The Multicultural Café: Enhancing Authentic Interaction for Adult English Language Learners Through Service Learning

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While service learning platforms hold great potential for adult learners of English as an additional language (EAL), there has been little research to date related to the impact of these programs on adult newcomers' linguistic and social development. The Multicultural Café was a food service learning platform for adult EAL learners operated over a 7-month period at a regional college in the British Columbia interior. The café was developed to provide adult immigrant learners of EAL with an opportunity to authentically engage in using English to provide a valued service to the local community. The current study was conducted to explore the impact of the service learning experience from the perspective of the participants. Using a qualitative case study research design, data were gathered from participants (n = 10) through a questionnaire, semistructured interviews, and a focus group. Data were transcribed, coded, and collected into emerging themes. Opportunities for authentic interactions with customers and with other volunteer coworkers emerged as two of the primary outcomes of the service learning experience. Incorporating the service learning opportunity of the Multicultural Café into the participants' English language learning experiences appeared to enhance their interactions within the college community.

Les cadres d'apprentissage par le service communautaire sont très prometteurs pour les apprenants adultes d'anglais langue additionnel (ALA); pourtant, peu de recherche a porté sur l'impact de ces programmes sur le développement linguistique et social des nouveaux arrivants d'âge adulte. Le Café Multiculturel a constitué, pendant une période de 7 mois, un milieu d'apprentissage par le service pour des apprenants adultes d'ALA dans un collège régional de l'intérieur de la Colombie-Britannique. Le café a été développé pour fournir aux immigrants adultes apprenant l'ALA l'occasion de communiquer authentiquement en anglais tout en offrant un service important à la communauté locale. La présente étude a porté sur l'impact de l'expérience d'apprentissage par le service selon la perspective des participants. Employant un plan de recherche qualitative visant une étude de cas, nous avons recueilli des données de participants (n = 10) par le biais d'un questionnaire, d'entrevues semi-structurées et d'un groupe de discussion. Les données ont été transcrites, codées et rassemblées selon des thèmes qui s'y dégageaient. Deux des résultats principaux de l'expérience de l'apprentissage par le service consistaient en les occasions d'interactions authentiques avec les clients et avec les autres collègues bénévoles. L'intégration, dans le parcours pédagogique des apprenants d'anglais, de l'expérience de l'apprentissage par le service au

Café Multiculturel semble avoir mis en valeur leurs interactions au sein de la communauté du collège.

Newcomers to Canada who speak English as an additional language (EAL) can find that the pathway to full participation in Canadian society as a valued member of the English-speaking community may be a hard journey spanning many years (Currie & Cray, 2004; Derwing & Waugh, 2012; Fleming, 2007, 2010). For example, there are immigrants with university degrees who struggle to find a place of equal value even after more than 10 years in the workforce (Galarneau & Morissette, 2008). This lack of successful integration can lead to questions related to newcomers' initial experiences in government-sponsored English classes as a pathway to settlement, employment, and integration in which newcomers are expected to acquire the language skills needed to fully integrate into Canadian society within one to three years (Boyd & Cao, 2009; Fleming, 2007, 2010). The result of not gaining the skills for social, personal, and transformative learning within government-sponsored English classes is that immigrants may become marginalized (Jensen, 2011; Lister, 2004; Russell, 2007) and experience social and linguistic isolation (Magro & Ghorayshi, 2010; Nawyn, Gjokaj, Agbényiga, & Grace, 2012; Yates et al., 2010). To stave off the negative effects of marginalization and promote the full participation of immigrants in all facets of Canadian society, organizations offering immigrant EAL classes can expand their current repertoires of pedagogical practices to include service learning (Felten & Clayton, 2011). Service learning offers a means for adult immigrant EAL learners to interact with target language speakers in their community in order to foster an environment that promotes social integration, personal growth, and transformative possibilities through reciprocally valued discourse (Dudley, 2007; Felten & Clayton, 2011).

While studies have emerged in the 21st century that cite the benefits of service learning as it relates to additional language acquisition and high school students (Russell, 2007), as well as to college- and university-level learners (Elwell & Bean, 2001; Grabois, 2008; Hummel, 2013), few studies focus solely on service learning and immigrants' linguistic and social development (Dudley, 2007). Particularly in the Canadian context, a review of the scholarly literature revealed little published research related to service learning and EAL programs. However, in the United States, recent scholarship has looked at the relationship between service learning and the EAL teaching and learning experience. For example, at one American university, students enrolled in an 8-week summer intensive course that combined EAL study with service learning made significant gains in their intercultural

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awareness and English language development (Askildson, Kelly, & Mick, 2013). Similar themes were explored by Miller, Berkey, and Griffin (2015), who considered the impacts of service learning in local nonprofit organizations on EAL students preparing for postsecondary studies. Specifically, they looked for transformative learning experiences, academic language learning, autonomy, and intercultural preparedness. Service learning for postsecondary EAL students in the United States also seemed to garner appreciation for active learning, an authentic environment, and confidence boosting (Bippus & Eslami, 2013). Perren (2013) concluded that service learning as part of a university intensive English course promoted community building and personal growth opportunities. Finally, three different university-level EAL programs in the United States involving a digital literacy project, tutoring low-income children, and serving the homeless promoted feelings of empowerment in EAL students that led to them feeling more a part of the community with a better understanding of civic responsibility and social issues (Perren, Grove, & Thornton, 2013).

The current qualitative case study investigation contributes to the scholarly literature on service learning and EAL teaching and learning by exploring the experiences of 10 participants who were EAL learners enrolled in a tuition-free, noncredit, government-sponsored English language program at a college in the British Columbia interior. They were all volunteers in a seven-month-long service learning venture called the Multicultural Café, which was an experiential learning platform that provided food services on the college campus. The purpose of this study is to understand the impacts of the service learning experience in the Multicultural Café from the perspective of adult immigrant learners. Through the voices of the participants who took part in this service learning venture, it is hoped that their lived experiences will inform government-sponsored English language services for adult immigrants and point to the potential of service learning experiences.

Background

Theoretical Framework

The potential of service learning as a component of a language learning program for adult newcomers from EAL backgrounds can be understood within a theoretical framework grounded in Second Language Socialization (SLS). SLS is defined by Duff (2007) as the various processes in which language learners improve their communicative competence and find membership and legitimacy in a group. This acceptance involves acquiring the linguistic conventions of a group along with related aspects such as pragmatics and group-specific behaviours. Language socialization involves understanding linguistic and social conventions relevant to the local community (Watson-Gegeo, 2004; Watson-Gegeo & Nielsen, 2003). For Pennycook (2010), SLS is

about the social activities that people take part in to create language rather than simply the grammatical rules of a language.

Related to SLS is Lave and Wenger's (1991) and Wenger's (1998) ideas related to community of practice. A community of practice has three distinct features (Wenger, 2000). First, a community of practice is a joint enterprise that is created and continually renegotiated by members so that people are able to contribute to that enterprise. Second, a community of practice involves interacting and developing relationships and common modes of behaviour through mutual engagement, including trust, to create a social entity. Finally, there is the creation of a shared repertoire of communal resources developed over time to include routines, artifacts, vocabulary, styles, and stories that can be accessed and used appropriately. According to Pennycook (2010), the focus should not solely be on the community, but also on the practice, because a community of practice is not just a group of people doing the same activities, but rather a group created by language practices and communicative acts within a larger framework of social practice. Duff (2007) has maintained that a community of practice involves community membership and participation as learning as well as in learning, and that novice community members' identities, participation, and legitimacy within that community are helped or hindered by certain processes that need to be identified. Keeping in mind how power affects language learning, a SLS framework can connect social and cultural contexts to language learning in order to understand how social, cultural, and linguistic factors affect these contexts (Duff, 2007).

Service Learning

Service learning can contribute to fostering linguistic, communicative, and sociocultural development for newcomers. Service learning activities take up van Lier's (2004) challenge to move away from the "safe, tried-and-tested language classrooms into more critical, challenging democratic directions" (p. 82). According to Stewart (2007), language learners in service learning contexts that place students in the community with proficient users of the target language can work with peers to gain language, culture, and other kinds of knowledge that facilitates belonging to that community.

Service learning refers to a "pedagogy which directs students' classroom learning to address the needs of relevant communities, where [there is] reciprocity between the institution and the community partner" (Bamber & Hankin, 2011, p. 192). Along with institutional reciprocity, Felten and Clayton (2011) have stated that "reciprocal, authentic relationships" (p. 82) also need to underpin service learning. Thus, in service learning, "both service to the community and learning on the part of the students are equally valued" (Hummel, 2013, p. 67). The stakes are high for immigrants in such reciprocal, authentic relationships, for Norton and Toohey (2011) argued that highly motivated language learners may not be successful if they do not have ac-

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cess to participate in social relationships where they are deemed reciprocally valued partners in communication. Service learning can provide a platform from which adult immigrant English language learners can have access to participate in local discourse as valued interlocutors.

Experiential learning opportunities, such as service learning, can create a space conducive to socialization and language acquisition, for it "emphasizes learning from firsthand, personal experiences rather than from lectures, books, and other second-hand sources" (Ravitch, 2007, p. 91). By creating reciprocal, experiential, and communicative inquiry spaces, such as service learning, learners can reap the benefits from being deeply engaged. In Crick's (2012) study of deep engagement, he contended that being deeply engaged is fundamental to experiential knowing, which is viewed as a direct encounter of participatory, social enquiry. Crick (2012) stated that in contrast to passive engagement, "deep engagement in learning requires personal investment and commitment—learning has to be meaningful and purposeful in the life of the learner and this is not procured simply by external demands" (p. 676), which "involves [the benefit of] personal transformation" (p. 679). Service learning may be a catalyst for personal transformation resulting from being deeply engaged in meaningful and purposeful endeavours.

Combining knowledge and experience is not a new concept in education (Dewey, 1938), yet experiential learning has seen only minor applications in adult immigrant EAL programs largely due to classroom time constraints, problems with assessment, and lack of understanding and training on how to meet course outcomes experientially (Knutson, 2003). Felton and Clayton (2011) asserted that the "interdependence of learning processes and outcomes with community processes and outcomes not only renders service-learning powerful as a vehicle for learning and social change, but also makes it challenging to implement effectively" (p. 77). Nevertheless, experiential learning has been linked to learners' positive self-perception and increased linguistic confidence with the target language (Hummel, 2013; Parks, 2000). This affords students a platform to access multiple new skills unrelated to the actual classroom-based language learning (Knutson, 2003), as well as brings together the realms of academia, civic learning, and personal growth to produce such "widely valued outcomes as intercultural competence and teamwork" (Felten & Clayton, 2011, p. 77).

Experiential inquiries such as service learning opportunities are needed for adult immigrant English language learners. Dudley (2007) found that many EAL speakers showed an interest in volunteering (i.e., service learning), but few arranged to engage in such activities. Baer's (2008) Canadian study of civic participation concluded that immigrants who are nonofficial language users are less likely to be involved in voluntary activities. Knutson (2003) recommended that more aspects of experiential learning in EAL curriculums needed to be studied, including "the empowerment that arises from just simply hearing one's own voice expressing ideas in a social con-

text in another language" (p. 62). Hummel's (2013) findings on the perceived benefits of service learning for one semester included "greater linguistic self-confidence, and the perception of having improved their L2 [additional language] skills" (p. 85). Hummel (2013) also pointed out that the participants of the service learning study also reaped personal benefits, such as personal satisfaction and development, and thus they were unanimous in recommending service learning for others.

Grabois (2008) has stated that such educational practices as service learning represent metaphorically "a two-way street" or a "legitimate peripheral contribution" (p. 393) in which learning is a "mutual movement between complementary communities. Instead of expertise being uniquely situated with the centre of one group, it is distributed differently among diverse groups, thereby radically changing the conceptions of knowledge and power" (pp. 384–385). Grabois highlighted the importance of learners contributing to a mutually dynamic and emerging community that develops within service learning opportunities rather than seeking participation in an existing community. Grabois moved the conversation of benefits of service learning from communities of practice to communities of contribution. Therefore, from his work with university students learning a foreign language, Grabois summarized the benefits of service learning when he put forward that students become contributing members of the community in which learning is evenly spread between members of that community. The learners gain a great awareness for other cultures and experience increased motivation within an effective language learning framework.

There appears to be a "definitive need to explore other settings particularly where the teaching contexts are more informal, less controlled by the instructor, and more susceptible to external influences (e.g., natural environment, public)" (Taylor, 2007, p. 186). Service learning ventures can be one of these less informal and externally influenced settings. According to Grabois (2008), "Service learning brings together members of diverse linguistic and cultural communities who, despite the fact that they often inhabit the same geographical spaces, may have minimal opportunity to interact in significant and meaningful ways with members of other groups" (p. 393).

Research Question

The current study is grounded in a qualitative research tradition within a SLS framework that includes the participants' voices and seeks to gain an understanding of the service learning experience from their perspectives. As such, the guiding research question for this study is as follows:

> From the perspective of adult EAL learners, what are the perceived impacts of volunteering in the service learning experience of the Multicultural Café?

The Study

Research Setting

The setting for this study was a small nonprofit food service learning enterprise, called the Multicultural Café, at a regional college with approximately 1,800 students in the British Columbia interior. At the time of the study, the college offered first- and second-year university courses, adult upgrading, adult special education, business courses, trades, continuing studies, and an EAL learning program for newcomers called the English as a Second Language Settlement Assistance Program (ESLSAP). The idea for the Multicultural Café grew out of the ESLSAP offered at the research site. At the time of the study, the ESLSAP was a provincially funded tutor-based language and settlement support program designed for newcomers from linguistically diverse backgrounds living in rural areas of British Columbia. One of the goals of the ESLSAP was to help newcomers improve their English and workplace skills. Elements of intercultural competence were also taken up in the ESLSAP. The program was noncredit, it was offered at no cost to new immigrants, and it included free English practice groups. While a service learning experience was the idea of the local ESLSAP instructor and volunteer tutor coordinator, the Multicultural Café was separate from the ESLSAP program, and it was completely optional for learners.

In the year prior to the Multicultural Café's inception, the college campus had one year without food services, which negatively impacted the overall sense of community. As a result, the college was supportive when the EAL instructor (also the principal investigator of this study) approached with an idea for an alternate campus café delivery model, namely an experiential, working classroom for adult immigrant EAL learners. The goal of the café was to provide volunteers with a learning experience in which learners would use English to engage in various tasks for authentic purposes, such as responding to customer questions about the menu, while providing a valued service to the community. Volunteers would be invested to negotiate meaning and explore the language skills needed to effectively operate the café. The Multicultural Café was not a credit-bearing course and did not apply toward any formal academic credentials. The café provided coffees, teas, cookies, muffins, sandwiches, salads, and dishes from the volunteers' cultural and culinary backgrounds. The volunteers were responsible for all aspects of running the café, including earning their food safety certifications, preparing food, cooking, planning the menu and specials, ordering food and supplies, organizing, delegating, marketing, developing an opening and closing routine, handling the cash register, dealing with catering events, and problem solving. After an initial seven-month period preparing to open the café, the Multicultural Café opened from September to March (seven months) during the research study period. Café customers included college students and fac-

ulty from a variety of programs along with some members of the surrounding community. In addition to being open daily (Monday to Friday 8:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., closed holidays), the café also catered one or two events at the college each week. There were typically two volunteers on duty at any given time, with three to four volunteers being available during the mid-morning and lunch hour rushes. A half hour was typically spent before and after the opening times preparing and cleaning up. If volunteers were not able to take a shift, they notified the principal investigator so that other volunteers could be found to fill in.

Participants

The participants were all adult immigrants to Canada who were or had been enrolled in the college's EAL program (ESLSAP) and who volunteered to work at the Multicultural Café. Most of the participants were taking EAL classes at the same time as volunteering in the Multicultural Café. However, participation in the café was not required to take EAL classes, and vice versa. Volunteering at the café was similar to a noncredit elective in which participants had the opportunity to apply the general English language skills covered in their EAL courses. The EAL lessons in the ESLSAP did not directly relate to the café. Rather, the café was an additional opportunity to interact with the local community and engage in English language practice. Out of 12 possible participants who were consistent volunteers at the café, 10 agreed to take part in the study by completing the questionnaire. All 10 participants chose pseudonyms, which were used in reporting the findings of this study. Of the 10 participants who completed the questionnaire, 4 went on to complete an interview and take part in a focus group.

The participants came from six different places of origin representing six different first languages: Japan ($n = 4$), Switzerland ($n = 2$), Philippines ($n = 1$), Hong Kong ($n = 1$), Germany ($n = 1$), and Uzbekistan ($n = 1$). Participants had lived in Canada from 1 year to 30 years. The average time lived in Canada for all of the participants was about 9.5 years. There were nine female participants, and one male participant. In terms of age, two participants were between the ages of 19 and 29, three participants were between the ages of 40 and 49, and five participants were 50 years or older. Therefore, half of the participants were below the age 50 and half were above the age of 50.

Method

Case study research design (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2003) guided the researchers in their investigations related to the research question. In particular, this approach was suited for examining a phenomenon such as service learning within a specific context such as the Multicultural Café (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The case study research design encompassed a qualitative approach to data collection and analysis (Mills & Gay, 2016). Once appropriate review and

approvals were obtained from the relevant institutional behavioural research ethics boards for the principal and co-researchers, data collection consisted of a paper-and-pencil questionnaire, semistructured interviews, and a focus group (see Appendix). The questionnaire gathered demographic information, data on the participants' experiences, and perceptions of the impact the Multicultural Café had on their English language learning. The semistructured interviews further explored participants' experiences and perceptions of the impacts the Multicultural Café had on their language learning. The focus group offered an opportunity for participants to explore together their shared experiences and perceptions.

Data from the questionnaires, interviews, and focus group were transcribed, coded, and analyzed for emerging themes (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012) related to the perceived impacts of volunteering in the Multicultural Café. The aim was to understand participants' lived experiences related to the café (Creswell, 2013). In reporting the data, representative quotes were used to illustrate the themes emerging from the analysis, with the participant responses woven together in a composite approach (Plews & Zhao, 2010) to bring the themes to life with the voices of the participants. Please note that the data were transcribed using the precise words of the participants; therefore, the participants' use of nonstandard English was not changed when quoting their words so as to avoid appropriating their voices.

The principal investigator was the creator and facilitator of the service learning Multicultural Café site and the EAL teacher for all of the participants. However, during the data analysis process, efforts were maintained not to impose predetermined themes on the data. Furthermore, the codes and emerging themes were checked by the co-investigator in order to verify the findings. The overall goal of the analysis was to employ a qualitative approach that described the lived experiences of the participants through the data rather than imposing interpretations of preconceived ideas on the data (Giorgi, 2012; Groenewald, 2004).

Results

One of the most evident impacts of the Multicultural Café service learning experience to emerge from the data was the opportunities it afforded for interactions between the participants and their customers as well as between the participants themselves.

Interactions with Customers

Interacting with customers was a major theme arising in the data. Ming wrote in her questionnaire, "I can talk to people," and Kaori said during her interview, "I enjoyed to talk to customers because I have never experienced talking to Canadians in English—very good experience for me." Miram stated in the focus group that the conversations with customers were valued for their

breadth, depth, and lack of boundaries for, according to Miram, in the café volunteers talked to "different person, about different subjects … in the café you talk about everything."

It was not just having the actual conversations with the customers that many of the participants valued, but with whom they were conversing. For example, Nobuo wrote, "I had a chance to meet a variety of new people at the café," and Tala said that at the café you can talk to "different persons." The new and different customers Nobuo enjoyed conversing with were from different age groups, as evidenced in his comment, "I was really enjoying talking to the different generations, 'cause my business the same age kind of thing, but I never talk to students and teens. That was interesting!" For Fumiko the "who" was labeled as "strangers" and she wrote, "As a person who felt more comfortable being her own company, it was a good experience interacting with strangers. I am glad I did it." For some participants the "who" was labelled as friends. Miram said that she "can make friends [and] practice English." Tala stated that she "get a lot of friends," and Mia wrote, "The friendship I made at the café will last for good." These new and different persons included members of the wider community, the college staff, and students who both patronized the café and helped support and promote the service learning concept of the café. Kaori encapsulated this when she said:

> I met many Canadians, local people … Many people helped us like the Gathering Place [the college's Aboriginal reception room], the First Nation people, they help us a lot, but experience we return in a good way that is a good experience in our new Canadian life.

Customers as Teachers

Part of the theme of customer interaction was related to what the participants were learning from their customers. The references went beyond the ability to talk with customers to the notion that the customers were like teachers from whom the participants were able to learn. The customers taught Tala about different outlooks: "I learn different people, different attitude." Kaori improved her ability to explain: "I improved my English better than before. For example, customers ask us 'Please explain about menu,' and so I tried to explain them ingredients, like how to make this." Nobuo learned about idioms from the customers:

> There are many ways to say the same thing, so it's really interesting. I talk to the customer and what say I can't recall what it is something like "in a flash," or "in a second," those are interesting because some of them I never heard of it.

Miram talked about learning contextual social politeness when interacting with customers: "I have learned to say, 'Yes, please, thank you.' Before if someone said thank you I wouldn't say anything. Now I still sometimes

forget, but at least I know that I have to say, 'you're welcome'." Miram also said, "I think I have learned to understand young people's speaking quickly." Mia added to the idea that the customers are teachers when she wrote, "Take orders, make conversation with customers, listen to their real English and beautiful pronunciation helped me a lot learn English." Finally, Kaori summarized the idea that the customers were teachers when she told the focus group, "In the café customers teach us … They taught us many things like Canadian culture, Canadian food, daily news, lots of new things."

The customers not only taught the café volunteers about social norms, but most seemed to do so with kindness, patience, and understanding. Nobuo told the focus group that "the good part is that they know we are ESL [English as a second language] because the sign says 'Multicultural Café,' and how they're kind almost 99% of the customers are kind, patient." The other three focus group members verbally agreed with Nobuo's statement once he completed his thought. Fumiko, who did not join the focus group, wrote on her questionnaire, "In general our customers were friendly, and many of them understanding and patient with us," which corroborated the focus group's conclusion that the customers were sympathetic interlocutors.

Reciprocal Benefits

The connection the participants had with the café customers could be seen in their reciprocally beneficial relationships. Kaori said, "I enjoyed cooking my favourites for customers," and Ming wrote, "I was very happy when I heard 'it tastes good!'" Karin and Ada both enjoyed "sharing time with nice people." Nobuo connected his happiness to the happiness of his customers when he said:

> The café was a nice place to gather for people in the college. I liked to see that they are drinking a cup of coffee or tea while sitting the tables with friends. They are smiling when I serve them a coffee or tea. It made me happy that I gave them happiness. Thank you for giving me the great opportunity to serve at the café.

Finally, Kaori poignantly summarized the reciprocal beneficial relationship between the participants, their customers, and others associated with the café when she said:

> I volunteered at the café. I go outside I got energy from other people and so if I a little bit depressed, but I go out and speak another person, my friend, or coworker, and so just speaking in English they make me happy, not depressed.

Challenges with Customers

Within the theme of interacting with customers, it was evident that working with customers was not always easy. There were several challenges

mentioned by the participants. For example, Nobuo worried about finding menu items that would strike a chord with their customers' palate. Tala was concerned about "not understand other peoples' English." Jan was nervous answering the phone. Karin was challenged "to speak—explain with the customer," and Fumiko worried about the customers' reaction when she told them that what they wanted was sold out. Miram further noted a challenge about the speed of speech when interacting with customers and the speed needed to comprehend what customers were saying.

The participants took their role volunteering and representing the café and themselves earnestly and rose to the challenges the café and its customers put forth. Nobuo captured this when he stated,

> but at the café there is a customer there. It is serious business … If there is a complaint with the customer we have to do something. We can think about it as much as possible. We want him to come back every day.

The cash register also posed challenges in relation to interacting with customers. In the beginning, Kaori wrote that it was a challenge for her "to use the cashier register accurately and quickly." Tala responded that the "cash register I am always scared." Miram said that she had "made lots of mistakes … When I worked as a cashier, there were some moments when people asked very quickly. I had to ask, 'What do you mean?'" Nobuo, Kaori, and Tala all agreed with Miram when she said in the focus group that "you have to be quick in English and quick to understand, especially when there is lots of people waiting in line." However, despite the initial anxiety of working both the technical and social aspects of the cash register, many participants felt they eventually mastered both aspects of the machine. Miram summarized these thoughts on the cash register: "I think it is a good place for people who are not confident because they are forced, especially for people working the cashier because they are force to be friendly and to be talkative."

The cash register positioned the participants in a space to "be forced," as Miram described it, to interact with customers in English "accurately and quickly," using Kaori's words, and this social and technical challenge played a role in the lived experiences of the participants during their time as volunteers for the Multicultural Café.

Interactions with Volunteer Coworkers

In addition to interacting with customers, another social network that participants had access to were the other adult immigrants EAL learners who volunteered to work in the café, with interactions between the volunteer coworkers emerging as a second major theme in the data. Mia wrote that the benefits of working in the café included getting to know the other volunteers: "the friendship I made at the café will last for good!!" Miram also socialized with

coworkers outside of the café as a result of volunteering: "because of working in the café I visited many houses. I was invited to many places because of my connection to the café with coworkers and staff."

Within the overall theme of interacting with fellow café volunteers was the idea that the café was a safe place for the participants. Over the Multicultural Café counter, the customers seemed to have played an important role for the participants; however, behind the Multicultural Café counter was, as Nobuo termed it, "café world," and Kaori compared it to a "family working together." The café was a space and a place where the fellow coworkers connected and negotiated meaningful relationships through the medium of English. Volunteering together with a person who is experiencing a similar life trajectory seemed to have made a positive impact on the participants. This was expressed by Mia:

> If all the coworkers were Canadian people it would be hard to work at the café because they all know perfect English and I would think that I have to catch up with them, feel more nervous. Even though workers are ESL people, customers are Canadian people. That was good for me.

Miram supported Mia's statement when she said:

> Also I think that because it is a Multicultural Café, all of us are immigrants and it help us understand each other, and to accept, and be patient because we know we are going through the same problems and we understand each other.

Tala noted some of the positive impacts for herself: "I developed my English skills through the help of my coworkers and customers of the café. It helped me to develop my confidence by talking and mingling with them." As Tala wrote about how coworkers helped her develop her confidence, she delved deeper into this experience by sharing that "the café helped me to regain my trust in people after my bad experience from my previous job."

Jan shared how working alongside other volunteers affected her when she wrote, "referring to speaking because your coworkers are also English speaking learners. It is easier to overcome your fear to speak up." Jan continued about the benefits of working in the café, which included "shar[ing] with other immigrants his/her own experiences about learning English and living in Canada." Karin and Ada both noted that "sharing" was an important aspect of working with other volunteers.

Working with the volunteers brought out other emotions as well. Miram mentioned a playfulness: "I like the times when we just have fun and laugh in the back." Tala noted a feeling of support: "There is a time in the café I talked my problems to [the principal investigator, who was seen as a fellow coworker] and I cried," to which Miram added, "and I cried too." This emotional support was felt by Kaori too: "If I a little bit depressed, but I go out

and speak to another person, my friend, or coworker, and so just speaking English they make me happy, not depressed."

Learning from Each Other

In the first theme related to customer interactions, the idea of customers as teachers and learning from others was highlighted. Similarly, in the second theme related to volunteer interactions, volunteers as teachers and learning from others was also highlighted. This notion of sharing and learning from others' experiences and ideas was reflected in the sharing and teaching of their knowledge and skills taking place between volunteer coworkers. Kaori spoke to this concept of coworkers as teachers:

> I learned about share and teamwork. Share because I learned how to make coffee or how to make latte from instructor, and I shared with other people, new volunteer person how to make or how to do something.

Miram said that she "learned to work with people from different cultures." Tala noted that by volunteering you "get a lot of friends, get to know about different cultures, and learn something new from them." In conjunction with working with people from different cultures, the volunteers were learning to understand different accents, and Nobuo said that "one thing I noticed is accents, but after a while inside the café we talk, chat, so it's more easy for me to understand." Miram learned about self-acceptance and career clarification as she compared herself to other café volunteers:

> I also understood that I can't do physical job … It made my purpose stronger that I have to apply in university … I am not that person because one day, two hours was exhausting for me. So I just could look at Fumiko, and she was never tired, and I said, 'Oh, my God,' and Kaori, so I guess maybe I am different and that is OK.

Challenges Working with Volunteer Coworkers

Within the theme of learning from the fellow Multicultural Café volunteers is the challenge of how to learn to negotiate differences. Nobou said that working with other volunteers was a challenge at times because "same words, but different meaning received." Ming reiterated this problem that it was sometimes difficult "to understanding other people's English." Mia wrote that the "volunteer staffs were from all over the world, each one has their own style and opinions, so it was often hard to understand each other." Jan gave an example that it was a challenge "to explain the proper use of the tools to the coworkers and to discuss ideas about how to do a sandwich, or how to manage problems." Fumiko further illustrated some of the challenges encountered while working with other volunteers:

> This is something that I observed: Sometimes words or demeanour is taken the wrong way because neither one of them were willing to talk to the other person to correct the misunderstanding. It left uncomfortable feeling for the rest of the working days. I suppose getting through to a person who does not speak you mother tongue can be difficult sometimes.

Thus, as Nobuo articulated, it is hard to "maintain good relationships with coworkers," and Kaori concurred that it was sometimes a challenge "to make good relationship with the coworker."

Despite these communication challenges, personal meaning could be successfully negotiated, as evidenced in Miram's experience:

> I learned that I have to be respectful because I had a little conflict with [a coworker] and I was really angry at her, but I was going to tell it to you [principal investigator], but then I told [another coworker]. Because I shared it with her then I looked differently at her [the coworker with the conflict], and I thought maybe she is lonely, so I tried to understand her. So I thought I have to learn to understand people … I have learned that if you are nice to other people the answer is a nice answer because I build up my relationship with [the coworker in conflict] after the accident.

Nobuo also found a positive outcome, a sense of trust, as a result of negotiating coworker conflict: "I had some difficulties to deal with, of course, but mainly I believe in the people who became the volunteers. They wants to help … They think a different way to make it work."

Differences Between Traditional Classroom Settings and the Multicultural Café

Participants also commented on the differences between traditional language learning in a classroom and learning English through the Multicultural Café. For example, Kaori stated that the traditional classroom was a "very good study in English grammar"; she added, however, that the café learning went beyond grammar because "daily customers is teacher they taught us many things like Canadian culture, Canadian food, daily news, lots of new things." Also, Nobuo noticed that in the traditional class he studied a more formal English, as opposed to in the café where a more colloquial English such as "something like 'in a flash' or 'in a second,' those are interesting because some of them I never heard of it."

Miram further elucidated the difference between the classroom and the café by stating, "In the classroom teacher speak more academic stuff … here [the café] is a more different language … different subjects … we talk about everything." The idea of difference was also expressed in Tala's answer: "In the classroom because the same students, but in the café different kind of

people every day. I learn English in a working in a café because you can communicate to different kind of people."

Nobuo brought up another interesting idea about the difference between the investment learners may have in the classroom contrasted with the investment they may have in the café when he said, "I shouldn't say this, but at the class sometimes I don't need to listen too carefully, but this [café] I have to have all ears."

Also discussed was the notion that the traditional class is more formal and not an appropriate place to display emotions, whereas in the café they were able to express a fuller range of emotions. This was evidenced in a conversation between Tala and Miram:

Miram: In the class we have to do assignments, homeworks, and even more. In the café you can make jokes and you don't have a strict teacher.

Tala: There is a time in the café I talk my problems to [the principal investigator and their instructor] and I cried.

Miram: And I cried!

Tala: You too and I remember!

Miram: In the class you can't do that; you have to be tough.

It seems some of the participants believed that a traditional classroom followed a formal structure that emphasized grammar; it may have been disengaging for learners like Nobuo. In contrast, learning in the Multicultural Café had the potential to be less structured and more open to emotionality. The participants may have even seen it as a more engaging place to invest their learning time and energy.

Discussion

Interacting with Customers

The Multicultural Café customers seemed to have played a significant role in the participants' service learning experience. As the participants continued to invest themselves in service learning at the Multicultural Café and accumulate social and cultural capital, the customer-participant connection appeared to become a powerful and significant relationship. The relationship with the customers may have signified entry into a community of practice by legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Lave and Wenger (1991) have stated that it is critical for newcomers not to be sequestered from community activities, which contain vital sympathetic interlocutors, such as the customers in the current study. The Multicultural Café became a place in which "an activity-based curriculum language would 'surround' the learner

in all its richness and complexity … by providing opportunities for interaction and collaboration with peers [or customers]" (van Lier, 2004, p. 92). Surrounding or situating the participants with authentic customer interaction is aimed "not to learn from talk as a substitute for legitimate peripheral participation; it is to learn to talk as a key to legitimate peripheral participation" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, pp. 108–109).

Being surrounded by the customer interactions in a community of practice that is different from a traditional classroom setting does not allow one to assume that the linguistic exchanges are smooth and effortless. Rather it means that these participants were starting to become well versed in negotiating meaning with customers to solve communicative challenges. Because the participants were invested (Norton, 2000) in their role of volunteering and representing the café and themselves, they appeared to rise to the challenge of negotiating meaning with the customers. Long (1996) posited that in order to learn a language there needs to be a modified interaction. Long and Porter (1985) argued that "learners must be put in a position of being able to negotiate the new input, thereby ensuring that the language in which it is heard is modified to exactly the level of comprehensibility they can manage" (p. 214). Long (1996) and Norton (2000) both have proposed that language learners need to be invested to able to interact to negotiate meaning that is mutually comprehensible, and the data appear to affirm this stance. Thus, when the participants were challenged to understand the customers, or conversely be understood by the customers, they negotiated for meaning, which is viewed by Long (1996) as an authentic and optimal method to acquire language; according to Canagarajah (1999), this type of interaction allowed the participants to use English to empower their own agendas.

Interacting with Volunteer Coworkers

The participants' coworkers, who were fellow Multicultural Café volunteers, also seemed to play a major role in the participants' perceived impacts of being a part of a service learning venture. The coworkers were all adult immigrants who spoke EAL. Even though most of the coworkers immigrated from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, they shared a common bond (Putnam, 2001), mostly surrounding the feeling of being the "other" outside of the mainstream cultures (Jensen, 2011; Lister, 2004). Volunteering alongside someone who was experiencing similar life challenges appeared to make a positive impact on the participants.

Because the learning orientation was both reciprocal and multidirectional, the participants entered a community of practice represented by a two-way street metaphor (Grabois, 2008). The metaphors of a two-way street (Grabois, 2008), world, and family, as they related to the coworker community of practice, signified the value placed on interconnectedness and multidimensionality in the coworkers' community of practice. In the coworker community of

practice, the participants moved away from being in legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) toward one of "legitimate peripheral contribution" (Grabois, 2008, p. 393). In legitimate peripheral contribution, learning is a "mutual movement between complementary communities[, and] expertise … is distributed differently among diverse groups, thereby radically changing the conceptions of knowledge and power" (pp. 384–385). Grabois (2008) highlighted the importance of learners contributing to a mutually dynamic and emerging community that develops within service learning opportunities rather than seeking participation in an existing community.

When the participants entered their coworker-centred community of contribution, they appeared to be acquiring a form of social capital that Putnam (2001) has called bonding or exclusive social capital. According to Putnam, bonding capital is a figurative "sociological superglue" (p. 23), as it is useful for specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity. Therefore, behind the Multicultural Café counter the social capital being accumulated represented the coworkers' empathetic interlocutor relationship with one another.

Within the coworker community of contribution, the participants' connection with their coworkers manifested as a novice-novice relationship. This novice-novice relationship was not originally recognized as a valuable language learning resource; recently, however, the novice-novice connection has been appreciated for its language acquisition potential (Lightbown & Spada, 2013; van Lier, 2004). This was also recognized in this study. The voices of the participants' lived Multicultural Café experiences seemed to support the importance of using, learning, and practicing language with peers who were empathetic interlocutors, while they actively engaged in a community of practice.

Volunteering with people who are experiencing a similar life path can make a positive impact on the participants in their coworker community of contribution. As Grabois (2008) has asserted, "expertise … is distributed differently among diverse groups, thereby radically changing the conceptions of knowledge and power" (pp. 384–385). Consistent with Grabois's ideas, participants were considered experts in some fields and novices in other fields. This was highlighted in the initial organization of the Multicultural Café when the volunteers were given the freedom to implement their collectively negotiated vision of the service learning platform. Rather than assigning random roles in the café, each volunteer autonomously found their own role according to their expertise, knowledge, and time available to volunteer. Thus lay the foundation for learner investment (Norton, 2000) and learner empowerment (Grabois, 2008).

However, embedded in this community of contribution was a need to negotiate differences (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004) regarding opinions, styles, and ideas. This was a challenge noted by many participants. Nevertheless, these participants were invested in the service learning process, and with the distribution of expertise altering the conceptions of power and knowl-

edge (Grabois, 2008), they exercised agency to persist and negotiate their differences. The result of the participants applying their agency to persist in negotiating differences was that they secured affective and personal benefits (Felten & Clayton, 2011).

Overall, participants typically perceived that working and interacting with other volunteers, who mirrored themselves as immigrants and speakers of EAL, was a valued experience in which they learned from and supported one another. Even though negotiating meaning presented a challenge at times, overall the references to trust, respect, teamwork, support, friendship, and lessons learned tended to supersede these challenges in negotiations.

Conclusion

This study highlights an alternative method for concurrently fostering social and linguistic skills beneficial for newcomers to Canada from linguistically diverse backgrounds. It also challenges conventional practices related to confining newcomers learning English to the traditional classroom. Service learning may be a creative method of meeting the need to support newcomers learning EAL while functioning as equally valued members of their communities both personally and professionally (Felten & Clayton, 2011; Grabois, 2008; van Lier, 2008).

One of the major impacts of the Multicultural Café was the exciting opportunity for interactions between adult immigrant English language learners and their customers as well as amongst each other. It appears that the service learning platform enhanced the participants' valued interactions within the college community, which is a key to language learning (Duff, 2007; Long, 1996; Norton, 2000). Immigrants to Canada who speak EAL are often sequestered for a relatively short period of time in government-sponsored classrooms and expected to learn all the linguistic skills as well as the social and cultural knowledge needed to integrate into their community (Derwing & Waugh, 2012; Fleming, 2007). Incorporating experiences such as the Multicultural Café may be a way for learners to break out of that sequestration and engage with the wider community where newcomers will have access to the language, cultural, and social knowledge that support integration into a new community. Service learning possibly provides a complementary setting to the classroom in which the teaching contexts are less formal, have less teacher involvement, and are more open to the community (Taylor, 2007). Language learning services for adult immigrants should consider including access to service learning opportunities so that newcomers can use their English to critically engage in and foster transactive and transformative discursive relationships within their communities of contribution and practice.

In smaller population centres, such as the research site for the current study, finding paid job placements for EAL learners can be challenging, and internships are rare. However, service learning opportunities such as the Mul-

ticultural Café can become stepping stones to remunerative employment. In follow-up conversations with the participants, it was found that some of them felt they found paid positions after their café experiences in part because of those experiences. During the study, it was found that some participants felt having an optional volunteer opportunity such as the Multicultural Café before seeking paid work offered them a chance to practice working in Canada, and, as Jan stated, "apply their skills and knowledge and get more secure in their language skills." For Miram, the café was a good place for people who are not confident because they are "forced … to be friendly and to be talkative after … I don't need to be afraid anymore of people of Canadians. So I think that is good for new immigrants that is a good chance."

Finally, the café offered participants more freedom and control than they might have had with entry-level paid employment in Canada. The Multicultural Café was the product of the participants' collective visions. All ideas—from the colour of the café's walls to the food being served—were heard, accepted, and often put into place by either the principal investigator, other volunteers, or the college representatives. Along these lines, Kaori noted that she enjoyed the freedom to decide the "menu for the customers." Ming also reported that the freedom to create a menu was important: "It is good to work in a café because it's a friendly environment and workers can improvise and make their own meal, unlike McDonald's where workers can't do it." Both Jan and Miram appreciated the freedom of "only working for a few hours" each week, so that each could pursue other schooling at the college. Also, Miram appreciated the freedom to volunteer according to her own physical limitations: "I worked at the beginning, I worked three hours, but then three hours was too much for me, then I decided to work two hours." Because of the volunteer nature of the café and the control that participants had over their participation, it became a valuable experience for them.

On a practical level, the findings from this study point to some suggestions for integrating elements of service learning into EAL learning experiences. First of all, the apparent success of the service learning venture in the current study may have been related to the fact that the café was serving an actual need in the community: the college in which the experience took place was lacking in food services at the time. Obtaining support from administration was also a contributing factor to putting together the service learning experience. The café was fully supported (including financially) by the community college for the duration of the project. However, finding sustainable funding was a challenge, and base funding to continue the café on an annual basis was not available. An annual base funding commitment from the host institution should go hand in hand with the institution's commitment to service learning ventures. It also would have also been beneficial to have obtained funding to create some paid positions in the café to supplement participants' volunteer experiences. For other organizations looking to put a similar project in place, it is highly recommended that there be one person dedicated to the overall

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service learning coordination. This person needs to be an advocate for service learning within the host institution who can contribute to providing administration with the information they need to make informed policy decisions related to service learning projects. Along with having a dedicated coordinator, the service learning experience should be optional for learners and perceived as a valuable use of their time. The service learning venture should be one in which learners feel they can contribute, grow, and have agency over their roles in order to make the experience meaningful. Finally, putting together an experience such as the Multicultural Café may involve considerably more time planning and implementing than would a more traditional classroom experience. It may be that the service learning option works best when it fully resonates with a practitioner's philosophy and values. However, when the elements do come together to create an experience such as the Multicultural Café, the potential exists to develop a robust, inclusive, positive, and diverse community that brings together newcomers to Canada from diverse linguistic backgrounds with the people around them.

Future Studies and Limitations

Further work needs to be done to explore the role of service learning for adult immigrant English language learners in the Canadian context. In particular, an examination of different kinds of service learning projects is called for, along with a study of how they are implemented and what their various outcomes may be. In studying how service learning projects are implemented, future studies could also focus on an examination of the logistical and operational barriers that may exist when setting up service learning projects for adult EAL learners. The current study focused the opportunities afforded through service learning for authentic interaction in the target language. Other studies might look at the impact of service learning experiences on participants' language proficiency, future job prospects, intercultural competence, or sense of belonging. Future studies might also incorporate quantitative research methods to explore the impact of service learning. For example, standardized English language testing could be administered before and after the experience to measure language growth. In the current study, the impact of the service learning experience on participants' additional language development was not measured due to the qualitative nature of the inquiry. This lack of language assessment limits the ability to interpret the impact of the service learning experience on English language development, and calls for future quantitative inquiry that includes measures of English language proficiency to further explore the relationship between service learning and additional language acquisition.

While providing a different range of language exposure than a traditional classroom setting, it is acknowledged that the sheltered nature of the Multicultural Café in a community college under the direction of a college instructor and coordinator might result in more positive interactions than are likely

in a less controlled setting. It is further recognized that a disadvantage of a nonrandom, convenience sample, as found in the current study, may be that it is "difficult to describe the population from which the sample was drawn and to whom results can be generalized" (Gay et al., 2012, p. 141). The smaller sample size and limited demographic data makes it difficult to relate the findings to specific factors and challenges other researchers seeking to carry out similar studies and compare findings, particularly to questions related to the relationship between service learning and language ability, age, concurrent classroom instruction, and length of residence in Canada. However, in the qualitative tradition, Gay et al. (2012) have pointed out that generalizing the findings to a larger population is not a typical characteristic of qualitative research. Rather, the goal of qualitative research is to gain an understanding of what occurred and why it may have happened for a particular set of participants. Furthermore, this study employed a self-reporting questionnaire, which may be subject to bias or distortion in the data. In addition, taking into account how power affects language, another possible limitation is that the principal investigator had a relationship as a teacher with all of the participants. While this relationship may enhance reliability, the relationship may be perceived as an imbalance of power held by the teacher/researcher and thus constraining or influencing the responses of the participants. Also, this study only included participants who were invested in the service learning research and did not address those adult immigrant English language learners who were not part of the service learning project or the study. Finally, because of the qualitative nature of this study, it is acknowledged that the conclusions of this research "will inevitably be situated and partial" (Norton & Toohey, 2011, p. 426), and the conclusions drawn are a few of many forged in the complex landscape of understanding human behaviour. Despite these limitations, it is hoped that the results of this study can be used to encourage discussion related to the efficacy of service learning for adult immigrant English language learners.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix
Multicultural Café Research Questionnaire

1. What is your first language (the language you first learned)?

2. What is your age range? Please circle: 19–29 30–39 40–49 50 +

3. How long have you lived in Canada?

4. What were your English skills *before* working in the café? Please circle:

	Beginner	Advanced Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced Intermediate	Advanced
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5

5. What were your English skills *after* working in the café? Please circle:

	Beginner	Advanced Beginner	Intermediate	Advanced Intermediate	Advanced
Reading	1	2	3	4	5
Writing	1	2	3	4	5
Listening	1	2	3	4	5
Speaking	1	2	3	4	5

6. Did the café help you to learn English? Please circle: Yes No
   (Please explain your answer to Question 6)

7. What were some challenges about working in the café?

8. What were some of the benefits about working in the café?

9. Would you tell a friend who is learning English to work in the café? Please circle: Yes No
   (Please explain your answer to Question 9)

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your time at the café?

Semistructured Interview Question Script

1. What did you learn about yourself when you were working in the café?

2. What did you learn about others when you were working in the café?

3. You may have learned some English in the café. Was learning in the café different than in your regular class? If yes, how?

4. Do you use English differently now after taking part in the café?

5. In the café, did you learn new things about Canada?

6. You may have learned some new skills and knowledge. Have you used any of these?

7. What can you do now after taking part in the café that you couldn't do before?

8. Has taking part in the café improved your English skills?

9. Now, do you use English in new places? Do you use English with new people?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences in the café?

Focus Group Question Script

1. What were some of your memorable moments at the café?

2. What were some of the challenges working in the café?

3. Do you think your English improved while working in the cafe?

4. Is learning English in the café and learning in a classroom the same?

5. Has this experience changed you in any way?

6. Would you recommend volunteering in the café to a friend?

7. What did you learn about Canadian culture in the café?

8. How would you improve the café?

9. Would you volunteer in the café again?

10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experiences?

TRACY RILEY & SCOTT ROY DOUGLAS