The Impact of Service-Learning on Early Childhood Preservice Teachers

Miranda Lin
Alan B. Bates
Illinois State University

Abstract

This paper explores how service learning helps preservice teachers change their perceptions toward working with diverse populations and how they link service learning to social justice. Providing opportunities for preservice teachers to link community service with their classroom experiences adds value to their learning experience and enhances qualities of understanding and commitment that lead to effective citizenship participation. Twenty-eight early childhood preservice teachers enrolled in a multicultural education course were asked to complete a service-learning project in which they worked with day care centers that serve low income families. In groups, preservice teachers worked closely with the centers to conduct a needs assessment and create projects that assist in overcoming the issues facing each center. After the projects were completed, preservice teachers completed a guided reflection paper and poster presentation as part of the project. Guiding questions focused on the impact of the experience on preservice teachers and the centers. Results indicated that overall, preservice teachers valued the service learning experience and gained an appreciation for working with students of diverse backgrounds. However, they had difficulty connecting service-learning and social justice. Strategies to help preservice teachers develop a better understanding of social justice will be discussed.

Introduction

Service-learning offers individuals an opportunity to link theory to practice; more specifically it can help teacher candidates explore the connections between theoretical and practical. It also offers individuals the opportunity to connect to a community and identify their civic roles in that community. Service-learning, a pedagogy that has been implemented in higher education, has received more recognition as the National and Community Service Act (1990) created a federal mandate to increase civic engagement across campuses. Service-learning is now perceived as a movement to reinvigorate the public purposes and civic mission of many higher education institutions.

Service-learning as a teaching strategy has been integrated in many teacher education programs across the country (Jagla, Erickson, & Tinker, 2013). It is used frequently in multicultural education courses to help preservice teachers better understand the social issues and their role as teachers in today's ever-changing classroom (e.g., Boyle-Baise, 2002). When community-based service-learning is implemented in teacher education programs, it can provide preservice teachers a basis for multicultural education. Community-based service-learning can help preservice teachers become aware of the social issues the community faces, needs of the community, their students' educational needs, and eventually help them develop instructional activities relevant to their concerns. Boyle-Baise proclaims that multicultural service-learning should focus on inclusive, critical, and social use. It is about building community and resolving issues associated with inequality.

Service-learning experiences provide the opportunity for preservice teachers to develop a commitment to lifelong learning.

They can also provide preservice teachers with the opportunity to better understand the real-world experiences of individuals of all walks of life in their immediate communities, especially in the culturally diverse and low-income community. Research on service-learning has shown positive effects on student learning outcomes (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011; Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Maynes, Hatt, & Wideman, 2013). Most importantly, service-learning has an impact on preservice teachers' dispositions toward teaching in diverse settings, cultural awareness, social issues, and social responsibility. This study attempts to further explore how service-learning experiences influence first year early childhood education preservice teachers and if these experiences affect their understanding of social justice.

Service-Learning

Service-learning combines experiential learning and community service; it focuses on critical, reflective thinking as well as personal and civic responsibility. Service-learning is a method for individuals to learn and develop through active participation in planned service within a school or community service program to meet the needs of communities (Jacoby, 2015). It helps foster civic responsibility, provides structured time for reflection upon the experience. Service-learning as a teaching strategy has become popular during the past two decades. Kaye (2010) argues that service-learning helps individuals develop a deeper understanding of the course content, fosters their sense of civic engagement, and helps develop better insights into themselves and their place in the community. According to Kaye, service-learning makes learning meaningful because it is directly related to the students' curriculum and students make meaning from their experience. This concept is not new as Dewey (1916; 1938) stated that

students learn best by doing. His learning theory focuses on learning through experience and critical thinking, which is the essence of service-learning.

Types of Service-Learning

Kaye (2010) proposes four types of service-learning: direct, indirect, advocacy, and research. Direct service-learning impacts individuals who receive direct help from college students, for example tutoring. Indirect service-learning refers to projects that benefit an organization, program, or community as opposed to specific individuals (e.g., food and clothing drives). Advocacy service-learning involves writing, teaching, presenting, and informing on projects that promote action or create awareness of on issues of public interest (e.g., lending library, family literacy night, violence and drug prevention). And research service-learning refers to the finding, compiling, and reporting of information on topics in the public interest via surveys, data gathering, interviewing and so forth (e.g., getting information on the pricing of children's furniture/equipment/teaching materials).

Service-Learning Outcomes

Previous service-learning studies present five outcome areas of service-learning: 1) attitudes toward self, 2) attitudes toward learning, 3) civic engagement, 4) social skills, and 5) academic performance (Baldwin et al., 2017; Celio et al., 2011). These findings indicate that service-learning can benefit individuals in various capacities. Enhanced self-efficacy and self-esteem, more positive attitudes toward school and education, and an increase in positive attitudes toward community involvement, as well as a gain in social skills associated with leadership and empathy are just a few of the benefits (Celio et al., 2011; Chambers & Lavery, 2012; Donnison & Itter, 2010; Lake & Jones, 2008; Warren, 2012).

Prentice and Robinson (2010) found that college students who were engaged in service-learning were more likely to be continuously enrolled in college and performed better academically than their counterparts. They also noticed that these college students demonstrated higher social skills and a will to pursue a higher degree. Evidently college students who have service-learning experience have enhanced attitudes toward learning and academic performance. Jacoby (2015), after many years of extensive research on service-learning, also suggests that service-learning has tremendous potential as a tool to assist college students to see and act on the problems of their communities, engage in dialogue and problem solving with the people most affected.

Meanwhile, the impact of service-learning on teacher education has also been observed. Maynes, Hatt, and Wideman (2013) integrated service-learning in senior preservice teachers' practicum. They found that preservice teachers perceived service-learning positively and they also found that the impact on preservice teachers included greater commitment to social issues and social responsibility. These preservice teachers demonstrated strong awareness of themselves and of the social issues, and exhibited support for social change. Their findings were supported by previous research, which affirms the value and effectiveness of service-learning (e.g., Baldwin et al., 2007; Lake & Jones, 2008). Most preservice teachers are from communities that are very different from those of the children/families/communities they work with in service-learning projects. Baldwin and her colleagues believe that service-learning experiences enable preservice teachers to examine their own values and the limited expectations they have for children, their families, and their communities.

Previous research that includes practicum teachers/mentors, field supervisors or faculty's voices indicates that the impact of service-learning can be rather profound. Many mentors/faculty agreed that service-learning not only enhanced preservice teachers' learning but also their civic engagement and skills to work with others (Donnison & Itter, 2010; Maynes et al., 2013; Simons et al., 2013). For example, field supervisors in the study of Donnison and Itter found that service-learners developed social responsibility, were more sensitive to other cultures and needs, had strong communication and interpersonal skills, and were better prepared for future work.

Certainly, the outcomes of service-learning vary depending upon the type of experience. (Desmond, Stahl, & Graham, 2011). For example, Vogel and Seifer (2011) state that sustained service-learning increases community engagement and improved community-university relations. This outcome may not be attained in all service-learning experiences but is more likely to be experience-specific. Generally speaking, positive outcomes outweigh negative ones when service-learning is used as a teaching tool in higher education. In the meantime, Desmond and her colleagues argue that while service-learning has a potential to be a transformative pedagogy, there is also a possibility that service-learning could perpetuate individuals' negative attitudes and behaviors toward people whom they have never dealt with before. Nevertheless, higher education has a responsibility to help individuals gain the knowledge of self and others that will propel them into becoming active citizens of the world.

Service-Learning and Social Justice

Social justice is often perceived as promoting a just society by challenging injustice and valuing diversity. Social justice is both a process and a goal (Adams, Bell, & Griffins, 2007). The process focuses on the understanding of the social structures that create inequality and challenge the existing

policies. The goal is to have a global community where people share social responsibility and are actively involved. Combining community service with learning in multicultural education course supplements classroom learning by giving preservice teachers the opportunity to practice their skills they are learning in the classroom in a real setting (Boyle-Baise, 2002; 2005). This concrete experience offers the opportunity for preservice teachers to interact with their group members and community members to work together to better the quality of life in their community. Desmond, Stahl, and Graham (2011) argue that multicultural service-learning can be a powerful pedagogical tool as it gives preservice teachers a direct opportunity to actively examine, investigate, and seek out multiple perspectives to gain a deeper understanding of social structures, challenges, and differences within the community. They further state that this experience is cooperative which promotes skills associated with teamwork.

The multicultural service-learning experiences provide preservice teachers with access to greater understanding of the social and cultural diversity of the community and its wealth and traditions as well as the challenges that the community faces (Desmond et al., 2011). Consequently, when preservice teachers feel connected to the community, they are more likely to care about the social issues and continue civic engagement. Boyle-Baise (2002) asserts that multicultural service-learning experiences with diverse groups of people not only profoundly impact preservice teachers' academic performance but also their understanding of social responsibilities. Incorporating service-learning into multi-cultural education, therefore, has been increasingly recognized to be a critical component of teacher education programs.

Recently, Simons and colleagues (2013) looked at the differences in attitudes and skills of 101 college students, most of whom were preservice teachers, after participating in academic-based and cultural-based service-learning experiences. They found that cultural-based service learners had higher ratings of social justice and increased multicultural and problem-solving skills compared to academic-based service learners. Multicultural service-learning as a teaching method can support the goals of social justice. However, it does not assure preservice teachers will develop multicultural knowledge and skills or be committed to social justice (Boyle-Baise, 2002; Simons et al., 2013). Simons and colleagues believe that if individuals are not challenged to think critically about the diversity content and social issues faced in the service context, they may still develop colorblind views and/or will not reduce certain stereotypes.

Service-learning can be a tool for preservice teachers to work toward social justice advocacy. As previous research suggests, preservice teachers need to be aware of the social issues of their community before they become activists within their community to improve the quality of life (e.g., Boyle-Baise, 2002; 2005). However, to prepare preservice teachers for this task, they need to examine their own values and attitudes in a safe learning environment (Lin, Lake, & Rice, 2008). Lin et al. argue that *"internalized dialogue"* which requires preservice teachers to reflect on their personal cultural values and understand that many ideas that they hold as truths are culturally-based. Additionally, preservice teachers need to learn the skills to work collaboratively with their peers and the community members. Most importantly, service-learning as Chambers (2009) points out, needs to go beyond the philanthropic approach. The social transformation approach to service-learning requires individuals to understand the causes and continuation of social inequities and to

challenge and change the world as well as reformulate their attitudes and challenge their preconceived notions (Chambers, 2009; Simon et al., 2013). Chamber argues that "social transformation focuses on altering the system, the assumptions, the mindsets, and the relationship that create and sustain inequities" (p. 90) which resonances the significance of internalized dialogue (Lin et al. 2008). Namely, the underlying assumptions, preconceived notions are to be critically examined and ultimately altered.

Conceptual Framework

The main goal of service-learning is to enable students to become engaged citizens and be critical thinkers. The outcomes of service-learning can be educational, vocational, and social according to Chambers (2009). Chambers argues that students who are engaged in service-learning in the college classrooms are more likely to choose service-orientated professions vocationally in the future. He also states that there is a positive relationship between service-learning and individuals' academic performance, and service-learning helps reduce racial stereotyping and cultural understanding. Chambers proposes four underlying theories of service-learning.

Experiential Education

Experiential learning is also referred to as learning through action, learning by doing and learning through experience. It focuses on the students' learning from the experience rather than the quantity or quality of the experience. The outcomes may be positive or negative; they vary by the nature of the projects.

Social Learning

The factors affecting students' learning can be multifaceted. The focus of this level of service-learning is on what the students take from the experience by learning about the social conditions in their community

(Maynes et al., 2013). This type of service-learning enables students to learn within the social and cultural context.

Student Development

This level of service-learning focuses on students' energy and commitment to the service and expanding their skills and knowledge. Chambers (2009) believes that "student's integration into the academic and social systems of institution is vital to student persistence" (p. 83). Student development can be categorized in various realms: cognitive-structural, psychosocial, eco-logical, and typological, according to Chambers. Through active engagement and reflection, students learn to be actively involved in their community and learn about their role personally and professionally.

Liberatory Education

Liberatory pedagogy recognizes the politics of education. Liberatory education is centered on social change and transformation through education based on consciousness raising and engagement with oppressive forces (Freire, 1970). For students to better understand and recognize the economic, political, and social conditions that impact their lives and the lives of the community members, this theory suggests students to be provided with the opportunity for social change and transformational shifts in social consciousness.

All the aforementioned service-learning theories are critical and essential for individuals to grow personally and professionally (Chambers, 2009). Since not all service-learning leads to social justice, depending upon the nature of the service-learning project, individuals may not have similar experiences and may experience different levels of service-learning.

In this study, contributions of service-learning to social justice were the main focus to be examined. The goal of the service-learning projects in this study was to help the

first year preservice teachers experience a liberatory education as the service-learning projects were embedded in a multicultural education course. Chambers believes that the contribution of liberatory education to service-learning is "the linkage tween discipline-based learning, individual identity formation, and socio-centric engagement, a linkage that changes inequitable conditions for self and others" (p.84). It was hoped that the learning that preservice teachers engage in would be meaningful and critical which help them understand the complexity and dynamics of the political and social issues that early childhood programs face on a daily basis. In turn, these preservice teachers would be able to articulate and advocate for (and advocate with) for the children and families who are marginalized.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Service-learning has demonstrated measurable improvement for preservice teachers' thinking and action. As the nation continues the work on educational reform, teacher educators/teacher education programs need to find ways to strengthen teacher preparation to better prepare preservice teachers for the real world classroom. Using service-learning as pedagogy to reform or transform teacher education programs has recently gained attention. For the purpose of the study, the definition of service-learning is as defined by the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (2013), "A teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities." If service-learning can offer teacher candidates an authentic and concrete pedagogical context to develop self and cultural awareness as well as an opportunity to enact social justice principles, it could be considered an ideal teaching method in

teacher education programs. Most importantly, through service, preservice teachers can "put meaning back into learning" (Lake & Jones, 2008, p. 2155).

Jagla, Erickson, and Tinkler (2013) assert that the pedagogy of service-learning can play a critical role in teacher preparation. Despite the increased presence of service-learning in college courses, it is still unclear what student outcomes are associated with service-learning projects and what factors contribute to effective projects. Agarwal, Epstein, Oppenheim, Olyer, & Sonu, (2010) maintain that new teachers can expect to struggle with issues of social justice because they know little about teaching with culture and community in mind. This project intends to explore the possible outcomes related to social justice and is guided by the following four research questions:

1. How does service-learning impact preservice teachers?
2. How does service-learning change preservice teachers' attitudes towards teaching diverse student populations?
3. How does service-learning help preservice teachers as future educators?
4. How do preservice teachers link service-learning to social justice?

Methodology

Participants

Convenient sampling was used to recruit the participants in this study. Early childhood preservice teachers who were enrolled in a multicultural education course, at a predominated White public institution in the Midwestern United States were asked to participate in this study. Twenty-eight students agreed to participate. All but two participants were White and of middle class and all but two were female. All were freshmen ages 18 and 19 except for one male student who was in his late twenties and an Iraq War veteran. All participants claimed to be Christians and had very little encounters with those who were different from them,

religiously, culturally, and linguistically. For all participants, this was their first service-learning experience as service-learning was not required in their general education courses or methods courses.

Setting

Five early childhood centers agreed to participate in this study. The preservice teachers were divided into five groups and each group chose to work with one of the five centers. All centers served culturally, racially, and linguistically diverse low-income families and received some form of government subsidies either from the state, city/county, or federal government. One of the centers served majority single parent households (98%). Each center has also worked with the university in various capacities such as taking preservice teachers when they are doing their practicum. However, none of the programs has engaged in any service-learning in the past. All of the directors/coordinators were White middle class females. All sites were located in the same town where the majority of the population was White.

Procedures

In groups, participants worked closely with the director or coordinator of the early childhood centers to conduct a needs assessment and create projects that assist in overcoming the issues faced by each center. All five group projects were created based on the needs of the center and participants worked with the center director/coordinator to successfully carry out their projects. For example, one group conducted research on pricing of equipment and materials as this particular center was going to move to a new location, and another group held a supply drive. Participants were required to devote at least 10 to 15 hours to their service-learning projects. However, because the nature of service-learning projects varied among groups, participants spent from nearly 10 to almost 20 hours to complete their projects.

As part of their coursework, participants were required to write a guided reflection paper after their service-learning projects were completed. The guiding questions focused on the impact of the service-learning experience on the preservice teachers, both in general and as future educators. Questions regarding service-learning and social justice were also included. The guiding questions were developed by the two researchers, one of whom was the course instructor. This study focused on responses to the following guiding questions: "What did you learn from this experience?," "How does this experience change your attitudes towards teaching diverse student populations?," "How does this experience help you as a future educator?" and, "In what ways, did your project promote social justice?"

Data Analysis

Participants' responses to the four questions were coded and specific codes emerged from the analysis. The process of analysis began with open coding of the participant surveys by each of the two individual researchers. Grounded Theory methodology defines open coding as the process of developing categories of concepts and themes emerging from data (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). Data exploration is done without prior assumptions as to what might be discovered and with relationships among the data yet to be determined. According to Bryman and Burgess, "categories are rarely known in advance of data exploration, and the relationships between categories must always be discovered during data analysis" (p. 168).

After initial open coding by individual researchers, responses were discussed and a code was determined which captured the overall response. In some instances, responses included more than one code. Individual codes were collapsed into logical

categories for analysis. There were six main categories for the research questions that focused on overall learning from the experience, the effect on attitudes toward teaching diverse student populations, and the impact as future educators. Table 1 lists these categories and related codes. Table 2 lists the categories used for the final analysis for research question 4.

Table 1. Categories for Research Questions 1, 2, 3

Category	Code
Personal Benefits and Development	Appreciation for what they have
	Motivation to want to give back
	Exposure to what is out there
Professional Impact	Teacher attitudes
	Teacher skills
	Nature of teaching
	Affirmation of career choice
Social Issues	Learning about funding
	Lack of governmental support
Social Attitudes	Every little bit helps
	School specific
	Importance of community
	Not everyone has what they need
Civic Responsibilities	Important to help others
	See the need to understand community
	See the need for good teachers who are willing to take less pay
	I can make a difference
No Impact/Change	
No Response Provided	

Table 2. Categories for Research Question 4

Category	Code
School related	Met the school's needs
	Stressed importance of having schools that serve low income families
Student related	Students' learning/ needs addressed
	Allowed school to focus on students
	Connecting children with college students
Focus on Equity	Showing that everyone deserves the best
	Showing that everyone should be given equal opportunities for learning
Did not Promote	
No Response Provided	

Findings

Research Question 1: How does service-learning impact preservice teachers?

The purpose of this research question was to examine the impact that the service-learning experience had on preservice teachers. Table 3 lists the percentage of occurrences for each coding category for question one. The most common category was that of the impact on their own social attitudes (44%), related to their own understanding of low-income schools and those who are socio-economically disadvantaged. For example, one preservice teacher wrote, "I learned that everyone is not as fortunate as others and that many schools are in need of resources. This makes me angry because more attention and money should be spent on the education of our children because they are the future." Another preservice teacher stated, "I learned how some daycares have very little money. Not all daycares have enough money for art supplies or toys. Even the smallest gesture could help." Other comments in this category were very similar, with preservice teachers almost showing surprise as to the lower ends of some schools.

The category with the second most responses was that of the impact on preservice teachers' professional skills (39%), most specifically related to their specific project. For example, one preservice teacher focused on her learning of pricing, "I learned that pricing a classroom is a lot harder than I thought it was and that it is very time consuming. It was hard having to decide between different furniture." Another participant, whose group assisted a school with classroom organization, commented, "I learned that organizing closets with lots of stuff is not as easy as it seems and that the closets don't have very much room in them." One other student whose group helped with organizing, commented on the impact of seeing what they were organizing, "I learned of the different subjects that early childhood educators target when teaching and about all the different toys and instructional resources that they use to teach things like dramatic play, fine motor development, and music."

It is important to note that the other two categories were often side thoughts mixed into comments that addressed one of the more common categories, professional impact and social attitudes. Two preservice teachers failed to address the guiding question that focused on impact of the experience on them and one other stated, "To be honest, I didn't feel that I learned very much from this experience. While I know it's important for the children in these state-funded centers to have enough materials for proper learning, I didn't learn much."

Table 3. Category Occurrences for Question 1

Category	Occurrences
Professional Impact	17 (39 %)
Social Attitudes	19 (44 %)
Civic Responsibilities	2 (5 %)
Personal Benefits/ Development	2 (5 %)
No Response Provided/ No Impact	3 (7 %)

Research Question 2: How does Service-Learning change preservice teachers' attitudes towards teaching diverse student populations?

Question 2 focused on preservice teachers' attitudes towards teaching diverse student populations. Responses regarding this topic varied significantly (see Table 4). The most common category for this question was that of Professional Impact (38%), mostly related to encouraging a stronger desire to work in a low-income or more diverse setting. For example, one preservice teacher commented, "This experience has enhanced my possibility of wanting to teach in a low-income, urban setting community. I am now more open to teaching in a more diverse setting with children of different races, classes and ethnicities." Another preservice teacher, with limited experience in dealing with diverse populations, stated, "Before this I had never experienced a diverse setting as diverse as [school's name] and now I feel as though if I do teach in a diverse setting in the future, I will be able to do so confidently.

Besides the category of Professional Impact, preservice teachers' responses were more spread out across the other categories. Six preservice teachers mentioned that the experience did not change their attitude. These preservice teachers were those that had more experience with diverse populations. Also, another six preservice teachers made comments related to a new found civic responsibility, "it makes me want to help other daycares or schools that do not have the privilege as other schools may have. I want to make a difference." Again, there was a small group of preservice teachers that chose not to respond to this specific prompt.

Table 4. Category Occurrences for Question 2

Category	Occurrences
Social Attitudes	4 (11 %)
Professional Impact	14 (38 %)

Civic Responsibilities	6 (16 %)
Personal Benefits/ Development	2 (5 %)
No Change In Attitude	6 (16 %)
No Response Provided	5 (14 %)

Research Question 3: How does Service-Learning help preservice teachers as future educators?

The third research question was intended to determine the effects of service-learning on preservice teachers, specifically as future educators. Although responses fell into each of the possible categories, as expected a high percentage, 68%, could be categorized as having a professional impact including ideas related to project specific tasks, ideas that they could incorporate into their future classroom, time management, and the importance of working together. Out of the 25 occurrences, 13 occurrences were specific to the service-learning project conducted by the preservice teachers, indicating that in terms of educational impact, preservice teachers may not be looking at the big picture of their project's impact on their future roles as educators.

Table 5. Category Occurrences for Question 3

Category	Occurrences
Professional Impact	25 (68 %)
Social Issues	4 (11 %)
Personal Benefits/ Development	1 (2.5 %)
Civic Responsibilities	2 (5.5 %)
Social Attitudes	1 (2.5 %)
Did Not Benefit	1 (2.5 %)
No Response Provided	3 (8 %)

Research Question 4: How do preservice teachers link Service-Learning to Social Justice?

The last research question focused on preservice teachers' ability to link service-learning and social justice. The preservice teachers had some difficulty answering this question with approximately 24% of them not responding to the guiding questions focused on this topic, more so than for any of the other questions posed. However, over 39% of the preservice teachers who responded discussed how their project met their particular school's needs and in doing so, supported social justice. For example, one preservice teacher stated, "We promoted social justice by giving them things they needed. Distributing things other classrooms have that are better off, and bringing it to the daycare was really helpful." Another preservice teacher commented in terms of needs that then benefited the children, "Our project promoted social justice by assisting the daycare staff in organizing their resource room. Because we took the time to do this, they could focus more on their students."

Other responses addressing the link to social justice focused more on specially impacting the students and providing them with what they need, for example, "everyone deserves help. It's really not fair to the children who have to be put in these low income environments where they are deprived of a lot of opportunities. A small number of responses also mentioned equality. One student stated, "Everyone is equal and deserves all they can get." Another example involving the issue of equality also demonstrates preservice teachers' lack of understanding of the true definition of social justice, "Our project promoted social justice by creating a sense of equality. By organizing this closet it make it easier for everyone to access the materials not just one person." However, it is promising that preservice teachers who stated that their project did not promote social justice, seemed to have an understanding of social justice by offering such explanations as, "It did not promote social justice but we provided kids a way to receive the resources they deserve." And, "it did not promote social justice but it did provide me a view of the inequalities that exist."

Table 6. Category Occurrences for Question 4

Category	Occurrences
School Related	13 (39.5 %)
Student Related	4 (12 %)
Focus on Equality	4 (12 %)
Project Did Not Promote Social Justice	4 (12 %)
No Response Provided	8 (24.5 %)

Discussion

The findings of this study provide us with insights on first year preservice teachers' perceptions of working with diverse learners, their perceptions of social justice, as well as how service-learning should be implemented in teacher education. The main focus of this study was to examine how preservice teachers link service-learning and social justice. Even though the findings of this study through this lens were not as encouraging as we hoped, we cannot interpret or simply state that participants of this study did not understand the significance of social justice in educational reform or the value of service-learning. Rather, we need to address the complexity and dynamics of service-learning and all the factors that contribute to its success or failure.

Relationship Building

Service-learning is all about relationship building. It involves preservice teachers, course faculty, program directors, and in some cases, the students. Many of the participants may not know the importance of building relationships prior to starting their project which could lead to some discomfort or miscommunication. Since participants of the study did not take a service-learning stand-alone course but a multicultural education course that embedded service-learning, it could explain why they were not well prepared for their service-learning projects. In addition, freshmen, especially

those who have not worked with social agencies or schools before, probably do not know it is essential to build and maintain a trusting relationship with their agency/ school partner. Also, preservice teachers need to be responsible for their actions and dealings with each other and the community members that they work with. The findings of a recent study found that the participants commented about how their growth as teachers related to their site supervisors as community partners (Tice & Nelson, 2013). Obviously, effective service-learning experiences prepares preservice teachers to become professional in various aspects. Further studies investigating the relationships between preservice teachers and their community partners as well as instructors' relationships with the community partners on the overall service-learning experience will be recommended.

Funds of Knowledge

Based on the findings of this study, we can safely state that faculty need to have extensive knowledge of service-learning, types of service-learning, and its implementation and practices. This stance is supported by Jagla et al. (2013). They also argue that faculty should have a solid understanding of the theory and principals of good practice in their use of service-learning as a teaching strategy. This also applies to the community partners who work with preservice teachers. In this study, none of the programs were involved in service-learning projects in the past; it could be difficult for the program director to understand what service-learning truly entailed. For this reason, the nature of the project might not best meet their programs' needs. Thus, it is suggested that faculty meet with the partners to provide information on service-learning before the semester starts so that everyone is on the same page. Furthermore, to make service-learning a transformative pedagogy that assists preservice teachers to achieve

social justice and other goals, Simons et al. (2013) argue that great alignment between course content and service-learning projects deems necessary. They believe better alignment may explain why some individuals develop the desired attitudes and skills while others do not while engaged in service-learning. Hence, faculty should address the nature of the course and the requirements of the service-learning project when meeting with the school partners or agencies.

The findings of this study also reveal that preservice teachers did not have adequate understanding of service-learning nor the skills to work with community members. Many participants in this study misunderstood service-learning as community service in the beginning because they never had service-learning experiences in the past. Thus, faculty also need to teach preservice teachers the differences between service-learning and community service. Additionally, the fact that participants' funds of knowledge were not assessed prior to the start of the project also jeopardized the success of the service-learning experience. If participants' (both the program directors and preservice teachers) funds of knowledge and their abilities were made available, it would assist preservice teachers in selecting the site and types of service-learning.

Furthermore, the findings of this study also indicate that the nature and mission of each program/site was not addressed explicitly. Some preservice teachers were confused as to what to do when they met with their program directors. Some participants were not prepared when they went to visit the site; they did not know what they would be running into or what they were supposed to do. And some participants anticipated working with the kids in the classroom. The findings of this study could have been different if preservice teachers were better prepared before they started their projects. Jacoby (2015) suggests that a pre- and post-assessment may help faculty better

understand the progress students make.

Professional Preparation vs. Student Development

Participants' responses to questions pertaining to overall impact and educational impact were very similar. Overall, participants believed they learned something from their service-learning projects. The majority of responses, even those pertaining to the overall impact of the experience indicated learning related to professional preparation such as learning what was taught in an early childhood classroom, how to budget for a classroom and how to keep a classroom organized. Also, some preservice teachers commented that they gained insights into the specific student population and the program that served this student population. However, only a handful of participants indicated that they would further advocate for this specific student population. This small group of preservice teachers seemed to understand the importance of examining social issues from a big picture perspective with a focus on social and cultural context.

It was our hope that when responding to the overall impact of the project, preservice teachers would indicate an impact on their own development. Service-learning is often used as "a tool to help students to gain an understanding of their own identity in relationship to the concepts of privilege and oppression (Desmond et al., 2011, p. 28)." As Jacoby (2015) discusses, development of one's self involves thinking of one's self in more complex and distinct ways while still considering the integration of the whole self. According to Jacoby, service-learning can promote this process through providing challenges and the support to overcome these challenges. Service-learning can affect students' cognitive, psychosocial and social identity development. As indicated above, a few preservice teachers experienced changes in their patterning of thinking about social issues; however no participants articulated

any changes in terms of psychosocial and social identity development. One possible explanation of this lack of deep examining of the self by students is the lack of experience they have with children. Another explanation could be that first year preservice teachers are not skillful when it comes to reflection. Also, freshmen's maturity cannot be compared with their senior counterparts. For most of these preservice teachers, this was their first time in a school or classroom as part of their higher education learning. It is understandable that they are more focused on learning to survive and about what it takes to be successful. We would hope that with further experience in the classroom and with service-learning that these preservice teachers would begin to develop personally in addition to professionally.

Overall, it was clear that preservice teachers learned from the service-learning experience, however, the learning regarding diverse populations and social justice was not as deep as was hoped for. Participants did not reach the level of liberatory education as proposed by Chambers (2009). It seems that participation in one service-learning project is not sufficient to make preservice teachers feel connected to the community or feel adequately prepared to work with diverse student populations. This finding echoed previous research that indicated one service-learning project may be insufficient to develop a sense of community orientation for teaching (Boyle-Baise, 2005). Participants' limited lived experiences and funds of knowledge could explain why they did not reach the level of liberatory education where they come to understand the interplay of politics, economy, and education. As Lin et al. (2008) argue the importance of the internalized dialogue in teacher education, faculty need to facilitate the discourse on various issues that preservice teachers observe while at the sites. Agarwal et al. (2010) also stress the critical role that self-reflection plays in teaching social justice.

Future research can look into how faculty prepare preservice teachers' service-learning experience and why service-learning promotes their understanding of social justice in various geographic locations.

Implications

The findings of this study explicitly demonstrate the positive impact of service-learning experience on preservice teachers. However, they also suggest ways to better prepare preservice teachers to engage in service-learning to overcome some difficulties that may occur or encountered. To have successful service-learning experience, teacher education programs can consider including some of the following implications:

1. Teacher educators can prepare preservice teachers to use service-learning as a pedagogy by studying principles of good service-learning practice. In other words, faculty should have a clear understanding of service-learning theory and practice, and model these principals in their use of service-learning as a teaching method (Jagla et al., 2013).

2. Community agencies or schools that work with preservice teachers should have a good understanding of what service-learning is in order to have a meaningful service-learning project that is both beneficial for them and preservice teachers. When a leader of a program does not understand service-learning theory and practice or the value of service-learning, the outcomes of service-learning experience can be detrimental. If time permits, community partners should be invited to college classrooms before the project starts.

3. Building relationships with partner schools or agencies. Communication will be the key to a successful preservice teachers' service-learning experience and the program's mission. To make service-learning a worthwhile experience for both preservice teachers and their partners,

faculty need to ensure that everyone is on the same page. Professional development sessions for the agencies or programs may be required to make service-learning an enriched experience for the preservice teachers and for the programs as well.

4. The teacher education program needs to acknowledge the role of service-learning plays and support service-learning by providing the resources and structural elements for faculty and preservice teachers to effectively carry out their projects (Jagla et al., 2013). Profession development sessions that help faculty incorporate strategies in their courses will be needed. Additionally, teacher education programs need to offer preservice teachers the resources to complete their projects.

5. Service-learning experience should be implemented in as many courses as possible. We cannot expect preservice teachers to change their mindsets in one course or one semester; relying on one course is not realistic. Because the factors that contribute to preservice teachers' change of perceptions or understanding of social justice are multifaceted, the teacher education program should provide opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect on their learning personally and professionally.

If we believe service-learning has the power to transform teacher education, we need to make use of service-learning as an everyday experience instead of seeing it as an add-on experience or a one-time experience. Service-learning as a pedagogy means preservice teachers need to learn the theory and have the hands-on experiences in the classroom and community as well. Both experiences can help preservice teachers understand and rethink their role as teachers and as members in their community. Social justice can only be understood and promoted when preservice teachers see themselves as members of their community. Although not all preservice teachers will be able to reach liberatory education level of understanding when engaged in service-learning (Chamber, 2009), preservice teachers need to know their own value systems, the social issues the community faces, and the resources in the community to help themselves understand the interplay of politics, education system, and cultural capital in order to shift their consciousness at minimum. As Tice and Nelson (2013) suggest, the nature of the participation in the service-learning experiences can lead to engagement and confidence. We believe that the more opportunities preservice teachers engage in service-learning, the more likely they will learn to overcome their obstacles. After all, preservice teachers need to feel prepared and be prepared to work with all learners.

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