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2013

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Service-Learning: International Teachers' Perspectives

Jean O'Keefe * (**Georgia State University**); **Joseph Feinberg** (**Georgia State University**)

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Abstract: In this qualitative case study, we explored the knowledge and perceptions of service-learning held by a diverse group of 22 international teachers. Through focus group interviews, we found that the majority of participants desired to implement service-learning in their countries, and they supported the idea of mandatory service-learning. The results show that the majority of international teachers had no prior knowledge of service-learning before instruction in the United States. We highlight diverse interpretations and definitions of service-learning but also emphasize that service-learning design and implementation varies depending on the beliefs and goals of practitioners.

Key words: service-learning, mandatory service-learning, international teachers, global service learning

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Background

While advocates studying and researching the topic of service-learning argue that the field is growing in popularity (Billig & Waterman, 2001; Welch & Billig, 2004), our research study indicated that the concept remains vague and confusing. Billig (2011) states, 'Service learning is an educational approach that uses community service as a way of helping students master academic content' (p. 8). Breaking from the more traditional definition and integrating the social studies, Wade (2000) argues, 'Service learning should be about social change, not just filling a gap in services. It should be about questioning the conditions in society that create the need for service in the first place and seeking to alter those conditions' (p. 6). Similar to Wade, other advocates for service-learning distinguish between traditional service-learning and critical service-learning approaches geared towards social justice (see Kahne & Westheimer, 1999; Rosenberger, 2000). In this study, we explore the service-learning perceptions of 22 diverse international teachers and conclude they adopted a definition similar to Billig's noted above.

Pre-service teachers, students, and educators mistakenly believe service-learning is a synonym for community service. Unfortunately, community service can have a negative connotation when associated with court ordered community service required for legal violations. Moreover, many educators question whether it is merely another fad or method advocated as the next best practice in education (see Evans, 2004), particularly in the social studies (Harkavy, 2004; Wade, 2000). Evans (2004) asserts 'The history of social studies is a story of turf wars among competing camps, each with its own leaders, philosophy, beliefs, and pedagogical practices' (p. 1). Wade (2000) and Harkavy (2004) believe service-learning as a pedagogical practice will enhance democratic society. Wade (2000) advocated that working towards social justice was an essential characteristic of being a democratic citizen. She asserted there were benefits even if students do not completely succeed, because the process of serving enhances the values, skills, and knowledge needed to function as effective democratic citizens. Harkavy (2004) emphasized that the service-learning process of engaging students in collaborative, action-oriented, reflective, and real-world problem solving is congruent to democratic ideals. Renner (2011), who researched service-learning for a longitudinal study in Jamaica, maintained that service-learning should go beyond charity work to instill a critical consciousness within students and the community. Renner further argued that a critical

consciousness will equip those involved in the service-learning projects with the tools necessary to battle social injustices within society.

Researchers are still developing the purposes and processes of service-learning at the national and international levels, but teachers inevitably control the fate of service-learning. Ultimately, teachers decide if they should incorporate service-learning into their classroom curriculum (Mintz & Abramovitz, 2004), although some of this curricular power is restricted by school district, government standards and/or community mandates (Hart, 2011). Therefore, teachers' knowledge and perceptions of service-learning must be examined if we desire to truly understand service-learning as a pedagogical tool to advance social justice.

We focused our service-learning research on a group of international teachers involved in a U.S. State Department sponsored exchange program called The Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA). Specifically, TEA is a program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State. More information about this program can be found on the IREX (International Research & Exchanges Board) website: 'IREX is an international nonprofit organization providing thought leadership and innovative programs to promote positive lasting change globally' ('About us,' n.d., para. 1). A large urban research university in the South received a TEA grant that enabled 22 secondary school teachers from diverse countries across the world to visit our campus and community in a six-week exchange program. The TEA program aims to further develop expertise in subject areas, enhance teaching skills, and increase knowledge about the United States. The participants in the TEA program participated in a service-learning workshops and it was imperative to learn how teachers in other countries were using service-learning. We were interested to learn if service-learning had democratic aims in other countries as well, especially within countries that did not support democratic values.

The countries represented by the TEA participants for this research study were Argentina (1), Cambodia (3), Columbia (2), Georgia (1), Honduras (2), Kazakhstan (4), Morocco (2), Nicaragua (2), Poland (2), and Uzbekistan (3). The international teachers participated in workshops and professional development at the university as well as local middle and secondary schools. They also attended metropolitan cultural events. One program of study the TEA participants were exposed to at the university level was a service-learning workshop with a definition of service-learning loosely adapted[1] from National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2013) as follows: 'Service-Learning is an organized, collaborative, reflective process that requires active participation, and must impact a community in a positive way with the goal of enhancing academics and citizenship'. We provided the preceding definition at the workshop to emphasize the academic connections and community partnerships embedded in service-learning.

In addition to the workshop at the university, the international teachers also participated in a service-learning experience. The teachers visited a high need urban elementary school for one Saturday to work with school leaders, parents, and teachers who were improving the physical aspects of the school. Some worked on painting murals, some worked in gardens, and others worked on the playgrounds. All the participants spoke favorably about the hands-on activity with their American colleagues to help improve learning environments. As teachers and professionals, the international teachers appeared to appreciate working with American educators and they valued the importance of serving to help create a visually appealing and safe environment for work and learning.

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[1]We created this loosely adapted definition of service-learning using information that is no longer available from National Service-Learning Clearinghouse.

We acknowledge that the participants had limited exposure to service-learning in practice due to the short duration of their stay and busy schedules.

The focus of our research was to learn what the participants perceived of service-learning before and after the workshop. Thus, we documented their pre- and post- workshop knowledge and experience with service-learning. In addition, we detailed their views of facilitating service-learning in their home countries K-12 educational settings with a focus on the content and application of mandatory service-learning. The specific interview questions are included in the methods section. We also examined whether the international teachers' various government systems showed any patterns regarding their perceptions of service-learning. The implications are discussed in the findings section and Table 1 is provided below as a summary of statistical country information gathered from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) World Fact Book.

Table 1. *Country Background Information (Country comparison is out of 227 countries)*

Countries	Government type	GDP per capita	Population below poverty line
Argentina	Republic	$17,700 country comparison: 69 2011 est.	30% note: data based on private estimate 2010
Cambodia	Multiple Democracy under a Constitutional Monarchy	$2,200 country comparison: 187 2011 est.	31% 2007 est.
Columbia	Republic; Executive Branch Dominates Government Structure	$10,400 country comparison: 109 2011 est.	37.2% 2010 est.
Georgia	Republic	$5,600 country comparison: 146 2010 est.	9.7% 2010 est.
Honduras	Democratic Constitutional Republic	$4,400 country comparison: 160 2011 est.	60% 2010 est.
Kazakhstan	Republic; Authoritarian Presidential Rule, with little power outside of the executive branch	$13,200 country comparison: 94 2011 est.	8.2% 2009 est.
Morocco	Constitutional Monarchy	$5,100 country comparison: 150 2011 est.	8.9% 2011 est.
Nicaragua	Republic	$3,200 country comparison: 171 2011 est.	46.2% 2005
Poland	Republic	$20,600 country comparison: 60 2011 est.	17% 2003 est.
Uzbekistan	Republic; Authoritarian Presidential Rule, with little power outside the executive branch	$3,300 country comparison: 169 2011 est.	26% 2008

Theoretical Framework

In order to examine the TEA participants' perceptions of service-learning, we chose an interpretive theoretical framework according to Patti Lather's research paradigms (2006). This unique study contributes to the field by enhancing and deepening the understanding and dialogue regarding international teachers' perceptions of service-learning. We argue that the theoretical framework supporting service-learning is dependent on the type or level of service-learning. Fertman, White, and White (1996) categorized service-learning into three areas of direct, indirect, and civic action. Feinberg (2004) summarized these areas of service-learning and provided examples of each shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. *Descriptions of Three Types of Service*

Area/Type of service	Explanation	Example
Direct	Server has personal contact with those being served	Visiting patients in nursing home
Indirect	Server channels resources or collects funds and/or goods for those being served	Organizing and participating in canned food drive
Civic action	Server actively works to eliminate or alleviate societal problem and inform the general public about the issue	Petitioning local government to fund homeless shelter and writing letters to the newspaper to promote public awareness

The theoretical framework behind an act of indirect service could be very different than an act of service involving civic action. Thus, the civic action approach provides greater opportunities to promote critical service-learning approach whereas the other two approaches qualify as traditional service-learning or simply community service depending on the extent they are connected to academic learning. In order to be clearly classified as service-learning, a service project must connect to a specific curriculum.

Many educators have undergone great efforts to distinguish between traditional service-learning and more critical service-learning approaches geared towards social justice (e.g., Mitchell, 2008; Wade, 2000; Hannah, Tinkler, & Miller, 2011). Critical service-learning (Mitchell, 2007) derives from critical pedagogy most often credited to Paulo Freire. Freire (1979) considers a critical pedagogy one that is liberating and humanizing and suggests a problem posing education model where students investigate societal problems: 'Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it . . . liberating education consists in acts of cognition, not transferals of information' (p. 79). Moreover, the foundation of critical pedagogy in education stems from critical theory (Adorno & Horkheimer, 1969). Service-learning is critical in orientation because it promotes a critical consciousness that transforms learning as students work with a community towards eliminating social injustice through civic engagement. Therefore, the theoretical framework behind service-learning itself is much more critical in orientation as it begins with critical inquiry. According to Michael Crotty (2003), critical inquiry questions power relationships in order to reveal hegemony and ultimately to take action for emancipation. We discuss in the findings section how the participants in this study did not necessarily understand the critical nature of service-learning. We note this could be because of the fact that service-learning was new for many and they only had limited exposure to service-learning in practice while visiting.

Methodology

In this qualitative case study (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009), we obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and conducted focus group interviews with 22 participants divided into five smaller groups containing three to six participants in each. We recorded and transcribed these semi-structured interviews for the purpose of analyzing them for common themes and discrepancies among answers (Richardson, 2006). All participants were encouraged to answer each question but were not obligated, and all individuals participated voluntarily with their names and identity protected by pseudonyms and codes. The questions were designed to reveal what the participants knew about service-learning in their home countries prior to their visit, what they liked and disliked about service-learning through the TEA program, and how they might implement service-learning when they returned home. The participants' perceptions of mandatory service learning were also compiled. Listed below are questions that we asked each group.

1. What did you know about service-learning prior to your visit here?
2. How does your country approach service-learning?
3. What did you learn about service-learning through the TEA program?
4. What do you like and dislike about service-learning?
5. Do you think service-learning changed your approach to teaching? If so, how?
6. What did you think of the service-learning experience through the TEA program (specifically the Saturday morning visit to the school)?
7. What are your thoughts about mandatory or required service-learning projects?

The responses were compiled into spreadsheets where each question was delineated by a row and a column delineated each participant. Both researchers reviewed the data separately looking for common themes among answers and then the researchers analyzed and cross-checked their findings together in order to discuss any discrepancies or varying perspectives on answers. Some answers were clearly explicit. For example, most participants transparently stated that they had no previous knowledge of service-learning and had never heard the term. Other answers were less distinguishable and required further analysis and discussion to reach a consensus. For example, a community service event described by participants would be evaluated to determine whether it qualified as a service-learning experience. We used the definition of service-learning supplied to the participants in their workshop as a guide in our decision making process: 'Service-Learning is an organized, collaborative, reflective process that requires active participation, and must impact a community in a positive way with the goal of enhancing academics and citizenship'. Some themes used in the analysis were: active, collaborative, community involvement, academic connection, and citizenship enhancement.

Dedoose computer assistive qualitative data analysis software (Sociocultural Research Consultants, 2013) was used to help us visualize our data analysis and some of those diagrams are located within the findings section. We used grounded theory methods to perform our data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). Charmaz, a constructive grounded theorist, explains, 'Coding distills data, sorts them, and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data' (2006, p. 3). We began the coding process with a form of open coding where we read the participants' answers to each question one by one and summarized what we thought each participant was saying. After reviewing all participants' answers to a single question, we would then review the notes to see if any patterns were emerging. We would then create codes based on these emerging patterns or categories and attach them where applicable to participants' answers/excerpts within Dedoose. Since we were

deciding which initial codes made the most analytic sense to categorize this data, we were conducting focused coding within Dedoose.

We also performed axial coding or the creation of subcategories from categories. Most of the participants answered the questions about prior knowledge with service-learning and whether service-learning should be mandatory and Dedoose automatically coded them by their question descriptor. However, we needed a more refined way to process what was happening within what the participants were saying about these topics. Dedoose allows the researcher to put weights onto codes so that he or she can set up subcategories within the category. We created legends or keys for these weights and assigned them specific numbers. The axial coding process really helped us when conducting analysis and drawing findings.

Findings

In this section, we synthesize the data to reveal the participants' previous knowledge of service-learning, beliefs surrounding the purposes of service-learning, desires to implement service-learning in their own classrooms, and opinions on the topic of mandatory service-learning. Please note that participants' gender is not revealed to protect the identity of the participants.

Prior Knowledge

The responses for all but one of the international teachers ranged from very limited knowledge of the concept to absolutely no knowledge prior to the program here in the United States. Thus, only one of the 18 participants, who responded to the question regarding prior knowledge of service-learning, claimed to know the concept and had prior experience before the workshop. A few participants had some previous knowledge of service-learning but did not know what it meant, and nine respondents confessed to confusing it with community service or comparable endeavors such as 'social service', 'public good', or simply,'helping others'. Connecting service to curriculum and learning was entirely new for many of the respondents. Billig (2011) noted that service-learning is sometimes confused with community service but reminds the reader that the only commonality between the two is the 'action' component. Service-learning is unique because the action is tied to curriculum and the action is continually reflected on throughout the six phases of service learning discussed by Billig (2011): investigation, planning, action, reflection, demonstration, and celebration. These findings expose a lack of knowledge relating to the concept of service-learning and provide justification for further professional development and increased exposure for international teacher education programs.

Figure 1 provides an example of the axial coding conducted during data analysis. We were able to create subcategories of 'no knowledge', 'some knowledge but confused', and 'had prior experience' for the category of 'prior knowledge' by creating weights for the code in Dedoose. Figure 2 shows that the average weight for the prior knowledge code was .64 on our scale from 0-2 justifying our claim that these international teachers had little knowledge/experience with the term service-learning. Figure 3 reveals a few excerpts from the participants' transcribed focus group interviews. While one teacher discussed previous work with service-learning, the others confessed that they were not familiar with the term before coming to the United States.

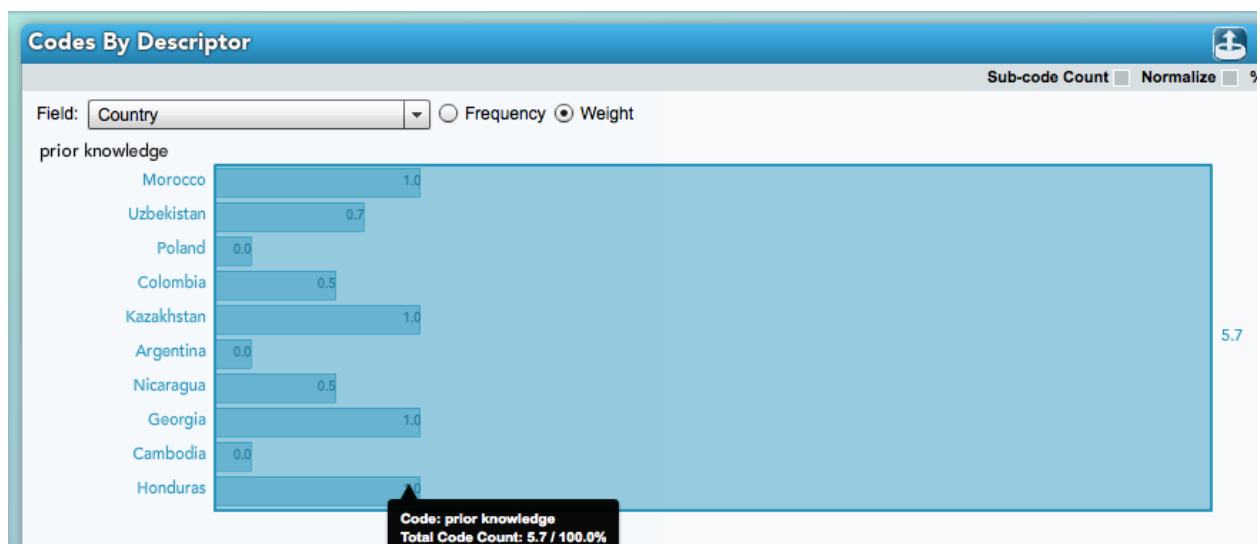*Figure 1.* Weight description for prior knowledge code

Figure 2. Prior knowledge of service-learning by country based on coded weight above (mean is .64)
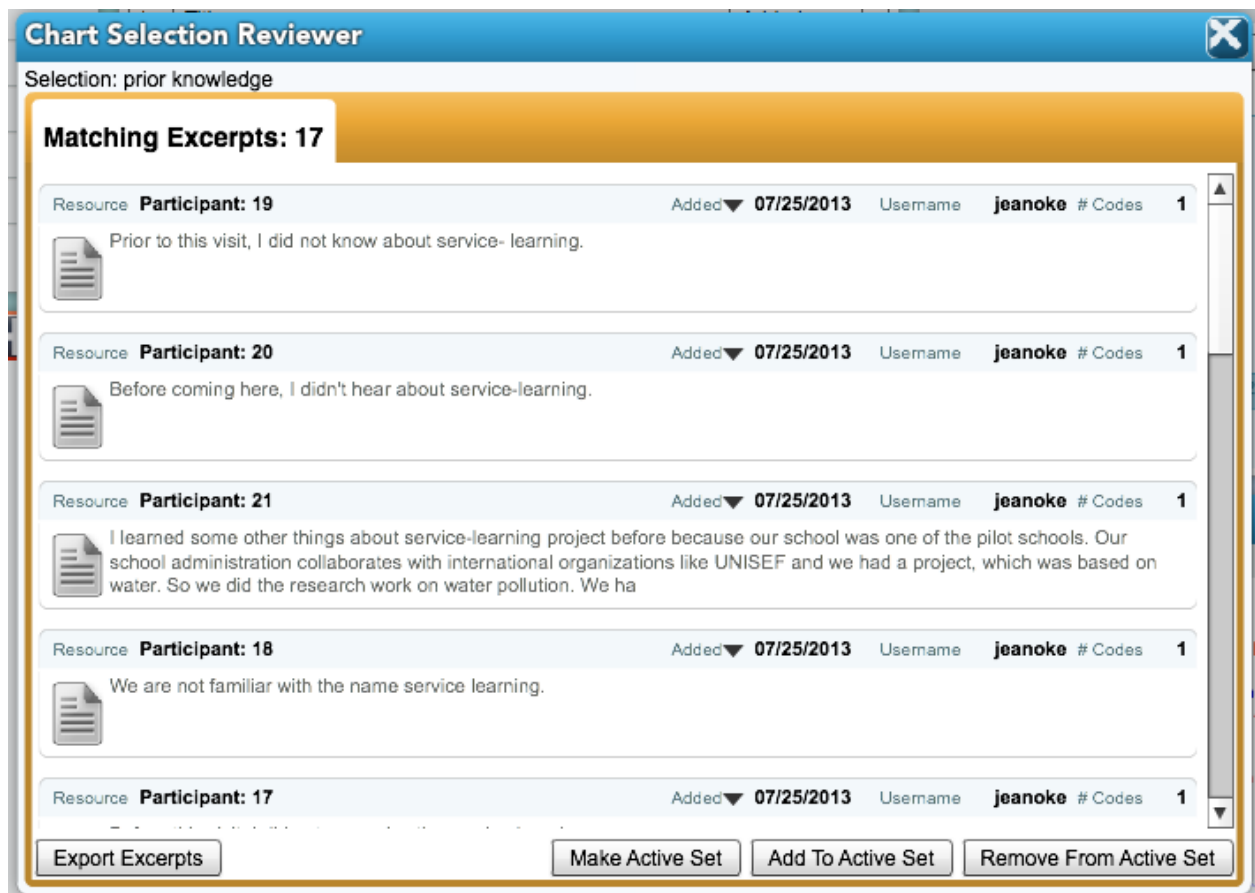
Figure 3. Excerpts from participants discussing prior knowledge

The one respondent who had prior experience explained that he participated in a pilot program at his school in Uzbekistan in which they collaborated on a water pollution project with the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF). It was interesting to learn that a participant from a country with an authoritarian government was the only one with service-learning experience and that Uzbekistan had collaborated with a world organization that has a purpose to 'overcome . . . poverty, violence, disease and discrimination' ('About UNICEF', 2012, para. 2). The Uzbekistan participant spoke very passionately and proudly about the improvements gained through service-learning to overcome the environmental issue. He explained how his students researched water pollution and collaborated with students from neighboring local schools on this project. This service qualifies as service-learning because it was connected to the science curriculum and several communities/schools. We would argue that this service-learning experience would be an example of the civic action approach and could be classified as critical service-learning because the students were actively working towards alleviating a societal problem: water pollution.

Purposes of Service-Learning

The international teachers' beliefs surrounding the purposes of service-learning were more difficult to discern. Questions relating to what they learned about service-learning from the program, what they liked and disliked about service-learning, and if service-learning had changed their approach to teaching were analyzed to evaluate how they perceived service-learning and its purpose(s). Overall, the results show these international teachers held positive opinions about service-learning. A

respondent from Morocco described it as beneficial and a respondent from Honduras claimed it was 'a great experience . . . we had fun'. We were pleased that the participants found the experience enjoyable but found it impossible to discern whether they saw the critical nature of the service from such casual statements. For example, another international teacher from Honduras exclaimed, 'it reminds me that I love teaching'. Whether these international teachers thought service-learning was a method or something with a specific purpose that would enhance democracy, as Harkavy (2004) desires, was not as distinguishable. We argue that most of the teachers did not understand the reciprocity of the endeavor as promoted by Gains-Hanks and Grayman-Simpson (2011) in which both the student and community benefit from the service-learning. The majority of the respondents discussed service-learning as a charitable act of helping others with many teachers noting the importance of helping those in need with the most popular being tutoring and school cleaning.

A few participants emphasized learning about an academic connection involved with service-learning as expressed by a Columbian participant: 'It [service-learning] is not like, ok let's just go help the community, and then you go and there is no learning. This is the most important thing I learned is to connect with pedagogy'. This quote shows promise that the participants were becoming aware of the difference between community service and service-learning through exposure at the workshop and service-learning experience. A participant from Honduras also discussed how he/she learned of the academic connection but noted the difficulty of implementation: 'I did know that it is important to help but now I am going back and I am going to try to make the connection of all the activities that we are doing in my institution and making the connection to academics. It is kind of hard.' Even when teachers understand the concept of service-learning, they also recognized the complexity of successful implementation.

Desire to Implement

The findings reveal that teachers overwhelmingly desired to implement service-learning and largely supported it being compulsory. A number of international teachers reported specific ways they planned to implement service-learning in their home countries that typically complemented their teaching expertise. An English language teacher from Georgia discussed having his/her students perform marketing skills in order to promote tourism and enhance the economy and overall quality of life for the people of their particular country. A science teacher from Nicaragua wanted to focus his/her efforts on environmental issues such as water pollution of major lakes in the country. Another English teacher from Kazakhstan spoke about how he/she would take his/her language arts classroom to the community by having students create bilingual signs for the markets. Similarly, another English teacher from Nicaragua described how academics would connect with service for his/her English language learners:

> For example, we now are going to learn songs in English and then we are going to visit a hospital where sick people are and we are going to sing to them in English and to service them in their sad moments. We are learning the content for a final task and they are going to service other people through this knowledge and I think this gives you more ideas about how to use your contents you are teaching to the students to do a task.

This English language teacher seems to embrace the Deweyian notion of learning through experience and thinks that service-learning will help students learn by doing. The overall enthusiasm for service-learning implementation is exemplified by this participant form Morocco: 'For sure service learning will change my approach, but I think it's going to be a plus for sure. And on my part, I decided that it is a must. I have to do it'.

Figure 4 provides an example of the axial coding conducted during data analysis. We were able to create subcategories of 'will not implement', 'will implement with some hesitations', and 'will implement with enthusiasm' for the category of 'classroom implementation' by creating weights for the code in Dedoose. Figure 5 shows that the average weight for the classroom implementation code was 1.65 on our scale from 0-2 justifying our claim that these international teachers strongly desire to implement service-learning. Figure 6 reveals a few excerpts from the participants' transcribed focus group interviews. These excerpts highlight the participants' positive feedback of their Saturday service-learning experience, their understanding that service is connected to academics in service-learning, and how they would like to use service-learning in their home countries.
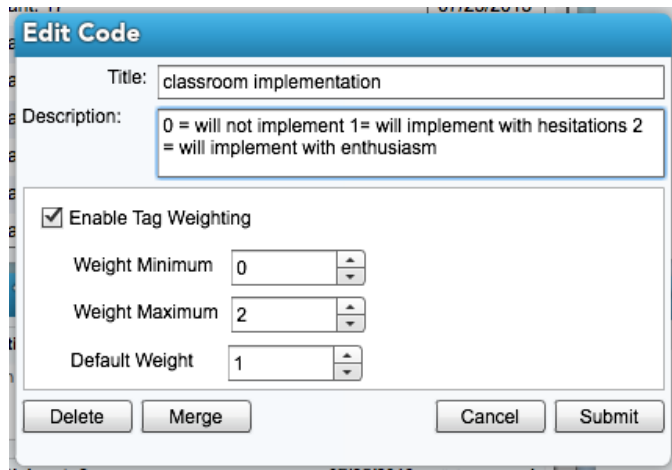

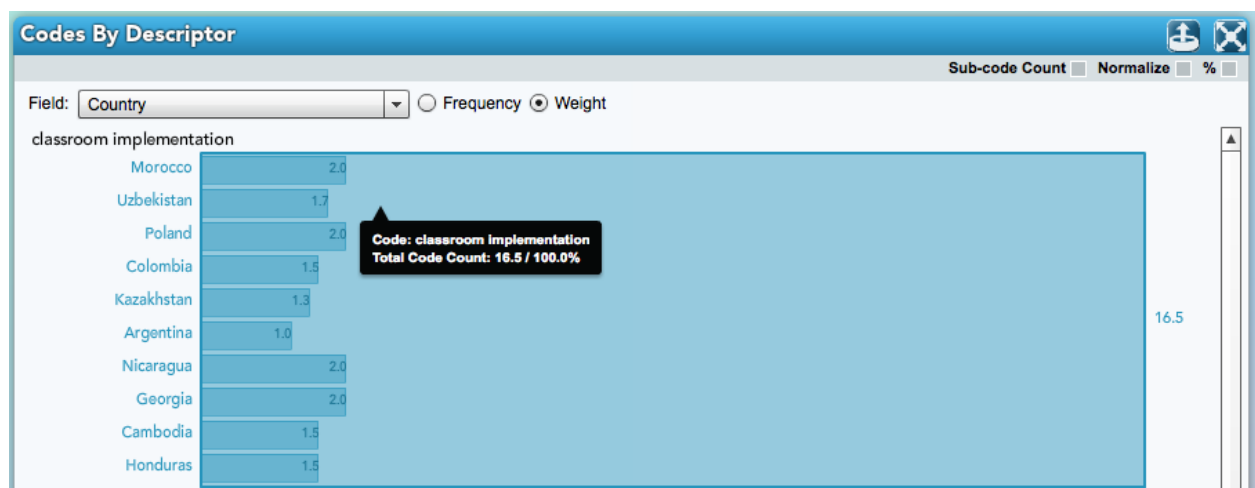*Figure 4*. Weight description for classroom implementation code

Figure 5. Classroom implementation by country based on coded weight above (mean is 1.65)

Figure 6. Excerpts from participants discussing classroom implementation

Mandatory Service-Learning

According to research by Metz and Youniss (2005), requiring or mandating service-learning did not negatively impact those predisposed to volunteer. More importantly, when those less inclined to volunteer were required or mandated to serve, they were more likely to participate in future voting and civic activities. In Metz and Youniss' study, the researchers had one cohort who did not participate (n = 174) and two cohorts who served 40 hours in 12th grade (n = 312). The two participating cohorts were divided among those who volunteered and those who were mandated. This research shows how required service-learning increases civic engagement and knowledge for students not inclined to volunteer.

In our study, about two-thirds (n = 13) of the teacher respondents, who answered the mandatory service-learning question, supported the implementation of mandatory service-learning. Of the 18 participants who responded, only 6 (33%) stated that they did not think service-learning should be mandatory. Moreover, five of these six respondents who opposed mandatory service-learning were from countries with authoritarian governments. There were a total of 12 participants from authoritarian governments in the study. Thus, we observed an interesting paradox where teachers who are intimately familiar with government mandates would clearly voice opposition to mandating service-learning.

It is important to note that one of the focus groups requested a definition for the word mandatory when we asked the question. The interviewer explained, 'mandatory meant that service-learning would be required in school' and 'children would be obligated to participate in service-learning.' Thus, there was some confusion over the term for some of the international teacher participants with limited English language. Coincidentally, none of the five participants who were from authoritarian governments and opposed mandatory service-learning were in the particular group that requested the definition for mandatory.

Of the six respondents who opposed mandatory service-learning, five of them stated in a previous answer that they desired to implement service-learning when they returned home. Thus, these particular international teachers supported and planned to implement service-learning but did not support requiring it for everyone. Moreover, six of the international teachers discussed the difficulties they would encounter because their colleagues at home would be resistant to implementation of service-learning due to lack of time and training. Service-learning requires extraordinary levels of preparation from teachers (Wade, 2000) so the reservations expressed by the international teachers are natural and expected. However, the teachers' declaration and resolve to try service-learning in their own classrooms despite the resistance they expected to face by colleagues and administration was noteworthy. These teachers could potentially encourage other teachers to take part in their service-learning programs in order to help them understand the process. Mintz and Abramovitz (2004) showed a statistically significant correlation between service-learning recruitment and actual project implementation. Of the 169 teachers they surveyed, 50.9% actually implemented a service-learning project, and 75.7% assisted a colleague with a service-learning project (Mintz & Abramovitz, 2004). Therefore, teachers who practiced service-learning positively influenced the participation of their colleagues and consequently the growth of service-learning.

Figure 7 provides an example of the axial coding conducted during data analysis. We were able to create subcategories of 'no' and 'yes' for the category of 'mandatory service-learning' by creating weights for the code in Dedoose. Figure 8 shows that the average weight for the mandatory service-learning code was .70 on our scale from 0-1 justifying our claim that these international teachers mostly approved of mandatory service-learning. Figure 9 reveals a few excerpts from the participants transcribed focus group interviews. The first two participants emphasize students exposed to mandatory service-learning would eventually realize its benefits and be happy about their involvement where as the last participant counters saying that students will only benefit if it something they want to do and that service-learning cannot be forced. The last participant discusses the service as an act of kindness through the example of the movie *Pay it Forward*.
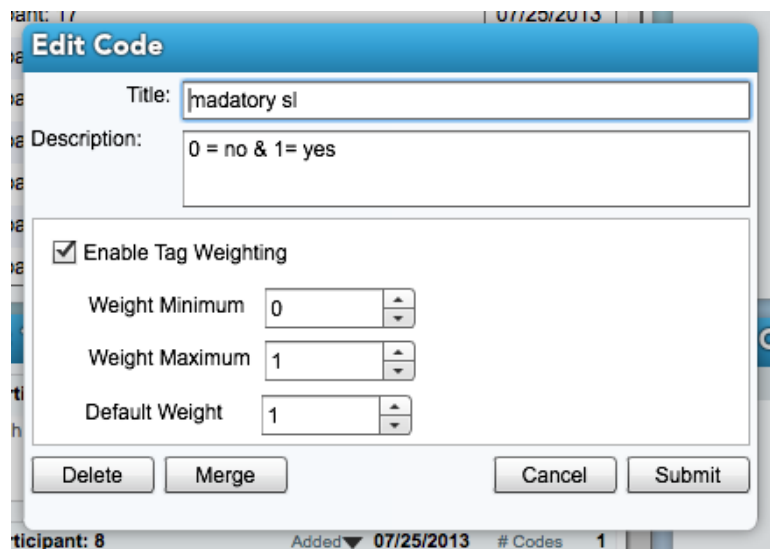
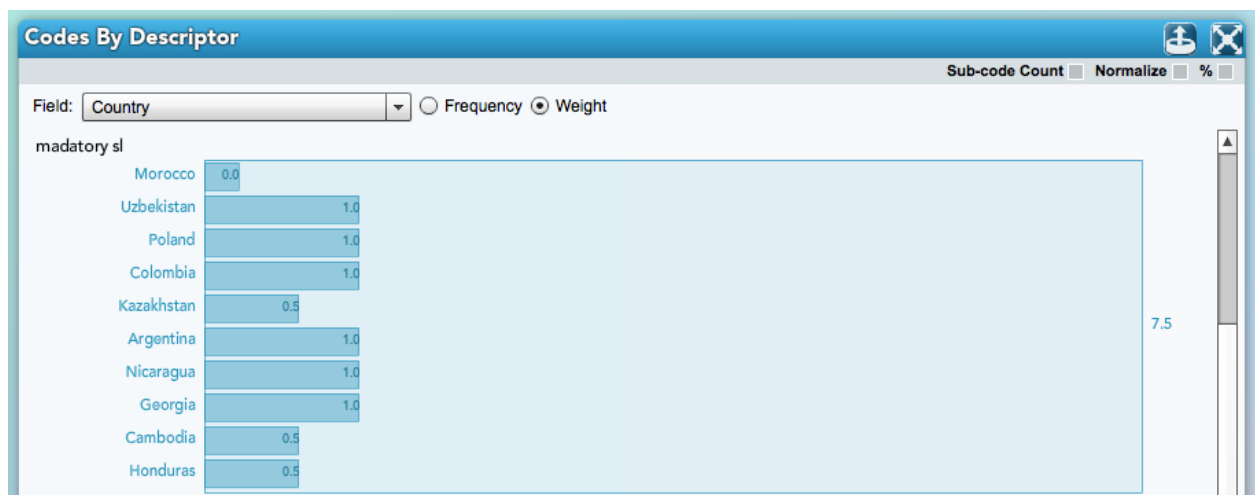*Figure 7*. Weight description for mandatory service-learning code

Figure 8. Mandatory service-learning by country based on coded weight above (the mean is .70)
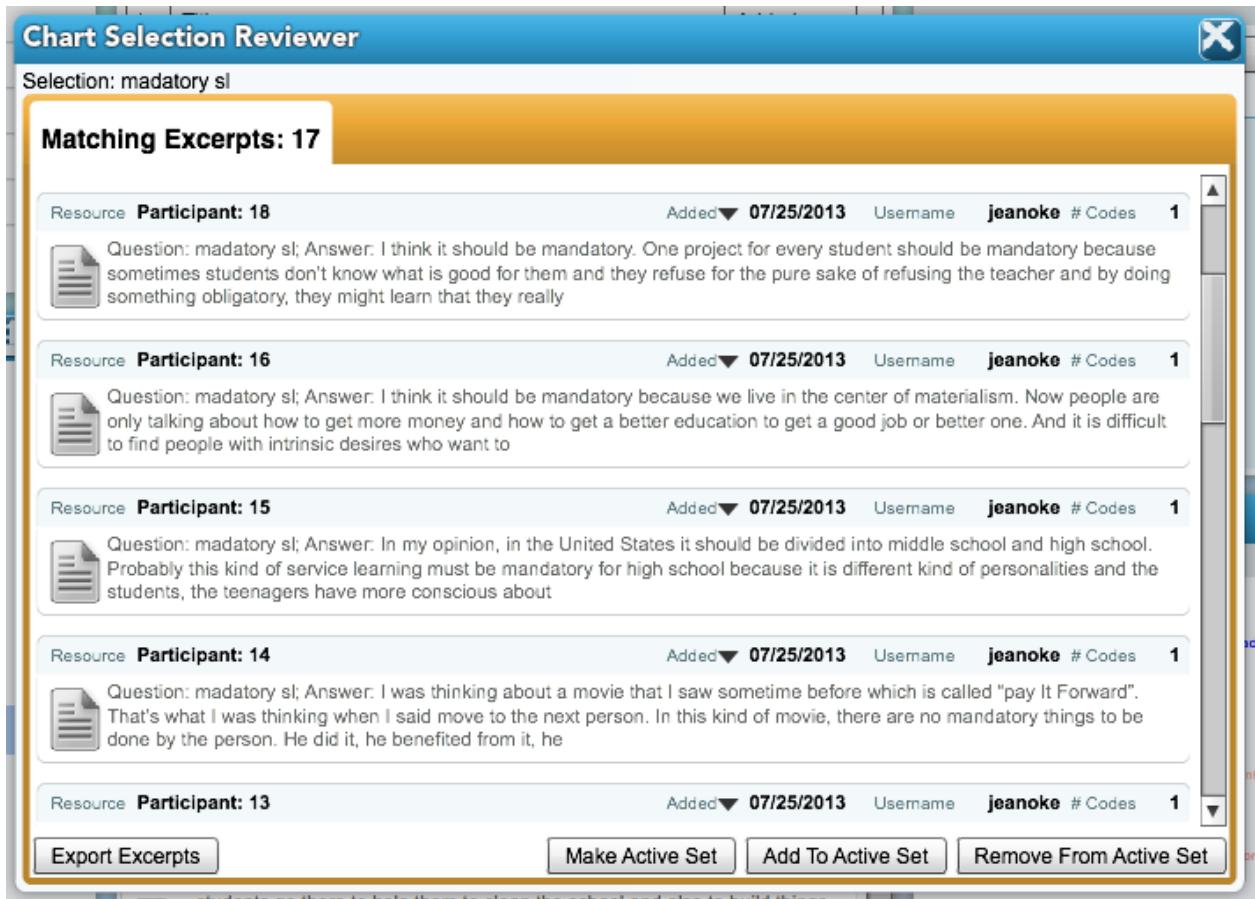
Figure 9. Excerpts from participants discussing mandatory service-learning

Five of the six respondents who stated that service-learning should not be mandatory came from countries with authoritarian style governments. Both participants from Morocco, two of the four participants from Kazakhstan, and one of three participants from Cambodia all opposed mandatory service-learning. As noted earlier, some of these respondents actually confirmed that they would be willing to implement service-learning within their own classrooms, but they did not believe that the government should mandate it.

For example, the participants from Morocco disagreed with mandatory service-learning because they saw service-learning as an authentic act of kindness that simply cannot be required. One of the participants from Morocco claimed that service-learning should not be mandatory based on the premise that people do not want to participate in mandated curriculum. The participant stated, 'they (teachers) should do it because they want it, because they love it'. The other participant from Morocco seemed to agree with the first maintaining that service-learning should be optional. This participant compared service-learning to the movie *Pay it Forward* and lamented that mandated service-learning would not be as effective because people would be obligated rather than doing it out of the kindness of their heart with the purpose to help others. It is evident that the participants disliked mandatory initiatives and feared that teachers would dislike service-learning if it was mandatory. As researchers/educators we should consider the purpose of service-learning and determine whether it is appropriate to mandate it. The participants from Morocco suggest that

mandatory service-learning would result in a diluted version of service-learning that would not be as powerful or rewarding.

Conclusion

Our study reveals the international teacher participants had little to no knowledge of service-learning prior to their professional development in the United States through the TEA/IREX program. Our research also shows that the majority of international teachers expressed an affirmative desire to implement service-learning in their countries and overall approved of it being mandatory. Recent research indicates that requiring service-learning actually increases civic engagement and knowledge for students who are not inclined to volunteer (Metz & Youniss, 2005). In the United States and Japan, mandating service-learning is embraced and does not appear unprecedented or controversial. For example, the entire state of Maryland and large urban school districts, such as Atlanta, Chicago, and Detroit, require service-learning for students to graduate from high school (National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2007). In Japan, the centralized educational system mandated that all students complete service-learning projects (Feinberg, 2002). Unfortunately, little research examines the impact of mandating this pedagogy on the students and teachers and it is unclear what significance the service-learning has on those being served. Overall, there needs to be more research on the effects of mandatory service-learning for students and an even greater need for research that examines how service-learning impacts those being served.

A thorough data analysis using Dedoose allowed us to code data and view results easily. The figures that reveal an average mean for weighted descriptions helped to strengthen our arguments. For example, the weight description revealed that 70% of teachers agree with mandatory service-learning. Numbers are often comforting to readers who feel uneasy with qualitative research. Dedoose also allowed us to quickly access excerpts from the participants on a certain topic. Providing these figures with the quotes also strengthens our study as it makes the data more transparent to the reader.

The results from this research are limited and not generalizable. Thus, a larger data collection and analysis of international teachers' perceptions on service-learning would be appropriate to strengthen the findings from this research. The construct validity of this case study would be enhanced if we had an opportunity for the informants to review the draft of the report (Yin, 2009), but contacting participants in their home countries is complicated and they have limited access to technology. We also acknowledge that the results might be skewed due to power influences. As with any study where the researcher holds power or authority over the participants, it is possible our participants responded positively to interview questions because they wanted to appear supportive. Although the coding process provides an element of transparency, a statement of bias is necessary. Both researchers in this study are proponents of service-learning and have been active in service-learning projects. One of the researchers has published other studies on service-learning as well. As with any research, it is possible our subjectivities influenced our data analysis.

The purpose of this study was to interpret our sample of international teachers' perspectives on service-learning and share this information in an effort to build on the existing literature and promote additional research. Our findings highlight that service-learning is not well known by our participants who represent a broad geopolitical range of countries. Findings also reveal that researchers and teacher educators need to be clear in communication with the purpose and definition of service-learning.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to infer from the focus group interviews if the international teachers realized the critical nature of service-learning or if they envisioned a more traditional model of service-learning discussed by Mitchell (2008). Many critical service-learning advocates warn of the dangers of a traditional service-learning approach because of the implications to further inequities and the status quo without a critical perspective (Doerr, 2011; Gains-Hanks & Grayman-Simpson, 2011; Renner, 2011). Mitchell (2008) refers to this phenomenon as the 'us-them' dichotomy in which the server has superiority over those being served. There is a clear need for more critical studies similar to Hannah et al. (2011) who investigate whether students are developing a critical consciousness through service-learning work.

Additional research should focus on whether teachers can recognize the critical component of service-learning and whether they can create service-learning projects that will alleviate social injustices rather than perpetuate them. Moreover, additional studies should evaluate the impact service-learning work has on the communities they are serving to see if these efforts are worthwhile and beneficial in alleviating social inequities. Further research needs to be conducted at the university level to reveal what pre-service teachers are being taught about service-learning and whether or not they are experiencing service-learning opportunities themselves. As we previously argued, the purpose of service-learning needs additional clarification. Researchers and educators should also evaluate the current training and professional development practices for service-learning. In particular, they should explore how service-learning can be practiced in each content area and supply instruction and training for teachers wishing to implement it. Similarly, future research should collect follow-up data to see if and how the participants implement service-learning initiatives. In addition, it would be interesting to examine the impact of different political systems on mandatory service-learning and whether service-learning fosters greater civic participation and awareness of social justice. Finally, research needs to evaluate teachers' perceptions of service-learning since they ultimately decide if and how it will be implemented into their classroom.

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