



## **Infusing Participatory Digital Service-Learning to Deepen Community-engaged Professional Excellence: Triumphs and Challenges**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Limited studies have considered meshing participatory visual methods, new technologies, and experiential learning to prepare preservice teachers to respond to the needs of adult second language learners with interrupted education. Thus, this small-scale exploratory action research investigates how implementing collaborative digital visual service-learning, a credit-bearing experiential scholarship that intertwines participatory methodologies with mutually beneficial inquiry, civic responsibility, and reflection, can facilitate engagement with adult learners and residents in a community-based English as a second language class in a suburban multiethnic US neighborhood. Despite the constraints related to course alignment, privacy, and logistics, the one-semester-long, small-grant-funded community-university partnership positioned the 15 learners and five preservice teachers as social actors and magnified mutual trust, hands-on learning, and social responsibility. Pairing service-learning with community filmmaking can tap into sociocultural capital to catalyze a range of community-identified educational and advocacy responsibilities through authentic communication, rapport building, and values-based education and inquiry.*

**Keywords:** English language learners, low-educated second language and literacy acquisition, community media, videovoice, visual-based community-engaged scholarship

### **INTRODUCTION: INVESTIGATING PEDAGOGICAL CONCERNS**

As an online English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) instructor at a southern US university, I was astounded by preservice teachers' (PSTs') self-reported insufficient opportunities to connect with English learners (ELs) and their unfamiliarity of the migration histories of Latina/os, who represent about 73% of the ELs in this state (Sugarman & Lee, 2017). Although the weak economy and restrictive immigration policies dwindled the number of Mexican immigrants nationally (Zong & Batalova, 2016), El Barrio (pseudonym), the neighborhood amid this campus setting, has experienced a renaissance of Hispanic culture. Unlike adolescent immigrants eligible for deportation protection and schooling access (Zong &

Batalova, 2016) adults' educational and career pathways are taken up by community-based organizations (CBOs). Given these educational disparities, I sought to volunteer at a local provider that served low-educated second language and literacy acquisition (LESLLA) adults.

When I started teaching English at Sak Tzevul (ST) (pseudonym, Lighting in a Mayan language) in summer 2014, the courses lacked funding, formal curricula, assessment, and enrollment policy; most learners in my class were from Mexico and Guatemala with complex migration histories, identities, and emerging print-based literacy, L2 verbal fluency, and academic ability levels. Compared to print literate and school-aged ELs, LESLLA adults face compounded obstacles in simultaneously acquiring content, academic, print-literacy, L2 proficiency, numeracy, and life skills, while fulfilling family, work, and community responsibilities (Yang, 2015). Learners from collectivistic cultures in Mexico and Guatemala master practical knowledge through apprenticeship, or engagement in community and family activities, and *consejos*, or words of wisdom transmitted by family members, -- mainstream education often marginalizes these resources (Valdés, 1996). In addition to limited academic, cultural, and L2 capital, Indigenous adults' home literacy and L2 socialization are shaped by trauma, socioeconomic, political, educational, linguistic, cultural, and racial oppression in their home and host countries (Barillas-Chón 2010).

In Eurocentric transmission-oriented classrooms that habitually ignore learners' particular experiences, multilingual resources, and home literacies ELs can encounter a "cultural clash" (Valdés, 1996), the contrast between formal and informal values. To adequately respond to their educational challenges, welcome alternative knowledges, and reinforce positive identities (Auerbach, 2002), practitioners can embrace linguistically and culturally responsive instruction that includes learning-service, adjusting the service-learning (S-L) experience to student abilities and needs (Wurr, 2018); the Mutually Adaptive Learning Paradigm (MALP) (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011), connecting learner oral traditions, pragmatic, informal knowledge with formal education; and the Language Experience Approach (LEA) (Dixon & Nessel, 1983; Wurr, 2002), generating written materials from ELs' spoken narratives. In addition to responsive teaching practices, participatory research techniques, such as videovoice (Catalani et al., 2012), photovoice, quilting, and digital storytelling (Vecchio, Dhillon, & Ulmer, 2017) value community funds of knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) – learners' home languages, cultures, and literacies, transnational connections, and life-worlds. Infusing responsive, participatory methods in high-impact practices can ground education and inquiry in community-identified issues, stretch expression repertoires, and enable participants to reconfigure themselves as knowledge creators and researcher-practitioners (e.g., Kennerly & Davis, 2014).

Consistent with calls for more practice-oriented and community-engaged projects (Perren, 2013) that draw "on the pedagogical details involved in engaged teaching and learning activities" (Wurr, 2013, p. 398), I share a sustainable community outreach model that fosters reciprocal education and personal and social change by reducing power differentials and acknowledging multimodal repertoires, lived experiences, sense of belonging, and voices traditionally marginalized in TESOL. I first clarify the instructional issues that sparked this multilayered pilot with PST and LESLLA participants and then review scholarship on critical pedagogies and participatory methods. Next, I introduce the methodology, the instructional aims, and implementation steps. Lastly, I describe outcomes, difficulties, and milestones and provide suggestions for implementing participatory visual S-L to bridge the theory-practice gap and shape mutually beneficial experiences and pedagogical expertise. My exploratory journey is

guided by the following research question: *What are the stages for constituting a participatory videomaking S-L initiative to embrace community, academic, and professional goals?*

### **LITERATURES INFORMING THE STUDY: TOWARD A COMMUNITY-BASED VISUAL S-L AND RESEARCH MODEL**

This report combines scholarship on S-L and participatory visual scholarly and pedagogical resources toward a compassionate, reciprocal S-L model to traverse the academia-community, disciplinary-interdisciplinary, print literacy-multiliteracy, and the L1-L2 fluency binaries, ameliorate pressing social problems (Berman & Allen, 2012; Kennerly & Davis, 2014), and shape pedagogical contextual understanding (De Felice & Lypka, 2013). Anchored in the conceptualization of education as a social endeavor, traditional S-L is an educational strategy that strives to systematically implement academic content, reflection, evaluation, and experiential activities with a CBO to benefit retention rates and community engagement, often without an advocacy orientation (Mitchell, 2008). Community-based oral and visual qualitative methods within empowerment education, feminist theory, and documentary photography engage residents as co-researchers as opposed to passive respondents to inform public debate through participant-authored visuals (Wang & Burris, 1997). Complementing S-L with strength-based techniques can link course objectives to social justice and emic perspectives through collective capital, multimodal literacy, practical mindsets, and reciprocal connections (e.g., Berman & Allen, 2012). Understanding realities through divergent communication forms and alternative knowledge can ignite context-specific pedagogy, inquiry, and advocacy with underprivileged groups.

The core ideas of employing documentary digital video and storytelling, or videovoice as pedagogical or methodological tools, derive from photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997), an approach used to invite women with emergent print-based literacy in China to identify, take photographs of, and investigate reproductive health issues in their communities and then, guided by these visuals, sustain action-driven public debates about social responsibility. Green and Kloos (2009) coupled thoughtful teaching and photovoice to elicit displaced refugee youth's perspectives about education inequality in Uganda. Instead of collecting data through interviews or surveys, the data sources included group discussions and advocacy procedures inspired by participant-created photographs. Graziano (2011) employed a modified photovoice to demonstrate ELs' potential for self-expression through multiple modalities. Discussions and reflections driven by learner photographs, drawings, paintings, and oral stories diversified L2 literacy practices and PST understanding of the particularities of the students' educational realities, mobilizing them to explore responsive pedagogical strategies. In post-Katrina New Orleans, Catalani et al.'s (2012) videovoice captured resident voices about pressing issues and augmented advocacy responses through the development of a film and its dissemination on [YouTube](#). Despite reservations related to unfamiliarity with expectations, perceived limited linguistic proficiency, and cultural, technological, and methodological constraints, complementing S-L with digital imagery provides residents an opportunity to express their views, endorses emergent forms of knowledge, and intensifies employment, advocacy (Catalani et al., 2012), and teaching practices (Graziano, 2011), and media attention to community-relevant issues (Green & Kloos, 2009). Given that these methods tend to diminish linguistic, cultural, and literacy boundaries, an implication of these findings is that they can be infused in

the curriculum to advance meaningful, contextual, inclusive, and responsive pedagogy, advocacy, and inquiry with vulnerable groups.

While blending S-L and collaborative media with learners with emerging linguistic and literacy skills remains relatively underexplored in the TESOL field, scholars concur that marrying service and visual arts authorizes rural residents (Berman & Allen, 2012) and migrant farmworkers (Kennerly & Davis, 2014) to respond to social problems. Berman and Allen (2012) describe how photovoice, paper prayer, and mural-making enabled visual arts students, artists, and residents to cultivate awareness on poverty, environment, and HIV in South Africa. Likewise, Kennerly and Davis (2014) document how documentary filmmaking amplified communication and video production students' intercultural awareness and digital literacy abilities while enabling Latino/a migrants in Georgia to share stories and practice English. Through "sustainable relationships between faculty and community partners for long-term, ongoing intervention into systems of oppression" (p. 324), process-centric design, equitable rapport, imagery, and storytelling S-L can successfully engage diverse groups to contribute to and benefit from the research-learning initiatives.

Although considerable language teaching scholarship has been devoted to S-L (e.g., Auerbach, 2002; Perren & Wurr, 2015; Wurr & Hellebrandt, 2007), less attention has focused on new media-infused S-L with PST and LESLLA learners. S-L has not only stimulated PST contextual understanding of L2 pedagogies and theories and empathetic awareness of ELs (Farrelly, Lypka, Morland, & Sun, 2018; Grassi & Armon, 2015; Lindahl et al., 2018; Lypka, 2018; Rodríguez-Arroyo & Brailsford Vaughns, 2015) but nourished access to authentic L2 literacy practice and enhanced critical thinking and reflexivity skills (Cameron, 2015; Chao, 2016; Perren, 2013). More importantly, crafting digital stories and websites in response to ill-structured matters engaged ELs in the participatory culture and amplified digital literacy and research abilities, sociocultural understanding, and identity building (Maloy, Comeau-Kirschner, & Amaral, 2015; Perren, Grove, & Thornton, 2013). Enhancing S-L with arts, bilingual materials (Auerbach, 2002), and MALP (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011) can sustain LESLLA adults' social and academic practices through tasks that connect spoken and written communication, shared and individual responsibilities, and immediate and future relevance while strengthening instructional practice (Lypka, 2018). Through apprenticeship, learners assume leadership and beneficiary roles to claim the right to speak through a fusion of pragmatic, oral, print, and digital modes and familiar and relevant content. Participant-authored multimodal narratives emerging from social justice S-L projects can transform into instructional-, art-, inquiry-, advocacy, and reflective-action statements and empower participants to raise public awareness about community-relevant issues.

Unlike prevailing Eurocentric instruction and research paradigms, participatory methods align with critical S-L (Mitchell, 2008) within a flexible, asset-based, and humanistic dimension. Through this perspective practitioners can traverse normative knowledge production barriers and power hierarchies by nurturing academic and community growth through community members' voices and sociocultural assets.

## METHODOLOGY

Given the complicated teaching contexts, instead of an action research driven by problem-based solution implemented through multiple cycles, often without "an initial, planned

exploratory period” (Smith, 2015, p. 40), I resorted to Exploratory Action Research to critically “explore, understand and improve [my] practice” (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018, p. 20) *with* co-researcher ELs and PSTs in fall 2014. Before establishing a community-academic engagement and action plan, I first surveyed community needs through attending public meetings, teaching, and consulting S-L literature. To understand the details of gradual implementation of this videovoice, I analyzed the qualitative data through iterative coding of common themes and patterns (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018) in lesson plans, surveys, reflections, researcher journal, and field notes. Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board, I invited volunteers to participate in this study, obtained written and verbal consent, and negotiated anonymity, confidentiality, permission, and dissemination issues on an ongoing basis (Catalani et al., 2012). This dialogic discovery triggered the initiation of my dissertation project.

## **ESOL Course**

To receive the ESOL endorsement, education majors at my institution need to complete three ESOL methods and pedagogy courses and a late field experience and pass an exam. Although this ESOL program supports pedagogical response to the cultural, linguistic, and literacy concerns of ELs in K-12 settings, PSTs should have sufficient hands-on training to confront diverse learners’ needs. To facilitate professional, scholarly, and institutional engagement, I integrated a project-based S-L experience in an online course that requires application of linguistics to social contexts and L2 practical and theoretical knowledge. This component aspired to fulfill the endorsement, institutional standards, and my intellectual curiosity toward applied practice and inquiry. Appendix A outlines a list of course assignments.

## **Participants and Service Sites**

The majority of 57 PSTs (ages 18-45) in my ESOL course were Caucasian females from a middle-class background with undergraduate degrees in teaching and reported limited instructional practice experience. Thirty of them joined previously established community-based exchanges at ST that involved team-teaching, tutoring, and designing instructional resources (16 PSTs), a documentary (five PSTs), a portable mural (five PSTs), and an arts-based L2 curriculum (four PSTs). Planned interventions at additional service sites, three elementary-, three middle-, and four high schools, included tutoring, computer training, and fundraising for bilingual books.

Except for two Guatemalan youth at the English class at ST, the service site for this report, the majority of the EL participants were Mexican and Guatemalan adults (ages 26-56; 11 males and four females), who spoke Indigenous L1s but unable to write in these L1s and Spanish language and dropped out from the sixth grade to contribute to the family income. For over 10 years in the US, they had worked as day-laborers in low-wage occupations in construction, agriculture, and landscaping that require minimal communication, literacy, numeracy, or digital technology abilities. Yet, they were determined to advance their L2 skills to improve their lives: some of them wanted to engage in their children’s education and communicate with the teachers; others aimed to expand their employment opportunities and socialize with L2 speakers.

## Procedure: Videovoice S-L Initiative Overview

**Purposes.** This community-university partnership aimed to equip ELs with (1) an L2; (2) digital literacy abilities; and (3) increased social awareness.

**Goals.** Inspired by the principles of collaborative education and inquiry, this participatory S-L engagement intended to enhance personal and community growth by creating a dialogic space with 15 ELs, five PSTs, the CBO director, and two volunteers. The team members assumed the roles of co-researchers, interviewers, videographers, editors, and storytellers to magnify authentic learning success and advocacy by documenting their experiences in the educational and cultural programs at ST and informing public debate through a video premiere. To align the instructional and advocacy efforts with the ESOL course goals, the PSTs explored real-life tasks that stretched their teaching beliefs and identities (De Felice & Lypka, 2013): they designed and modified lesson plans to fulfill the learners' and the organization's goals, incorporated visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and artistic learning to spark L2 production and interactivity, team-taught task-relevant content and language, facilitated discussions driven by learner-created visuals, co-constructed a video project, and reflected on their experiences. The team estimated the 15-minute culminating videovoice would require six weeks and 15 hours of commitment.

**Curriculum Design.** The videovoice was incorporated into the English course at ST in fall 2014 following the steps in [Appendix B](#).

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

To address the needs of the community partner, the ELs, and PSTs while also complying with course objectives outcomes, I complemented a modified videovoice ([Appendix B](#)) model with the variations described below.

### Curriculum Design.

#### 1. *Development of initial objectives and plan.*

The concept, objectives, informed consent, and methods for this project evolved through continuing consultation with the CBO and a university S-L specialist. Inspired by videovoice studies (Catalani et al., 2012) that made me realize the affordances of the video to sequence events and capture emic perspectives, visuals, and sounds, I aimed to adopt this method with my PSTs and ELs. Deemed as a versatile storytelling, educational, and advocacy vehicle by the team, videovoice was incorporated in the initial action plan.

Given the time and budget constraints, the team members formulated procedures that maximized collaboration and minimized ethical, technology, and logistical demands. For example, the co-researcher ELs could rely on their mobile phones and the university Flip video cameras for data collection; [Google Translate](#) and [DuoLingo](#) free mobile applications for translation; the university studio and computer with iMovie for recording and editing; and Google Slides for data collection and analysis. To welcome a range of perspectives, innovation, and abilities and scaffold learning, co-researchers utilized preferred visual communication forms (Graziano, 2011), social media, spoken communication, and peer help (Lypka, 2018).



## 2. *Voluntary S-L orientation and celebration.*

Following the introduction to the S-L pedagogy, the PSTs attended an exhibit that showcased the paintings of the ELs who completed the English course at ST in summer 2014.

## 3. *The videovoice team engaged in the following procedures.*

- a. **Training:** I modeled videovoice procedures, image taking, discussion, ethics, and camera operation techniques.
- b. **Brainstorming:** Team members revisited the intended outcomes, timeline, and procedures, negotiated issues related to consent, implications of identifications, time constraints, logistics, resources, and dissemination, and provided project updates. For example, given the restricted resources, they provided minimal instructions about image-making and editing. To expand L2 production opportunities beyond the class, they discussed ways to share visuals on a private Facebook group, showcase the film to a broader audience, and provided alternatives to encapsulate perspectives through posters, drawings, paintings, mindmaps, and open-source photographs to ensure anonymity.
- c. **Teaching:** Through MALP-infused lessons (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011; MALP Education, n. d.), the PSTs delivered activities related to storytelling, camera use, ethics, safety, and themes emergent in learner-authored visuals.
- d. **Visual documentation:** After an initial outing in which ELs captured thematically-relevant visuals, they continued to generate images beyond the class. This data collection phase can be repeated as needed.
- e. **Visual elicitation:** For the weekly class sessions, the ELs selected three relevant images and discussed about them using questions, such as “What do you see in this visual?”, “What do you think this means?”, and “Why is it important to you?” In some instances, they wrote captions to accompany their visuals and reflected on their experiences, with input from the PSTs. Visual elicitation can be recorded as part of individual interviews, gallery walks, and town hall meetings. Steps c., d., and e. can be repeated and modified with caption writing and editing instructions.
- f. **[Writing a script](#):** Drawing on topics from the conversations, the ELs and PSTs produced a rough draft of the script, shared it on Google Docs, and revised it following further feedback. While the PSTs organized the data on a laptop, the ELs continued collecting and curating images, engaging in discussion, analysis, and reflection (steps d. and e.), and revisiting the script in light of this data.
- g. **[Storyboarding](#):** The storyboard generated by the PSTs was revised following feedback from the ELs. Feedback elicitation can be infused in steps g., h., i., and j.
- h. **Producing the rough cut:** The team recorded the script and produced a draft.
- i. **Screening of rough cut:** The video was shown in class. Additional projects can include creating a website, newsletters, and brochures (e.g., Perren et al., 2013).
- j. **Disseminating findings:** The culminating project was published on the ST website and shared with community members at the end-of-semester celebration event. Despite some unplanned steps (e.g., promoting the video on Youtube and connecting the public screening with a dinner), sharing the video on social media and infusing public engagement in the initial project design could increase public awareness.

- k. Reflecting: Through ongoing reflections, the PSTs pondered upon S-L processes, products, and their professional development. ELs can also engage in written or verbal reflections incorporated after each visual elicitation and the public screening.

**Outcomes for ST.** Similar to other digital community-based engagements (e.g., Perren et al., 2013), this collaborative filmmaking and its instructional S-L components maximized dialogic learning and reflection and contextualized high-priority L2, digital literacy, and advocacy efforts through EL voices. Students unlocked a range of expertise; they invested in the project design, action-driven dialogue, reflection, and analysis, brainstormed potential topics, conducted interviews, captured video footage, and planned a video project. They also approached PSTs with questions related to educational practices, bilingual books they could read to their children, bills, bank statements, and letters from the school. These materials were folded into the classroom to make learning relevant. At the same time, this initiative seemed to disrupt existing teacher-student power structures and enabled the ELs to negotiate themselves as knowledge producers. I frequently observed that regardless of their proficiency, they drew on multimodal input, regalia, peer mentoring, mobile applications, and gestures to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers and scaffold their communication. Furthermore, some learners took on the cultural broker roles to translate, interpret, and explain concepts to their peers. This responsive, participatory inquiry and education centered on learner realities, home literacies, and multimodal repertoires seemed to facilitate positive L2 identity development, agency, and investment (e.g., Graziano, 2012).

The hands-on aspects of this model stretched inclusive inquiry and civic involvement, strengthened community building, and furthered the completion of a culminating project that would be less feasible in teacher-centered instruction. Regardless of linguistic abilities, some ELs became change agents by volunteering at public events, collaborating in the filmmaking project, communicating with media and political stakeholders, and helping their peers convey stories significant to them. Through the ubiquitous nature of social media and cellular phones, narratives about family and cultural events connected ELs in class who previously did not know each other and enabled them to creatively exercise learning anytime, anywhere and foster community pride, authorial voice, and confidence growth. For example, a student shared his immigration trajectory on social media using snapshots of his painting, religious symbols, and statements such as “so this is my life” and “esta noche I feel good.” Making sense of reality through multimodal and multilingual channels and jointly constructed activities encouraged change on a personal level: many ELs could (re)position their immigration and L2 socialization within the narrative of hope and connect with the local and transnational communities.

Nevertheless, assessing the impact of this project on personal and social change remains inconclusive in absence of follow-up surveys or interviews with stakeholders. Overall, the outcomes materialized in a Needs Analysis document (2015) circulated in community partnerships and grant applications. The film premiered before family members, officials from CBOs, lawyers, and police officers, PSTs, journalists, consular officials, and residents increased the organization’s visibility and spearheaded public debates about neighborhood crime, safety, and immigration policy. Donations from local businesses and volunteer support continued to sustain the arts-based English and computer literacy programs and the technology lab. Despite of these positive outcomes, funding for these programs and ongoing community partnerships remains a struggle.



**Outcomes for PSTs.** Similar to Graziano (2011), this project challenged the traditional teacher-student dichotomy and scaffolded reciprocal community-relevant professional advancement through meaningful relationships and involvement ranging from team-teaching, discussion facilitation, editing, designing a website, translating, and tutoring various family members. Unlike teacher-centered lectures, this videovoice created a space for identity negotiation and knowledge construction through shared meaning-making and enabled PSTs to take on positions of educators, facilitators, and students and explore pedagogical practices to address their ELs' needs. For instance, following the pre-teaching training, drawing on MALP (DeCapua & Marshall, 2011), the PSTs were inspired to design brief mobile learning units with simple texts to familiarize ELs with language frames. Additionally, they embedded the image elicitation within conversation-focused tasks and learner-created familiar content and language to ease comprehension. More importantly, they socialized with the ELs on social media, family visits, and public events. Collaborative learning, extended discussions, and ongoing reflections challenged preconceived understanding about pedagogy, increased community investment, and empowered the enactment of responsive strategies.

The final reflections reveal that this initiative confronted them to query discourse about L2 teaching and power and negotiate their membership with the professional community of practice (De Felice & Lypka, 2013). One student reconceptualized her practice and service within an equitable, asset-based relationship: "I am more open to assisting the community... The ELs not only learned during our S-L experience, but they also taught the teachers as well. I learned some Spanish when they learned English. It is important that you are not only the teacher but also the student as well." With the exception of two reflections that defined S-L as a top-down "volunteering to help," the reflections portrayed the ELs as competent multilingual storytellers, brokers, and practitioners, as opposed to passive information receivers. At the same time, teacher candidates took on the roles of learners and allies who empathize with students, as opposed to being information transmitters. Experiential pedagogy driven by participant-authored media can generate critical insights from underserved groups that are less likely to emerge through decontextualized tasks that minimize aspects of interconnectedness and introspection (e.g., Graziano, 2011). Although it remains unclear how these perspectives transpired into long-term practice, the moment-by-moment experiences captured in continuing reflections enriched professional beliefs in ways that was not possible in mainstream learning settings (De Felice & Lypka, 2013).

### **Key Components for a S-L Engagement**

Inspired by Perren (2013), I identified the following components for developing sustainable community partnerships.

**Join a S-L Professional Network.** In Fall 2013, I attended university workshops related to community-based pedagogy models and course design, interacted with representatives from community partner agencies, and joined [Campus Compact](#). Before creating a prototype syllabus, materials, and assessments for my course, I reviewed existing syllabi and literature.

**Planning.** To maximize supervised teaching and service placements, I scheduled face-to-face meetings with the ST director to inquire about her perspectives about community-based

engagements and the CBO needs and jointly developed activities and outcomes at this site. I then scaffolded these service goals into my course, by aligning them with the learning objectives, content, and assignments, and soliciting feedback from the director. I shared [resources](#), S-L projects, and sites with the stakeholders at the beginning of the semester.

**Recognize Goals and Existing Resources.** The video, team-teaching, and tutoring components were intended to raise awareness of the agency’s mission and facilitate L2 and digital literacy development. I was hoping to stretch PST notions about a homogenous EL group and engender practice and critical involvement with a less visible group of learners beyond the course. Through ongoing communication with ST, I was able to align the community needs with the course goals and observe and mentor PSTs in-situ, an opportunity I missed in previous courses. For instance, to line up the lesson plan task with the community-identified objective to seek educational frameworks for LESLLA learners, I shared [resources](#) and incorporated PST-led instruction based on modified lessons about storytelling, video camera use, editing, and question formation.

Unlike the co-researchers in Catalani et al. (2012) who collaborated with professional filmmakers and received a stipend, a video camera, and copies of the film, the respondents in this study received no such benefits. Despite challenges to fully engage in film editing, they conceived their media production, research, and L2 communication expertise utilizing available mobile learning technologies and gained English language knowledge and the expertise to launch photo-videovoice initiatives, it is unclear how this experience improved their job prospects or lives. Similarly, although the PSTs increased their pedagogical and research knowledge through hands-on practice with ELs, the influence of this project on their practice remains speculative.

**Maintain Ongoing Involvement and Adjust Goals.** To recognize diverse viewpoints, stakeholders could take on a myriad of roles in this collaboration. Although the ELs and PSTs were not involved in the initial design, they were engaged the data collection, analysis, and public dissemination phases. Given the limited access to video editing at ST, the PSTs transcribed interviews and edited the video on a campus computer and negotiated with ELs to ensure the inclusion of voices in the editing and feedback phases (see Appendix B). For example, when an EL perceived an emotional scene might send a negative message about a community member, the co-researchers decided to remove this scene from the video. While these negotiations helped ameliorate the power imbalance and establish trust, they also resulted in co-producing a film that might have embodied different themes if undertaken by the ST community.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that ELs enjoyed filmmaking because “it was fun,” and it enabled them to (re)construct sequences, sounds and visuals. Although they proudly shared the film on their social networks, the distribution of this video on Youtube, a step that was not incorporated in the initial project design, has been challenging given privacy issues. Even though we informed the co-researchers of the privacy and data ownership before and during this exchange, for ethical and safety considerations, the team opted to upload the film on YouTube in “unlisted” format. Furthermore, connecting the end-of-semester community screening with a dinner following the screening was not conducive to ongoing critical dialogue about community-relevant issues embodied in the film. Given these drawbacks, evaluating public awareness generated beyond the community screenings at ST remains unlikely.

**Successes and Constraints.** “ELs taught me to constantly learn and mold into a better teacher.” As this reflection quote reveals, one way to connect practice to real-life in teacher education is to invest in an equitable exploration and reflection *with* ELs to deepen the teacher knowledge base. This is possible through an exploratory action research (Smith & Rebolledo, 2018) and a visual S-L collaboration grounded in shared knowledge and community voices.

Although my familiarity with engaged research and new media contributed to this project, I recognize that including initially PSTs and ELs, representatives from media, and other CBOs to define community issues would have enriched the participatory value of this inquiry. The six-week timeframe and technology constraints seemed to constrain opportunities for data analysis, production, advocacy, and reflection. Unlike long-term advocacy-focused connections (e.g., Kennerly & Davis, 2014), this project combined videovoice with S-L as a learning and community involvement vehicle over six-weeks in a low-technology community-based learning setting. Given the sporadic internet connection, hard copies of visuals served as a starting point for vocabulary study, caption writing, and storytelling tasks. Future S-L partnerships could foster social change through longitudinal engagement across a wide variety of web-distribution platforms, such as YouTube (Catalani et al., 2012), [Omeka](#), [Scalar](#), [Aesop Story Engine](#), and [Tiki-Toki](#) and organizations with shared agenda, such as [Schools for Chiapas](#) and [ProMedios](#).

As this collaboration unfolded, I struggled with integrating high-impact practices into an online course while preparing PSTs for their exams and negotiating concerns related to involvement, privacy, data ownership, logistics that might reinforce existing power structures and weaken the intended outcomes (Kennerly & Davis, 2014). In addition to institutional endorsement for S-L through small grants, possible ways to foster program-level support are to launch community-student consultations for large courses, scaffold S-L across relevant courses to allow professional advancement over time, elevate the value of S-L to research (Werder & Lypka, 2014), and integrate supervised instruction (Yang, 2015). Given my familiarity with the teaching context at ST, negotiating expectations regarding PST conduct, agreement forms, course alignment, and individual coaching seemed less demanding. For example, to line up the film with the course objective of developing and evaluating instruction, I incorporated team-teaching that required creating project-relevant lessons and modifying them to the ELs’ goals, a course core task. Although reflections predominantly portrayed PST stance, insights for the agency, ELs, and public officials could have been elicited through follow-up interviews or surveys.

Despite some logistical and course alignment concerns at the other service sites, the feedback reveals that overall, the stakeholders benefited from these community-based exchanges. Specifically, the ELs received English instruction and tutoring, shared personal stories, and engaged in mural making, painting, drawing, and other projects. The ST leadership continues to use the documentary film in grant applications and at community events. The PSTs were introduced to learner-appropriate instructional and research techniques and materials. Furthermore, they honed their practice by observing classes, implementing technology-infused lesson plans, teaching, as well as analyzing and reflecting on their experiences. I have gained opportunities to engage in a participatory visual S-L initiative, coach, provide individual feedback, and facilitate reflection on context-dependent pedagogical problems.

In contrast with Green and Kloos (2009), who noted some refugee narratives were divorced from deeper connections, the group discussions generated occasional sensitive narratives related to parents leaving children and other family members in Mexico, crossing the border, and feeling isolated in their current lives. These visual elicitations, sometimes in stark

contrast with the mainstream discourses on immigration, education, and English as a lingua franca, challenged PSTs to critically reflect on their learners' migration and L2 development trajectories that vastly differed from international- and study abroad students and examine their own backgrounds and beliefs. Although these interactions did not necessarily translate into concrete individual or collective actions, the videovoice seemed to influence their commitment for change: in addition to educating themselves and others through sharing stories, some PSTs chronicled their desire to advocate for ELs and engage in similar projects, suggesting that perhaps this experience shifted their teacher identities and beliefs toward a value-laden investment (De Felice & Lypka, 2013).

Similar to other visual-based studies (e.g., Graziano, 2011; Lypka, 2018), this videomaking S-L initiative anchored in available resources, reciprocal interests, and preferred learning modes— oral, visual, gestural, and tactile senses— seemed to effectively foster linguistic, literacy, and content knowledge advancement and social awareness. Contrary to my fear that the lack of resources and perceived poor linguistic confidence might hinder participation, the reliance on mobile learning technologies, the repetitive nature of interaction moves in discussions, as well as the peer-, Spanish language, and visual scaffolding boosted L2 knowledge and investment. In response to ELs' family, work, commuting, and technological concerns, I sought volunteers for transportation and childcare assistance and championed reliance on hard copy handouts of visuals during discussions and mobile phones for data collection.

A surprising outcome was that filmmaking in some instances transformed family members into experts and teachers. During a visual elicitation task, a student reported how her son, an avid videographer, helped her sequence her visuals for her photo essay about culture and explained her concepts in English while she taught him these terms in Spanish. The repetitive nature and relevant content during the data collection and visual elicitation phases advanced real-world connection and academic, digital literacy, and socialization in ways that were familiar to students. In addition to observing learning-in-action, the visual elicitation task foregrounded the sociocultural aspects of meaning-making, revealing rich literacy practices and emic perspectives in ways that may not come across in interviews or questionnaires and mainstream classrooms (Vecchio et al., 2017).

These preliminary results should be interpreted in light of my evolving personal and professional identities and numerous limitations. I recognize that my minority, language learner, instructor, researcher, and supervisor roles, previous engagement at ST, and co-researchers' dynamic and expectations have influenced this work.

One of the limitations of this study was my struggle to provide coaching, oversee exchanges, and establish course connections across the S-L exchanges. Although I was able to mediate challenges model, observe, and provide individual coaching at ST, coaching and feedback efforts on projects at other service sites were constrained to online communication. To mediate interventions at these sites, I chunked projects into smaller tasks (Perren et al., 2013) and encouraged a balanced involvement through teamwork, individual face-to-face and e-consultations, as well as email check-ins. Delegating supervision responsibilities to teaching assistants or a co-instructor or narrowing the S-L projects to one or two service sites can expand feedback and interaction efforts.

Although the PSTs were advised about the S-L requirement and the possibilities to enroll in another section of this course, identify projects at their practicum sites, or work in small teams in established exchanges at ST, students who were enrolled in several courses perhaps remained

less invested in these S-L initiatives. Other limitations were the small sample size and the limited opportunities for the participants to analyze and edit the video. Further studies could involve more members in the analysis and production phases. Despite my extended time at ST and efforts to establish trust by relying on the director as a multilingual translator and cultural insider (Auerbach, 2002) and mastering beginner-level Spanish language fluency, some ELs were reluctant to invest in these projects. Finally, the lack of lasting community engagement, debriefing, and follow-up interviews weakens the interpretation of this initiative. Inviting residents and decision makers to engage in this project can strengthen the advocacy efforts. Similar to Cameron (2015), follow-up surveys or interviews could reveal the long-term benefits of S-L. Nevertheless, the ethnographic nature of this videovoice and the community support broadened my understanding of the S-L practice through the exploration of a context-sensitive participatory digital visual S-L framework.

## CONCLUSION

To advance participatory digital visual S-L scholarship in TESOL, this inquiry is the first to describe the implementation of a grassroots videovoice to galvanize LESLLA advocacy and L2 investment in a community-based program while fulfilling the demand to prepare PSTs to effectively apply linguistics, technology, and instructional techniques with adult LESLLA learners. Although, I continued to perfect this method over a two-year period, as an alternative to print-based literacy and instructor-centered curricula, participatory visual S-L has the potential to reframe pedagogy as an ongoing dialogue and identity negotiation mediated through multiple communication modes, reflection, and technology (De Felice & Lypka, 2013). Properly implemented community media S-L exchanges have the potential to disrupt dominant ideas, power tensions, and privilege, such as the server- served, disciplinary-interdisciplinary, and academic-civic knowledge binaries, recognize diverse practices, shift mindsets and enable individuals with diverse print-literacy, L2 fluency, and professional skills to spark dialogue about issues relevant to them.

From a sociocultural orientation, real-life tasks, personal stories, and reflections amplified interactions on multiple levels. By humanizing emic perspectives and recognizing preferred oral and visual communication modes and cultural practices, such as observation, modeling, and storytelling, collaborative filmmaking became an authentic meaning-making, advocacy, reflection, and assessment tool. In contrast to conventional practices that might constrain linguistic and cultural capital, the preliminary findings suggest that shared investment and reliance on multilingual, multimodal repertoires underscored expression, reflection, and knowledge production, which are difficult to attain in prescriptive instructional contexts.

By emphasizing equitable collaboration, particular realities, and local practices, this approach can build an alternative space for action and self-discovery. Despite the time and logistical constraints and family and work commitments, co-researchers experienced heightened awareness of community issues and some form of legitimacy as competent multilingual ambassadors, activists, or as educational actors. The PSTs with previous limited practice opportunities gained situated educational knowledge and adapted to pedagogical challenges drawing on students' sociocultural backgrounds and language policies (De Felice & Lypka, 2013). The ELs practiced their speaking abilities and gained communicative competence and authorial voice (Perren et al., 2013). Their video testimonial at the end of 2014 in response to a

grant from the Institute for Mexicans Abroad to sustain EL courses at ST illustrates the ELs' dedication to high-priority projects in their communities. During this exchange, I learned to align my inquiry and pedagogy with community-identified goals through ongoing dialogue and input from stakeholders. Above all, I grew more confident in my abilities to employ multimodal community-based professional investment to deepen learning and mobilize action and enacted this technique in other language teaching contexts.

### **APPENDIX A: ESOL Course Assignments**

The following assignments were part of this course:

- The Core Tasks entailed an EL case study and an ESOL-infused lesson plan. The case study required describing an EL's sociocultural background, analyzing linguistic, literacy, and American cultural competencies, and offering pedagogical recommendations based on the data collected. The lesson plan task involved adapting and accommodating three plans from the same theme for multiple learner levels in the skill areas of reading, writing, speaking, and listening and explaining accommodations with specific actions, materials, and means integrated throughout the plan at the objective, materials, procedures, and assessment.
- The midterm contained questions related to course, using resources and life experiences.
- Additional activities included discussion boards related to the S-L action plan, timeline, instructional strategies, memorable stories, and peer feedback on the core assignments, practice quizzes, reflections, a final report about the S-L project and students' evolving understanding of community, pedagogy, and linguistics, and knowledge of self, and a pre- and post-survey.

### **APPENDIX B: Modified Videovoice Procedures**

1. Development of the initial objectives and a plan
2. S-L orientation
3. Videovoice training
4. Videovoice procedures
  - a. Refining development of objectives and plan
  - b. Team-teaching
  - c. Visual documentation in initial outings (modeling and data collection)
  - d. Visual elicitation through guided discussion, analysis, and reflection
  - e. [Writing a script](#) and feedback elicitation
  - f. [Storyboarding](#) and feedback elicitation
  - g. Production of the rough cut and feedback elicitation
  - h. Screening of rough cut
  - i. Public screening
  - j. Reflection

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