

Summary of Service-learning experience

Lynne N. Cohen

TSL 5085 Teaching Language Minority Students, Summer 2018

University of Central Florida

Part I: Introduction and focus on instruction

My name is Lynne Cohen, and I embarked upon this service learning experience in the summer session of 2018, as part of TSL 5085 and the MAT program with specialization in Chemistry. Prior to this experience I spent one year as a chemistry teacher at Ocoee High School, during which time I worked with approximately a dozen EL students in my classroom. I will be returning to Ocoee this coming year to teach environmental science, and anticipate an increase in the number of EL students I will be serving.

My service learning took place on the UCF campus in Orlando, Florida, under the supervision of the TSL 5085 volunteer coordinator. The coordinator arranged a weekly SAT review program that lasted for five weeks between June 21 and July 19, 2018. The participating students volunteered to attend, and were offered the service as part of a refugee student program run by the state for students whose families have immigrated to the US within the past two years. The national origins of participating students varied; a large percentage of students were Haitian or Hispanic, and there were also students from the Caribbean, Africa, Iran and Sri Lanka. The languages spoken included Spanish, French, Haitian Creole, Swahili, and possibly others, though those were the ones I personally confirmed.

All students were between 10th and 12th grade as of the 2018-2019 school year. The primary objective of most students was to pass either the SAT or ACT in order to become eligible to graduate high school, though some had already passed and attended the program in hopes of improving their scores in preparation for college entry. The students' educational backgrounds varied widely, and I did not probe them for that information. However, I do know

that all of the students had been enrolled in the Orange County school system, and had at least a few months of education in the US.

Once a week, the students were transported to UCF by adult volunteers. They gathered in a pre-arranged classroom on campus, where volunteer pre-service or in-service teachers acted as tutors, working with groups of one to four for several hours. Review materials included practice SAT and ACT tests, review books, dictionaries, and pre-printed SAT flash cards. No technology was used formally in the environment, though students were allowed to access their phones for purposes of defining or translating unfamiliar words, if they did not wish to use the provided dictionaries. As the study period was several hours during mid-day, the students were given a lunch break each time, at which times the volunteer tutors either prepared additional materials or chaperoned their break while conversing casually with the students about their experiences, goals, and thoughts.

Each week, I worked with a different set of students. The first week, I circulated among 6 students, spending the most time with three of them. Having to split my attention in this way, it was difficult to put into practice individualized strategies; so, we read passages as a group. Sometimes I read, while other times another student read, or students read quietly. The main focus on this day was identifying unfamiliar words and looking them up. However, I did not feel this was a good use of time, and shortly after that, I learned that definition-based strategies are not an optimal way of learning vocabulary. As a result, I did not repeat this strategy in later weeks.

In the second and fourth weeks, I worked with individual students, and was able to tailor our time to their specific needs, beginning by identifying strengths and weaknesses. Both wished

to focus on SAT literacy sections, but one on comprehension and the other on grammar and structure. For comprehension, one strategy I used was using synonyms and verbal sentence frames. Instead of providing definitions for unknown words, I restated the sentence with a synonym, and then asked what a similar word might be in the student's first language, which was Spanish. In other cases, I blanked out the word and asked the student to read the two surrounding sentences, then fill in a word that made sense in context. These strategies were both useful. When tutoring the grammar and structure section, we discussed different punctuation rules and subject-verb agreement by finding and creating examples. The student taught me how subject-verb agreement worked in her first language (Haitian Creole), and I explained how it was different in English. I found, in general, that tying in questions and discussion about the student's L1 was very useful in building a relationship that allowed for a more productive session.

On the third week, I worked with a group of three students who natively spoke Haitian Creole (two advanced, one intermediate). We began by using a new resource available that week, vocabulary flashcards. I started modeling the use of the flashcards by asking the group to think about what a word might mean, based on the roots and prefixes, and then share. I then handed the deck over to one of the students. Eventually, the two advanced speakers were working intensely but independently with the cards, and then I focused on working through vocabulary embedded in text with the intermediate EL student, much as I had with the independent student the week prior. However, this student was more reticent about speaking, so while we made some progress, it was not as productive a session as compared to the week prior.

I still need to work towards more effectively creating a positive and open atmosphere for shy or reticent students.

On the final week, I worked with another group of three students; two who spoke Swahili (intermediate and beginner) and one who spoke Spanish (intermediate/advanced). By their request, we worked through the grammar and structure portion of the SAT. At first, we took turns reading through a passage slowly, taking breaks to practice pronunciation and to answer questions as they appeared in the text. At this point I provided a lot of guidance and immediate feedback on right or wrong answers. However, I soon stopped doing that, as I realized it was discouraging engagement. Instead, I stated that I would now be the answer recorder, and the three students would have to discuss and agree on one answer. As a result, several discussions were held over conflicting opinions. When the students were not sure how to voice their opinion, I provided the beginning of a statement, or provided a leveled question. Lastly, I asked the students to try reading and answering a section independently, and then comparing their answers afterwards. This, I felt, was one of my most productive sessions; however, the discussions were a heavy linguistic task for the students, particularly the beginner EL student. For her, I allowed her to switch between English and Swahili, and let the other Swahili-speaking student help her form an English sentence. I also sometimes lightened the cognitive load by posing to her simple “yes” or “no” questions.

Part II: Reflection on power and privilege

Though I did not ask probing personal questions of any students, there is one who volunteered information about her educational history and goals during a lunch break. This student, an 11th grader who had been born in Haiti and had been in the US for one year, explained that she wished to go to UCF for college. She explained that this was remarkable, because no other members of her family had gone to college, and she helped take care of her younger siblings. Her parents had good jobs in Haiti when she was younger, but her father left and her mother moved to the US to be with family and provide opportunities to her children.

This young woman seemed quite clever, and could speak English well, but often chose to continue speaking Haitian Creole with her friends. I asked about her aspirations, and she explained that she could currently speak three languages (French, Haitian Creole and English) and was learning a fourth, Spanish. She hoped this would help her stand out in college applications and internship opportunities. She intended to attend college and medical school to become a doctor. Specifically, she wished to be an OB-GYN and eventually return to Haiti to provide much-needed medical care to women there.

I think this young woman's goals are high but attainable, and she will have experience both benefits and challenges due to her cultural and linguistic background. Being brought up in Haiti, and accustomed to speaking casually in Haitian Creole, she may experience some culture shock in a largely English-speaking environment. Though I am unfamiliar with Haitian culture, I imagine there are other inevitable cultural differences that will affect her. In addition, her family may or may not be prepared to handle the extended support required to young people who attempt advanced degrees, seeing as her family seems to already require her assistance with

younger siblings. It may also be expected that she get a job after high school to help support the family.

Another problem this student may face are those who underestimate her ability or intelligence due to her accent. Often, those with heavy accents are assumed to be less educated or unable to communicate properly. This is clearly not the case for this young lady, but I could imagine that in a highly competitive environment, she may be pushed aside by initial prejudices and have to work harder to prove herself. That being said, her high self-esteem and desire to acquire new languages is a boon that will enhance her opportunities in our increasingly globalized world. Another benefit she has are her very clear--and commendable--aspirations.

From this course and this experience, I have learned to recognize my inevitable biases and be careful about generalizing the needs of EL students. Though it is good to take a course that prepares teachers with tools and outlooks to best serve English language learners, no tools are universally applicable; English learners are as diverse as native English speakers, and have just as wide a variety of needs, talents, and strengths. Most importantly, it is vital not to equate the level of one's English proficiency with the level of one's intelligence; some of the most intelligent students I knew from my own year of teaching were those emerging from their silent period, who barely spoke a word of English to me. Though having twice the work as others by virtue of learning content-area material in a foreign language, their dedication and hard work led them to succeed, with a little bit of understanding and flexibility on my part.

### Part III: Completed Service Learning Log

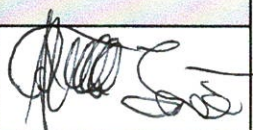

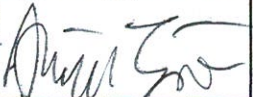

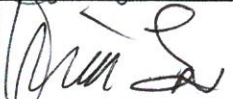
My completed service learning log is attached in a separate PDF document.

**ESOL Service Learning Experience Timesheet Log for TSL 4080/5085**

Candidate Name: Lynne Cohen

Semester/Year: Summer 2018

Service learning site/school name: UCF Volunteering for SAT review sessions Teacher name and contact (in print): Antonio Losavio

Date	Arrival Time & Departure time	Hours	Activity	Number & Level of English Learners Worked With	Teacher/ coordinator Signature
01/01/14	9:00 a.m - 12:30pm.	3.5h	Circulated during adult ESOL class to help individual students with practice exercises	Worked with 5 students in the Beginning class	Jim Cummins
6/21/18	11 AM - 3 PM	4h	Beginner & One advanced learner - SAT tutoring involving reading, vocabulary, problem solving, comprehension and concept identification	Circulated among 6 students of varied levels (Math/English)	
6/28/18	10:30 AM - 2:30 PM	4h <u>AI</u>	Tutored ACT/SAT vocab, reading comprehension, & grammar for intermediate ELs using practice exams.	Individual work with Haitian student (12th grade) and conversational exchanges with intermediate ELs	
7/15/18	11 AM - 2 PM	3h	Tutored ACT grammar & vocabulary w/ Barron flashcards for SAT.	Worked with 2 advanced and 1 intermediate EL Haitian speakers.	
7/2/18	10:30 AM - 2:30 AM	4h	Tutored SAT sentence structure & reading comprehension through one-on-one discussion & practice test-taking	1 student - intermediate and conversational exchanges with all levels.	
7/19/18	11 AM - 2 PM	3h	Close reading activity of SAT writing & grammar section. Identifying problems through group discussion, agree/disagree, and coming to consensus.	Worked with 1 advanced, 1 intermediate and 1 beginning EL, LI included H-Creole & Swahili.	
N/A					

18 hours total



<b>Total hours</b>	18 h				

**Teachers/coordinators:** Your signature indicates that both you and your student met the service-learning expectations as outlined.

**TSL 5085 students:** ANY FALSIFICATION OF SERVICE-LEARNING DOCUMENTATION IS ACADEMIC DISHONESTY AND WILL BE TREATED AS PLAGAIRISM. Please report any problems or misconduct to the instructor, Michele Regalla ([Michele.regalla@ucf.edu](mailto:Michele.regalla@ucf.edu)) \*Attach additional sheets if necessary.