.

This study has been reviewed by the University of Mississippi's Institutional Review Board (IRB). If you choose to participate, please return this signed consent form to your participating teacher within a week of its receipt. Finally, if you have any questions, concerns or reports regarding your rights as a participant of research, please contact the IRB at 662-915-7482 or [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu).

Sincerely,

Kimual Snow

I have read the above information and have received a copy of this form. I consent to have my student participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I have read the above information and have received a copy of this form. I consent to participate in the study.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Student's name (Print)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator/Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix D

### **Service-Learning Reflective Journaling Activities**

#### **Pre-Service Journal Questions (Weeks 1-2)**

1. Briefly describe the service-learning project and your role in it.
2. Describe the organization where you will be working.
3. Discuss the problem or need you will address during your service. Why is this work important?
4. What do you hope to learn from this experience?
  - a. about yourself?
  - b. about the organization?
  - c. about the issue?
  - d. about your community?

#### **Service Midpoint Journal Questions (Weeks 3-4)**

1. How am I like no one else here?
2. How am I like some of the people here?
3. How am I like everyone here?
4. Explain the main concept behind the community need that you have been investigating (i.e. Why are people poor? Why is there violence?).
5. As a high school student, what can you do to help solve the problem?

#### **Post-Service Journal Questions (Weeks 5-6)**

1. Choose three words that best describe your Service-learning experience. Develop a brief essay around these words.
2. Think back to your attitude about Service Learning prior to your experience. Did your experience change or confirm your attitude? Describe your experiences as you answer this question.
3. How is your service organization important to the people it serves? What changes would you suggest to the director or the Board of Directors? What was your role in the agency's service?
4. Do you have more or less sympathy or understanding for the problem you addressed than you had before your service-learning experience?
5. Did you take any risks or did you play it safe during this experience? Were you challenged? Did you grow in any way? Did this experience impact the way that you see yourself or the world?

## Appendix E

### Focus Group Script and Prompts

Good morning/afternoon. My name is Kimual Snow and I am a doctoral student in Teacher Education. I am conducting a study on high school students participating in service-learning in the ELA classroom. The study is an examination of how service-learning impacts students' mastery of the content area, students' performance on standardized tests, and students' ability to transfer classroom curriculum to real-world issues. This focus group is the first of five parts to the study, which in addition to this focus group will include a survey before and after your service-learning activity, on-site observation, pre-and post-tests, and an individual follow-up interview.

It is important to set a few ground rules for our conversation. First, we must show respect by speaking one at a time so we can hear others' comments. Second, it is very important that you listen to your classmates. They may say something that you can use to build on your point. Next, this should be a safe space for any student to share any comments, concerns, or thoughts they may have. Thus, it is important that you not share these comments or thoughts outside of class. Finally, the conversation will be transcribed using pseudonyms to protect your identity. Therefore, you will not be identified with any comments you make during this focus group.

This focus group should last approximately 30-45 minutes. Thank you, in advance, for your time and cooperation.

1. Do you feel prepared for this service-learning experience? Why or why not?

Prompt 1: What do you think you will find different about mastering ELA concepts through service-learning rather than through traditional classroom lectures?

Prompt 2: Do you think service-learning will help make the classroom content relevant? How?

2. What personal strengths do you expect to bring to this experience?

Prompt 1: How much do you think this experience will contribute to your future career?

Prompt 2: Do you think this experience will help prepare you for college?

3. What do you think are the important qualities of a good volunteer?

Prompt 1: What do you expect to give through this experience?

Prompt 2: What do you expect to gain from this experience?

4. Regarding your service site, explain how they are a partner in your service and/or learning experience?

Prompt 1: What educational outcomes do you hope to accomplish?

Prompt 2: What personal and professional outcomes do you hope to achieve?

5. How are you preparing yourself for this experience?

Prompt 1: What do you already know about the service organization?

Prompt 2: What would you like to know about the service organization?

6. What personal challenges do you think you will encounter at your service site?
  - Prompt 1: Do you think you will have any educational challenges?
  - Prompt 2: Do you believe you will experience any cultural challenges?
  - Prompt 3: Do you think you will experience any emotional or physical challenges?

Appendix F

SERVICE-LEARNING COMMUNITY ASSET MAP TEMPLATE

Each participant in service-learning will need to conduct a community needs assessment. This template is provided to you as a guide for the service-learning project you agreed to conduct with your students.

Please complete a detailed write-up of your service-learning project using this template. Use the kind of language and detail so other teachers can take your project to conduct in their classrooms. An archive of service-learning projects and artifacts will be made available for secondary classroom educators.

**Project Title:**

**Created by:**

**Class:**

Project Description	
Community Issue or Problem Selected -How project evolved?	
Community Partner(s)	
Project Objectives	
Georgia Core Standards/Objectives	

Essential Question(s) -Spatial Issue	
Assessments (rubrics, scoring guides)	
Project Products	
Project Timeline (include a step by step Procedures)	
Resources Needed	
Skills Required	
Project Team Member Roles	<b>Teacher(s):</b>  <b>Students:</b>  <b>Partner(s):</b>
Celebration/Presentation	
Project Evaluation	
Project Bibliography	
Plans for Future CMAP Activities	

Optional:  
 -Lesson Plans    -Student Artifacts    -Publicity

## Appendix G Student Interview Protocol

Welcome, and thank you for your participation today. My name is Kimual Snow and I am a graduate student at the University of Mississippi conducting my special study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD—Teacher Education. Thank you for completing the surveys. This follow-up interview will take about 45 minutes and will include 15 questions regarding your service-learning experience.

I would like your permission to tape record this interview so I can accurately document your answers. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue either the use of the tape recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. All of your responses are confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how service-learning impacts your academic performance in English class. The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of how using service-learning to implement the Common Core State Standards impacts content mastery, college-readiness, and career-readiness.

At this time, I would like to remind you of your written consent to participate in this study. I am the responsible investigator, specifying your participation in the research project: *The Impact of Service-Learning on Secondary English Students' Mastery of the Common Core State Standards—A Mixed Methods Study*. You and I have both signed and dated each copy, certifying that we agree to continue this interview. You will receive one copy and I will keep the other under lock and key, separate from your reported responses.

Your participation in this interview is completely voluntary. If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. You may also withdraw your participation at any time without any consequences to your overall grade. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

### DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONS

What is your current grade level? (Check one)

- 1<sup>st</sup> year-11<sup>th</sup> grade
- 2<sup>nd</sup> year-11<sup>th</sup> grade
- 1<sup>st</sup> year-12<sup>th</sup> grade
- 2<sup>nd</sup> year 10<sup>th</sup> grade
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Ethnicity

- African American/Black (Non-Hispanic)
- Hispanic/Latino
- Caucasian
- Asian
- Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Diploma Program

- College prep
- Vocational
- Special Needs
- Dual Enrollment

Elective Focus (Check all that apply)

- CTE
- Science and Math
- Humanities
- Fine Arts
- AP/IB
- College Readiness
- Career Readiness
- ROTC
- Dual Enrollment
- PE

English course grade prior to service-learning

- A
- B
- C
- D
- F

English course grade after service-learning

- A
- B
- C
- D
- F

1. How was this class similar to or different from other English classes that you have taken?

2. What challenges did you face in your service-learning experience? Were they overcome or were they left unresolved?

3. How did your participation in service-learning benefit the organization or the people with whom you partnered?

4. As a result of service-learning, how do you view your own ability to make a difference in your community and in the world?

5. Do you believe service-learning helped you understand the content for your English class? How or why not?

6. Compared to traditional classroom assignments (such as research papers and tests), how useful was participating in service-learning in helping you understand course material?

7. What was the most important thing you learned during your service-learning experience?

8. How did this learning relate to the course objectives?

9. Talk about at least two aspects of language arts or literacy learning that you understand better as a result of your service-learning experience.

10. How will you use this learning in the future?

11. Did your service-learning experience increase your appreciation for cultural diversity or

decrease any stereotypes that you had? Explain.

12. What skills did you discover that you never knew you had as a result of your service-learning experience? Which skills or roles did you utilize?

13. Have you decided on a major or a career based on your service-learning experience?

14. Were you able to apply classroom material to your community-based activity? If so, how?

15. Did your service-learning experience empower you as a student? How or why not?

## Appendix H

### Teacher Interview Protocol

Welcome, and thank you for your participation today. My name is Kimual Snow and I am a graduate student at the University of Mississippi conducting my special study in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of PhD—Teacher Education. Thank you for completing the teacher surveys. This follow-up interview will take about 30-45 minutes and will include 10 questions regarding your perception of the service-learning experience with your students.

I would like your permission to tape record this interview so I can accurately document your answers. If at any time during the interview you wish to discontinue either the use of the tape recorder or the interview itself, please feel free to let me know. All your responses are confidential and will be used to develop a better understanding of how service-learning impacts students' academic performance in English class. The purpose of this study is to increase our understanding of how using service-learning to implement the Common Core State Standards impacts content mastery, college-readiness, and career-readiness.

If at any time you need to stop or take a break, please let me know. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the interview.

1. Did service-learning help you grow as a teacher? If so, how? If not, why not?
2. Identify a strength your service experience revealed that you never knew your students had?  
A weakness?
3. Name something new that you learned about your students as a result of service-learning?
4. How did service-learning most impact students in your standard/remedial/honors English class?
5. What would you deem some of the benefits of implementing service-learning? The obstacles?
6. How do you think service-learning either benefitted or hindered classroom instruction?
7. What might have helped link your service experience and the course content better?
8. What differences, if any, in academic growth did you observe between the service-learning group and the non-service-learning group?
9. To what extent did the service-learning experience either meet or not meet your expectations.
10. How did your service-learning experience either illuminate or challenge your theories about teaching and learning?

## Appendix I

### Service-Learning Research Teacher Survey Questions

1. Service-learning enhanced my ability to communicate the core competencies of the subject matter I teach.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

2. Service-learning helped my students see the relevance of the ELA subject matter.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

3. Service-learning helped my students see how the ELA objectives can be applied to everyday life.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

4. The service my students completed was beneficial to the community.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

5. Service-learning interfered with my students' other academic responsibilities.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

6. Service-learning required more of my time as a teacher.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

7. Using service-learning in my classroom was worth the effort.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

8. I will use service-learning as a teaching strategy with other courses.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

9. Service-learning helps fulfill this school's mission.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

10. There should be more courses offering service-learning at this school.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

11. I am satisfied with the assistance I received with the mechanics of service-learning (placement sites, student follow-up, etc.).

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

12. Service-learning helped me develop better relationships with my students.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

13. Students in my service-learning class were more engaged with the course materials than students in the non-service class were.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

14. The service-learning component of this course enhanced my ability to help students master the course content.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

15. I will suggest teaching a service-learning component to my colleagues.

SA      Agree      Neutral      Disagree      SD

Appendix J  
IRB Approval

From: **irb@olemiss.edu**  
To: Kimual Snow <kjsnow1@go.olemiss.edu>  
CC: ROSEMARY OLIPHANT INGHAM <ringham@olemiss.edu>  
Date: Tues, Jan 26, 2016 at 4:15pm

Ms. Snow:

This is to inform you that your application to conduct research with human participants, “Service Learning, Common Core, and the Secondary English Classroom: A Mixed-Methods Study” (Protocol #16x-189), has been approved as Exempt under 45 CFR 46.101(b) (#1).

Please remember that all of The University of Mississippi’s human participant research activities, regardless of whether the research is subject to federal regulations, must be guided by the ethical principals in The Belmont Report: Ethical Principles and Guidelines for the Protection of Human Subjects of Research.

It is especially important for you to keep these points in mind:

- You must protect the rights and welfare of human research participants.
- Any changes to your approved protocol must be reviewed and approved before initiating these changes.
- You must report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated problems involving risks to participants or others.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact the IRB at [irb@olemiss.edu](mailto:irb@olemiss.edu).

**Jennifer Caldwell, PhD**

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## VITA

### **Kimual J. Snow**

Phone: 662-915-7063

E-mail: kjsnow1@go.olemiss.edu

### **Education**

PhD. Teacher Education—Secondary English Education, University of Mississippi, 2012-present  
Dissertation: The Impact of Service Learning on the Secondary English Students' Mastery of the Common Core State Standards

Concentrations: Secondary English education, Literacy, Service Learning, and Common Core

M.A., English, University of Mississippi, 1995

Thesis: "Hurstons' Growing Class Consciousness: Economic Themes in Their Eyes Were Watching God"

Concentrations: Eighteenth-century literature and Elizabethan drama

B.A. Political Science, Jackson State University, 1990

National Board-Certified Teacher of English/Language Arts—AYA (2012)

### **Academic Honors**

- Graduate—Jackson State University Honors College for Academically-Gifted Students
- Recipient—African American Doctoral Teacher Fellowship
- Cum Laude Graduate—Jackson State University
- Magna Cum Laude Graduate—University of Mississippi

### **Related Professional Experience**

English Instructor, Sandtown Middle School, South Fulton, GA, 2019-Present  
I teach 7<sup>th</sup> Grade ELA (TAG) students.

English Instructor, Towers High School, Decatur, GA, 2017-2019  
I taught Gifted and Accelerated 9<sup>th</sup> Grade English and Gifted and Accelerated World Literature

Adjunct Instructor, SAE—Atlanta, Atlanta, GA, 2017-Present  
I teach Composition and Writing and Introduction to Literature

Virtual English Instructor, Howard-Rumph Academy, Douglasville, GA, 2017-present

I teach 6-12 English and Reading courses, in addition to ACT English and Reading online for homeschooled students.

NCTE/CAEP Program Reviewer for Undergraduate Secondary English Education Programs, 2016-present

English Instructor, Whitehaven High School, Memphis, TN, 2009-2016  
Taught English I, English II, English III, Creative Writing, and African American Literature

Adjunct Instructor, University of Memphis, Memphis, TN 2015-2016  
I taught Introduction to Literature and African American Literature

English Instructor, Wooddale High School, Memphis, TN 2005-2009  
Taught AP English Language, Honors Aviation English, Creative Writing, Public Speaking, and African American literature

AP Reader, College Board, Louisville, KY, June 2011

AP Reader, College Board, Daytona Beach, FL June 2006-June 2009

Adjunct English Instructor, Strayer University, Memphis, TN, September 2003-May 2006  
Taught Grammar and Composition, Advanced Grammar and Composition, and Business English

English Instructor, Compass Intervention Academy, Memphis, TN August 2003-May 2005  
I taught AP English language, AP English literature, English as a Second Language, Speech Communications, and GED language arts. I also served as the testing coordinator for the Education department.

Tutor/Trainer—Sylvan Learning Center, Southaven, MS, January-November 2005  
Taught ACT language arts, SAT Verbal Skills, and administered K-12 diagnostic reading tests

English/language arts instructor, South Panola School District, Batesville, MS, August 1998-May 2001  
Taught 7<sup>th</sup> grade language arts

English Instructor—Rust College, Holly Springs, MS, August 1995-May 1998  
Taught Grammar and Composition, Advanced Grammar and Composition, African American literature, and Speech Communications

### **Professional Memberships**

- National Council for Teachers of English
- International Language Association
- College Language Association
- Modern Language Association
- Kappa Delta Pi International Honor Society
- Sigma Tau Delta National English Honors Society
- Society for Technical Communications
- College English Education
- National Speakers Association
- International Literacy Association

### **Presentations**

- University of Mississippi College Writing Symposium, Oxford, MS  
October 2014  
Chairman: “Landscapes of Academic Writing” and “Strategies for Student Engagement”
- Tennessee Council for Teachers of English State Convention, Memphis, TN,  
September 2014  
Service Learning, Common Core, and Literacy
- National Council for Teachers of English Annual Convention, Boston, Massachusetts,  
November 2013  
High School Matters forum  
Topic: “Service Learning and the Common Core Standards: Integrating Common  
Core Standards with Core Values”
- National Council for Teachers of English Annual Convention, Orlando, Florida,  
November 2010  
High School Matters forum  
Topic: “Moral Literacy: Using Service Learning to Enhance Adolescent Reading and  
Writing Skills”
- Southern Regional Forum, Atlanta, Georgia, February 2010  
Topic: “Integrated Service Learning: Using Community Service to Promote Cultural  
Diversity, Real World Experiences, and College Readiness”
- PreparaTe: Educating Latinos for the Future of America, Chicago, Illinois, May 2008  
Topic: “Community, Culture, and College”