

Research Paper

## **Service Learning, Cultural Humility, and Language Instruction: Being in Community**

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### **Abstract**

To address linguistic, social, and settlement needs among professional and highly educated newcomer language learners in Canada, a Service Learning program was established at an urban community college. It incorporated field-specific language instruction, cultural humility and intercultural communication training, and meaningful Service Learning placements with local organizations. Using a participatory action research approach, co-design, and developmental evaluation, a case study of the course's development, delivery, and short-term impacts was conducted. This paper highlights key findings from that case study. Data were collected from surveys, focus groups, and reflections over the course of two pilot offerings with 27 learners. Using an inductive approach to qualitative data analysis, broad themes were identified. In this paper, the findings are grouped into four main themes: language development, settlement needs, cultural humility, and personal transformation. To conclude, barriers, facilitators, and recommendations are discussed with the goal of highlighting the challenges and celebrations of Service Learning for newcomer language learners.

### **Introduction**

Canada is the world's top resettlement country, having welcomed 437,539 permanent residents and 46,528 refugees in 2022 (IRCC: Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2023a). This country aims to attract nearly 1.5 million permanent residents in the next three years (IRCC, 2023b). Canada's immigration strategy privileges immigrants with professional and educational experience in high demand fields.

Professional and skilled immigrants across Canada bring with them varied backgrounds and often have high levels of education, advanced occupational skills, and innovative ideas. However, many professional and skilled newcomers' economic and social potential is not realized (Preston et al, 2010). Called “one of the greatest bait and switch games in human history” (N. Nenshi, cited in Roy, 2011), many highly educated skilled immigrants, prioritized by Canada's immigration strategy, struggle to find employment commensurate with their skills. For example, credentials from other countries may not be recognized, foreign work experience is often not valued on par with Canadian experience (Sakamoto et al, 2013), and the economic and occupational outcomes of upskilling or reskilling in Canada tend to be moderate (Adamuti-Trache, 2014). This is a reality faced by many adult language learners in Alberta, British Columbia, and across Canada in general.

Research (Nakhaie, 2019) has found that the four main service need priorities for immigrants to Canada are government services and language skills; information about Canadian life; education and work; and networks and community involvement. A structured Service Learning program for professional and skilled adult immigrants can help to directly or indirectly address each of these needs. This paper presents research findings stemming from two pilots of a Service Learning course for underemployed newcomers with professional and related educational backgrounds.

## Background Literature

### Language Needs

Findings from AAISA's (Alberta Association of Immigrant Serving Agencies) *ASIP Stakeholder Engagement Report* (AAISA, 2021) noted a key barrier to labour market attachment was a lack of language proficiency, especially language for the workplace. Similarly, AMSSA (Affiliation of Multicultural Societies and Service Agencies in British Columbia, 2024) noted that language proficiency is correlated with positive integration in civic and cultural integration spaces. Research (Imai et al, 2019) has demonstrated that of immigrants to Canada with high-level professional experience in their country of origin, those with less English language proficiency were further disadvantaged in the Canadian labour market. This disadvantage resulted in a greater likelihood of them working in manual jobs where they are not able to use their professional skills. Similarly, Boyd and Cao (2009) found that lower proficiency in an official language was positively associated with lower weekly earnings. There are also social implications, as “language is intricately woven into the fabric of human life. It is closely linked to the relationship between...self and society” (Kumaravadevelu, 2003, p. 156), and strong connections exist among language proficiency, economic and social mobility, and full civic participation (Spruck Wrigley, 2012). These relationships point to the importance of ensuring

that newcomers have access to high quality language programs to address not only linguistic but also other settlement needs.

### **Sociocultural Needs**

Language proficiency and professional skills are necessary but typically not sufficient for successful settlement and integration. Languages and cultures are brought into close contact in additional language classrooms, “where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is constructed” (Kumaravervalu, 2008, 46). As such, intercultural communication development programs and cultural humility can also benefit newcomers as they settle and construct their identities in a multicultural country. Cultural humility refers to a lifelong learning process that promotes openness, self-awareness, self-reflection, and critique to facilitate mutual empowerment and respect (Foronda, et al, 2015). Research (Deeb & Bauder, 2015) has shown that learning and employing intercultural communication skills helped some professionally skilled newcomers realize their economic potential and move into better paid and managerial positions. Aside from positive economic outcomes, intercultural learning is also personally transformative (Lange, 2015).

Intercultural offerings that promote cultural humility can prioritize “reflection, awareness, and critical dialogue in a culturally secure learning environment” with the aim to empower learners to “move beyond the learning of content to engaging with a community” (Mercer & Carter, 2018, p. 13). In the classroom, instructors foster a “nurturing *temenos* [that] encourages dialogue and reflection while helping students integrate what they learn about the objective world with their subjective experiences of the self in the world” (De Rezze, 2020, 40).

Opportunities for intercultural dialogue make mutual learning possible (Phillips et al, 2014), and intercultural development programs can foster awareness of social justice issues as well as understanding of community interactions (Leydens, 2015). These practices are promising because community engagement among immigrants is associated with greater well-being; as such, its promotion among immigrants is important (Alfieri et al, 2019). Li (2020) found that as immigrant women’s social networks widened, their civic engagement increased, which was positively associated with mental health and life satisfaction; it is not clear if the same positive outcomes might apply to men. Despite these benefits, immigrants tend to volunteer at lower rates and have smaller social networks than those born in Canada (Kazemipur, 2011).

### **Canadian Experience Needs**

It is well-established that newcomers’ education and work experience is consistently undervalued in Canada; they often experience deskilling, unemployment, under-employment, and lower earnings upon immigrating (Grenier & Xue, 2011; Kaushik & Drolet, 2018; Slade, 2011, 2012;

Taylor, 2019). Canada's immigration strategy (Canada, 2022), British Columbia's Provincial Nominee Program (BC PNP) Skills Immigration (British Columbia, 2023), and the Alberta Advantage Immigration Strategy (Alberta, 2024), prioritize the welcoming of professional and skilled immigrants with the hope that they will be able to use their skills to contribute to the economy and society. However, the reality is often misaligned with the promise, and many newcomers find themselves unable to secure employment that is commensurate with their skills and experience (Taylor, 2019). In response, immigrants may respond in ways that include resignation (e.g., giving up and settling for a survival job), reducing expectations (e.g., working in jobs that are not aligned with their education or experience in the hope that that Canadian experience will pay off), or researching (e.g., learning as much as possible about Canadian workplaces and strategically pursuing goals) (Bernhard, 2023). For those *researchers* who are committed to integrating into a Canadian workplace, further education (e.g., upskilling, language learning) and experience is often necessary. As such, professional development programs that combine education with Canadian experience can be beneficial.

### **Community Engaged Service Learning**

Service Learning is:

a structured learning experience that combines community service with preparation and reflection. Students engaged in Service Learning provide community service in response to community-identified concerns and learn about the context in which service is provided, the connection to their service, their coursework, and their roles as citizens (Seifer, 1998, p. 274)

Service Learning serves as a powerful educational tool, offering students opportunities to apply theoretical and applicable skills gained in their studies in community-based and workplace settings. While it has similarities with community service/volunteering and traditional practicums or work-integrated learning (WIL) programs, there are some key differences. For example, Service Learning is meant to benefit both the learner and the community partner, while volunteering is typically for the benefit of an organization or community and WIL programs tend to benefit the learner. Additionally, Service Learning includes structured reflection and content that can lead to deeper understandings of complex social issues in addition to personal and professional growth (University of Northern Iowa, 2024)

Transformation and reciprocity are at the heart of Service Learning. Learners transform themselves through their connections with and contributions to the community. Communities are transformed and benefit from the contributions of learners who offer their skills, time, and perspectives. The benefits of Service Learning are well documented (Alberta, 2021; Desmond et

al, 2011; Eyler, et al, 2001) and extend to improved personal, social, and learning outcomes as well as career development and contributions to research.

To date, most Service Learning projects and research have focused on K–12 or post-secondary programs for domestic learners. Although Service Learning opportunities are relatively common in post-secondary contexts, programs designed for newcomers or language learners are relatively rare, despite the promise they hold for language development (Wisla et al., 2017) and community connection (Riley & Douglas, 2016). When it comes to newcomers, there is a clear gap not only in Service Learning programs, but also in the research about them. In fact, it is not uncommon for Service Learning opportunities to be designed for local post-secondary students to volunteer with immigrants, and the benefits of such program are recognized as learner participants expand their own awareness of others and take on more pluralistic and culturally aware views (Pasricha, 2008). It stands to reason that the benefits of immigrants providing service is also valuable and warrants research.

Service Learning programs can offer newcomers meaningful and relevant work experience, community engagement, and language learning opportunities, and it has already been demonstrated that newcomers who engage in volunteering reap many benefits (Guo, 2014). Likewise, community organizations benefit from Service Learning projects because participants bring with them skills and can make valuable contributions to organizations, especially when coupled with training and support (Edwards et al, 2001). Despite the clear potential, this approach has been under-utilized and under-explored in the field of English language instruction.

### **Course Description**

To respond to this gap, and to test out the feasibility of a Service Learning program with newcomers, we developed a course, delivering it to two cohorts of language learners. There were three main components of the course: Language instruction, cultural humility training, and Service Learning placements. The language and cultural humility components were taught by two different scholar-practitioner instructors who worked closely together and with the research team, ensuring that their content and approaches were aligned.

### **Language Instruction**

The language component of the program was primarily aimed at preparation for Service Learning placements and future workplaces. Deciding how to approach this type of preparation was initially a challenge, as the learners had varying backgrounds, skills, expertise, and language proficiency. The language component of the course used an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) framework, in which the specific purpose was Service Learning. The language content and instruction drew on the learners' existing expertise. One of the main goals of the ESP-inspired

language component was “rhetorical consciousness-raising, helping students to become more aware of the language and communicative practices in their fields” (Hyland, 2022, p. 214). This focus on field-specific language and communicative practices guided the course designers when choosing language content, developing materials, and adapting resources. Language instruction focused on grammar and vocabulary items relevant to workplace communication and community engagement. It was closely connected to the cultural humility components of the course, drawing on concepts learned in the cultural humility part of the class to recycle vocabulary and scaffold grammar learning.

A thematic approach to organizing the curriculum was applied, and learners practised applying grammar and language content to Service Learning, while balancing the fact that placements were distinct and would require different language. Language instruction continued through their placements, and the students’ Service Learning experiences were used for in-class language focus and job readiness. For example, learners practised incorporating their Service Learning experiences into their resumes and cover letters. Additionally, language learning was also connected to the intercultural component of the course; for example, students learned and practised the grammatical and logistical aspects of using and sharing personal pronouns. Connecting the language instruction helped narrow the focus of language instruction, while keeping it structured enough to be effective in a short amount of time.

### **Cultural Humility**

Intercultural communication and cultural humility training was also a daily occurrence in this full-time program. Having ample designated class time and an experienced and committed instructor with an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) focus addressed the main challenges to incorporating Intercultural Communication content (Landry, 2023) in language programming. Designed for language learners ranging from CLB (Canadian Language Benchmarks) 6–8, the materials were accessible to those with limited background knowledge and developing English language proficiency.

The goal of this component of the course was to provide learners with information about various social issues that are topical in Canadian workplaces and society; examples include, Indigenous awareness, identity, bias, power, privilege, and advocacy. One of the main goals was to help learners develop strategies to be inclusive and advocate for themselves and others. This course content guides them to recognize their lived experiences and diverse backgrounds as strengths. With Canada’s growing diversity, lived and living experience, coupled with cultural humility skills, is an asset, especially in the age of artificial intelligence, when the soft skills that machines do not perform are valued in the workplace.

## Service Learning Placements

Learners also took part in various Service Learning activities, with time during the second half of the 15-week course reserved for individual placements. However, prior to embarking on their placements, learners also took part in Service Learning activities as a class. They volunteered at a shelter to serve lunch, collected donations, worked at a conference, and went out together on and around our urban campus to perform random acts of kindness for strangers. The random acts of kindness included giving people small notes of encouragement, flowers, and coffee cards, while inviting them to have a conversation about what kindness means to them. The goal of these group activities was to raise awareness of social issues, while also safely empowering learners to address these issues and connect with community members. This experience also helped prepare them for their individual placements. Individual placements occurred in a variety of organizations, and there were a few internal placements on campus. Service Learning placements were varied, with learners at ethnocultural and settlement organizations, housing and food security organizations, and a women's organization. Tasks ranged between resource development, accounting, event planning, food preparation, childcare, and education. When possible, placements were tied to learner interests and experience. While some placements were better fits than others, with some learners having the opportunity to make meaningful contributions of their skills, other placements looked more like volunteering opportunities where they prepared or served food or answered phones. Placements ultimately depended on learner experience, willingness, and ability, as well as organizational capacity and openness.

## Methods

To better understand the potential for Service Learning with newcomers, this program was designed and piloted with two cohorts of language learners, and a research component was incorporated. The learners were all adult newcomers recruited at a community college. Prior to enrolling, they had all had language assessments and already attained CLB 5–7 levels. The first cohort had eight learners enrol and successfully complete the course; the second cohort had 19 learners enrol, and 13 learners successfully complete the course ( $n=27$ ). Women outnumbered men in this program, with 21 women and six men. Their length of residency in Canada ranged from nine years to under one year, with a mean of 4.4 years. Of the 27 learners, 23 were permanent residents and the remainder were admitted under the CUAET (Canadian Ukrainian Authorization for Emergency Travel) program. All but one learner had completed post-secondary education from their country of origin.

To contextualize and understand the themes that were coming out of the data analysis, a co-design team was formed. Co-design, (sometimes called co-creation), is an emancipatory approach to participatory social justice, in which participant voices are centred (Fanjoy & Bragg, 2019), as it prioritizes involvement from those who are most impacted by the research. Co-

design is about designing with rather than for, employing inclusive facilitation that embraces many ways of being, doing, and knowing (McKercher, 2023). In this study, findings (i.e., categories and themes that emerged from the data, along with anonymized examples) were discussed with the group, and solutions and ideas were proposed during sessions. During and between the two cohorts' semesters, the group co-design team met once every three weeks, for a total of 12 times. This team was comprised of learners ( $n=12$ ) and community organization representatives ( $n=7$ ); it was facilitated by a member of the applied research team and attended by a research assistant who helped with facilitation, note-taking, and logistics. Co-design team members were remunerated for their time and expertise.

A case study approach (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009) was employed, focusing on this specific program, along with its development and delivery over the course of two years. With the goal of conducting an in-depth analysis, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed. Incorporating participatory action social justice design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 230), learners were invited to take part in many aspects of the research project, and an informed consent process was used for all data collection; as such, some participants consented to participate in some components and not others or were absent during some data collection, which accounts for the inconsistent numbers. Data included pre-surveys ( $n=27$ ) and post-surveys ( $n=18$ ), in-class reflections ( $n=28$ ), a learner focus group, and an instructor focus group. Likewise, representatives from community organizations were also invited to participate in research components, which included two focus groups and surveys ( $n=6$ ). Some learner and community organization co-design participants ( $n=13$ ) also took part in two focus groups.

This project employed a developmental evaluation approach to understanding the pilots and their outcomes. That approach was embedded throughout the project and served to collect and highlight information to report to the funder as well as to answer broader questions about program feasibility and lessons learned for future iterations. At its core, "developmental evaluation is designed to be congruent with and to nurture developmental, emergent, innovative, and transformative processes" (Patton, 2010, 7). An evaluation framework was developed to answer questions in a formative assessment (i.e., Did the Service Learning pilot meet its objectives?), a process assessment (i.e., What were the facilitating and limiting factors that contributed or inhibited the outcomes?), and as identified by the project team (i.e., "Can Service Learning work with newcomers, and can it fit within LINC [Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada] programming?").

This research project had approval from the institutional REB (Research Ethics Board) at the community college where this study took place. Data were co-analyzed by an applied research team that comprised of a lead researcher, a research officer, three student research assistants, and an external developmental evaluator. Quantitative survey data were collected, and descriptive statistics were produced. Qualitative data were collected from reflections, open ended



survey responses, and focus group notes. The research team employed an inductive logic model (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 64) for data analysis. After the data were initially analyzed to form categories, the researchers collaboratively revisited categories, looking for broad patterns. The team collectively discussed those categories and patterns to identify themes and sub-themes.

### **Limitations**

This study and its results are limited by a small sample size and reflect the project's context. While findings and recommendations may inform other programs, they cannot be generalized to a broader population or different programs. Additionally, quantitative data are based on student perspectives of the impact of the program. For example, their CLB scores were wide ranging and used only for entrance into the course; they were not reassessed upon completion due to the length and structure of the program.

### **Findings**

Four key themes that are particularly relevant to adult language learners emerged from the data: Language Proficiency, Settlement Needs, Cultural Humility, and Personal Transformation. Each of these themes was identified by the research team, based on data collected and analyzed. These key themes were then explored more deeply in focus groups and co-design sessions to better understand and contextualize them.

### **Language Development**

Because this project was run in a language school that is part of a community college and students were all adult English language learners, it is unsurprising that much of what came out of the data connected with language learning. Learners were surveyed about their perceptions of the impacts of the class on their language proficiency, and they largely reported positive results. For example, when asked about improvements to their speaking proficiency, 61% of post-survey respondents reported that they had improved very much or quite a bit. Surprisingly, even more reported improvements in their written communication, with 78% of post-survey respondents indicating they had improved those skills very much or quite a bit.

Many learners expressed concerns prior to their placements about their language proficiency, worrying about their ability to communicate effectively. For example, one learner, Myrocja<sup>1</sup>, reflected, "Since my English is still not good enough to be fluent, it will be difficult for me to explain to the [clients] exactly what we do at [placement] and why it is so important." Despite concerns prior to their placements, many learners reported feeling more confident with their language ability upon completion of their placements. For example, Sandra reported, "It

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<sup>1</sup> All participant names are pseudonyms

helped me lose my fear of talking to other people in English... I was able to collaborate by serving as an interpreter with other participants who did not speak English only Spanish, my first language.” Meera described how much of her placement involved speaking on the phone, which, as a language learner, had been a fear of hers. She described how her placement manager took time to practise with her, which gave her more confidence and helped her develop her speaking skills.

### **Settlement Needs**

Post-survey results indicated 78% of respondents reported that the course had helped them to make further educational decisions, with the remaining 22% reporting some improvement. Most learners opted to continue their language studies upon completion of the program. A smaller percentage (61%) of learners reported the program helped them further their career decisions very much or quite a bit; the remaining 39% reported that it had increased somewhat.

When it came to workplace skills, various learners reported specific skill development and knowledge gains related to their careers. For example, Kristina, who assisted with developing materials for Research Ethics Board training, noted “I found this topic very interesting, so I feel like I became ... more critical thinking, problem solving. Back home my research field was ... very technical, [and] this area [research involving humans] improved my decision-making skills in real life.” Likewise, Jeremy, who assisted a sustainability coordinator in researching and evaluating prior organizational projects mentioned, “I have learned a lot of things about sustainability (related to the environment, the society and the economy), which are useful in the engineering field. I have also been able to develop my communication and collaboration skills.” More generally, learners reported that class components and assignments, such as resume writing and presentations were important and connected to future employment and education.

Although many learners recognized that the program can indirectly help them secure work through gaining Canadian experience or expanding their networks, a small minority were disappointed that their placements did not directly lead to employment. As Raed mentioned, “I was expecting the program to end with an employment but unfortunately it didn’t happen and we [were] only able to do some volunteering.” However, in another reflection he mentioned “This program increased my ability to connect with workplace[s] through my increased knowledge, skills, and opportunities.” Although the instructors and coordinators were clear that placements would not directly lead to employment, for some learners this expectation persisted, perhaps indicating that the pressure to find suitable employment is a top-of-mind concern.

Learners reported that the program was successful in meeting other settlement needs. Lisa shared in a focus group that she appreciated learning more about support and resources, but

wished she had had access to this information and program earlier in her settlement journey: “I wish I had this opportunity when I first came. I had to do so much chasing, some information here, some there, and some [was] complicated, and I wish it was more organized.” Learners had been asked about their awareness of various settlement services prior to and immediately following the program; on average, learners were familiar with 2.78 different settlement services, and were aware of 4.5 upon completion; this is a 61% increase. This awareness of settlement services was also explored at length in co-design, as participants highlighted their needs as newcomers. As such, the co-design team curated a list of resources and identified what information is most useful during various stages of settlement based on their own experiences as newcomers at various stages of their settlement journeys.

### **Cultural Humility**

In addition to the language instruction and skills development, learners also had intercultural learning opportunities throughout the program. When asked to what extent they increased their understanding of people who have different backgrounds than their own, 83% of learners reported they had increased their understanding very much or quite a bit; the remaining 17% reported some increase.

Many learners reported that this information was new to them, but useful in their settlement journeys. Soo described how the content she was learning helped her understand broader Canadian culture: “I was surprised when I heard some words [on] the TV and I realized I am learning very essential parts.” Filomena noted the value of this information, reflecting that “It’s important to be aware... about multiculturalism, and the diversity of cultures. As a newcomer we need to know a lot of the society and support to begin [a] new life.”

Learners noted that this content had helped them better understand others’ perspectives, along with notions of privilege and power. Frida mentioned that she had become “more grateful... and more empathic with others, because they don’t have opportunities in different ways” demonstrating the development of cultural humility.

It is important for newcomers to be a part of a community. Despite high levels of education that the learners had, some had had exploitative experiences in Canadian workplaces and other institutions. As such, they learned to advocate for themselves and leverage their diversity. Soo added that she learned “to communicate with [people] from different cultures, how to answer their questions without any assumptions, and how to set up boundaries to protect [her]self.”

Noor also spoke about boundaries and relayed an episode from her placement where she was able to assert her boundaries and respectfully advocate for herself. She described how a male

colleague tried to touch her as part of a friendly gesture, which was not appropriate in her religion. Previously she would have said nothing despite feeling uncomfortable. When this happened, she politely told him, that as a Muslim woman, she should not be touched by a man. He was understanding and had not realized his actions were offensive. In her words, “I used my information about boundaries.”

### **Personal Transformation**

Many codes from the data connected to notions of personal transformation. These were related to confidence and civic engagement. When asked about the extent to which their confidence had increased, 72% reported it had increased very much or quite a bit; the remaining respondents reported some increase. Interestingly, the responses were identical with responses to the question of whether their community and civic engagement had increased during the program, and 72% reported it had increased very much or quite a bit. Again, the remaining respondents reported some increase. It is possible that there is a connection between increased confidence and increased engagement.

Regarding community engagement, Song reported that her placement provided her with “a great opportunity to support women in need and engage with a community. It was a rewarding experience as it made me feel part of a community, allowing me to positively impact the lives of others and grow as a person.” Fariha completed her placement doing a different role at the same organization, and she learned a lot about the organization’s services, noting it is “an incredible organization that supports many women in different ways and I definitely not only put my skills into practice but also learned how [to] support others.” Both learners continued to volunteer at the organization beyond the completion of the program.

Myroscja’s desire to continue volunteering and using her skills in the community was also apparent. During her placement, she assisted in a classroom, and described how she “felt the students really appreciated we were there to help.... this made me think about going to my kids’ school to volunteer.”

Likewise, Frida reflected on her increased confidence to engage with and contribute to her new community,

As a newcomer, I didn’t think I could help people in a country that I immigrated to. It was a unique experience. I didn’t used to volunteer in my own country, but helping people in Canada, I was able to learn a lot. About Canadian culture, especially people who are underprivileged. It was eye opening. At home, I never connected with people who needed support from the government or organizations. It was good to be a part of it. And to work with staff and other volunteers.

Soo described how she was able to draw on community and social support to increase her confidence. She mentioned how although she was interested in her placement, she did not have previous experience in that field, noting that she was nervous about the responsibility, “I have talked about this with my husband, my friend, and my teacher, they all encouraged me and gave me confiden[ce] to do it... during service learning, I also can ask for help from the teacher and my classmates.” Similarly, Milana described initial reservations and how the Service Learning workplace was different than in her home country, but that the Service Learning “workplace was comfortable. I had some nerves about being in a Canadian workplace, [but] it was much better than I thought—nice, friendly. I felt more confident. I had a chance to practise English, [and] no one made fun of me.”

Increased confidence and civic engagement can be transformative. Frida’s in-class reflection touched on notions of confidence, transformation, empowerment, and community engagement:

Throughout this course, it made me think how I want to live. I learned more about how to be with people around me. More about me being in community. Now I know that I can provide support and help even though I am an immigrant.

### **Implications**

Service Learning programs can address, at least in part, the three needs outlined in the literature review: Language needs through relevant instruction; sociocultural needs through class content, Service Learning placements and experience; and Canadian experience needs through Service Learning placements that can be put on resumes and increase networking opportunities. Despite the many promises and positive outcomes of this Service Learning course, Service Learning with newcomers is not without challenges and considerations. This section outlines some barriers, facilitators, and recommendations associated with an Service Learning program for language learners.

### **Barriers**

Service Learning programs can be both organizationally challenging and resource intensive, when compared to traditional language classes, and even compared with established Work Integrated Learning (WIL) programs or practicums. A few factors contribute to this. For example, language learners come from a wide range of professional and educational backgrounds, and the course they are taking is not directly tied to one field, unlike WIL and practicum programs where the class learns specific content for future careers. This lack of specificity can make it challenging to find appropriate placement opportunities that build on learner skills. It requires dedication reaching out to potential organizations, finding good fits, and

communicating openly and honestly with learners and placement contacts. Additionally, there may be other demands on time and financial resources, such as obtaining police background checks for Service Learning placements that may involve vulnerable populations. These factors are certainly more resource intensive than a regular language class. In our program, one instructor negotiated placements for the first cohort, but with a larger second cohort a dedicated placement coordinator took over this role. Having an additional coordinator may be prohibitive regarding time and cost. Program designers must allot sufficient time and resources to the logistical challenges.

### **Facilitators**

Despite the barriers that exist, there are many factors that facilitate successful Service Learning programs with language learners. Community organizations with interest and capacity are invaluable, and so when individuals who are invested get involved, the benefits are manifold. Learners have meaningful and tailored experiences and organizations benefit. Related to these benefits is a mentorship component, which makes a big difference in a learner's experience. Those who completed placements in organizations with involved mentors had a much more positive experience than their peers with less direction and support. It can be challenging to recognize which organizations will work best, so the other main facilitator is relationship building and maintenance. Similarly, if one organization was a great fit for a particular learner or with a particular project, it does not guarantee it will make a suitable placement with other learners; this variability can be due to the goals of the organization, individual learners, or turnover within organizations. Getting to know and work with organizations, or working with those where there is an existing personal or professional connection, is fruitful. Likewise, organizations benefit from structure, regular communication, and clear expectations so that they can plan for the placement and flag any concerns that arise. In our program, we had greater success with placements done on and near campus, because relationships and expectations were already established.

When it comes to classroom content and instruction, materials that are directly related to placements help. It is also useful to make salient the connections between course content and Service Learning so that learners can see the bigger picture. Additionally, incorporating reflective practices into course work allows learners to consider and integrate their learnings and experiences. Embedding reflective opportunities throughout the duration of the course is a major facilitator to successful outcomes and can help learners find value and make meaning.

### **Recommendations**

For Service Learning with newcomers to be successful, we recommend that learner recruitment focus on those who have been in Canada for at least a few years. They should have some

knowledge of the culture and a level of language proficiency that will not disproportionately hinder their ability to complete their role successfully. Additionally, it is prudent to recruit learners who have articulated professional goals. We learned that those without a clear sense of what they wanted to do ended up in less meaningful placements where they felt more like volunteers and were less able to use their skills and expertise. It may also be wise to also recruit learners who are men, as they are at times overlooked in programming and recruitment efforts. The practical experience offered by such a program might appeal to them and help them build networks. Research has shown (Li, 2020) community engagement is associated with many positive outcomes for women, but it is unclear if this is also the case for immigrant men. This is a potential direction for future research and programming.

While this program took place during one semester, it may be more practical to run it over two semesters, in which semester 1 is dedicated to preparing students and doing group Service Learning activities in addition to instruction. Semester 2 would be reserved for reduced instruction time and more time in placements. In this scenario, the extra time could be used to help learners articulate their expectations and become more involved in finding an appropriate placement for themselves, with the support of an instructor or coordinator. This gradual increase in responsibility is likely to foster more ownership of the experience and lead to placements they are personally invested in. We suggest this may also be more beneficial or potentially impactful for the organizations where learners complete their placements.

Based on this case study, we believe that Service Learning programs for adult language learners offer a lot of potential for their development of language, cultural humility, and workplace skills. As such, we recommend that Service Learning offerings be considered by language programming funders, policy makers, and educational administrators. For the learners, Service Learning may also be a transformative experience that increases their confidence and civic engagement, while supporting their settlement journey, integration, and contributions to Canadian society.

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