Many schools around the world are looking to service learning projects to help enhance the English language learning experience. I just got back from Malaysia where service learning has captured the attention of ministries, teachers, students, and newspapers. This short professional development activity introduces the idea of service learning to the teacher and how it can intensify a student’s language learning.

**Time:** 45 minutes  
**Materials:**  
Scraps of paper, baseball hat  
**Audience:**  
Secondary school teachers and university professors  
**Objectives**  
Teachers will be able to create a service learning action plan that will enhance their students’ English language learning.

**Pre-lesson Reading:**  
Before starting this teacher training, teachers should read *Using Service-Learning as Part of an ESL Program* by James M. Minor (2001). This short article gives some excellent tips on creating service learning programs. This article is part of the information segment of this activity.

**Introduction:**  
Divide your teachers into logical groups: departments, grade level, student proficiency level, etc. Have teachers talk about what service learning means to them. Give them about 3 minutes to come up with a definition. If they are stuck, here are some definitions:

- Experiential learning that uses community service to reinforce classroom learning objectives (Marlow, 2007).
- A union of community service and formal learning.  
  - First, going out into the school’s community  
  - Using that which they learn in class with community members  
  - Last, bringing their experience back into the classroom (Minor, 2001)
- Integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection ([www.servicelearning.org](http://www.servicelearning.org))

Continue the conversation. Ask each group to answer these questions:

- Does your school have a service learning program?
- What types of activities would be considered service learning?
- How long has your school been participating in service learning?
- How can service learning activity enhance your students’ English skills?
Last, give each group several scraps of paper and have them brainstorm ideas for a service learning project. Think of projects that might enhance students’ English skills: working at soup kitchens, volunteering at orphanages, etc. Groups should write one idea per piece of paper they have. Place all scraps of paper in the baseball hat.

Information: (10 minutes)
Give a quick summary of the Using Service-Learning as Part of an ESL Program article. Focus on the ten practical tips for getting started.

Let teachers know that in their groups, they are going to develop an action plan for a service learning project. First, they will blindly take several pieces of paper from the baseball hat and then choose one topic to develop. They should plan their activities based on the steps offered in Designing a Service-Learning Program in Ten Steps. This chart will help groups keep organized.

Planning: (15 minutes)
Each group should complete the chart based on the service learning topic they chose. Groups should also create a realistic timeline for how long it might take to implement the project. Also, groups should remember to discuss how this particular service learning project will enhance their students’ English language learning. For example, cleaning a city park does not allow students to practice their English with the community.

Closure: (5 minutes)
REPORT OUT! If there is time, let groups share their action plans with each other.

Resources:


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Sarah graduated from the University of Maryland with a degree in English, and there she trained a circus train classroom for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey, and taught 8th grade writing in Maryland. Prior to all that, Sarah was a Peace Corps Volunteer in Ethiopia. She is also a certified ashtanga yoga instructor and has managed an eco-lodge in Chugchilan, Ecuador.

**SERVICE LEARNING PLANNING CHART**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step:</th>
<th>Timeline:</th>
<th>Action Plan</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assess the Needs and Resources of Your Community and School</td>
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<td>Form Community Partnerships</td>
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<td>Set Specific Educational Goals and Curriculum</td>
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<td>Select a Project and Begin Preliminary Planning</td>
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<td>Plan Your Project in Detail</td>
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<td>Acquire Necessary Funding and Resources</td>
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<td>Implement and Manage Project</td>
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<td>Organize Reflection Activities</td>
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<td>Assess and Evaluate Your Service Program</td>
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<td>Celebrate Achievements</td>
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