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From AAHE's Series on Service-Learning in the Disciplines, Teacher Education Volume

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From AAHE's Series on Service-Learning in the Disciplines, Teacher Education Volume

Introduction

by Joseph A. Erickson and Jeffrey B. Anderson

Progressive teacher educators face a pair of daunting yet crucial tasks. New teachers must be prepared to function successfully in schools as they exist today and also be educated to take a leadership role in the improvement and reculturing of K-12 education to more fully meet the needs of individual students and resolve societal problems. One approach that can address both these tasks is the integration of service-learning experiences into teacher preparation programs.

Definition and Examples

What is service-learning? Service-learning is most often defined as a pedagogical technique for combining authentic community service with integrated academic outcomes. A growing body of research indicates that well-designed, well-managed service-learning can contribute to students' learning and growth while also helping to meet real community needs. (See "School-Based Service: A Review of Research for Teacher Educators," beginning on p. 42, for a further discussion of conceptions of service-learning and a review of research on service-learning in K-12 and teacher education.)

Examples of service-learning in K-12 schools are numerous. One case illustrates how integrated and impactful a service-learning project can become. In Minneapolis, former teacher Mary J. Syfax Noble (now a K-12 administrator, whose comments on an administrator's role in promoting service-learning begin on p. 134) developed an elaborate multilayered service-based learning unit that started with her fifth graders' visiting a local high-rise for senior citizens. The students' initial task was to meet and query the seniors regarding what (if anything) they would like from the youngsters. This initial inquiry led to the development of a formal paper-and-pencil survey that the fifth graders wrote, disseminated, collected, tabulated, and analyzed. The results of the survey indicated a wish on the part of the older people to laugh. The students set about addressing this need by writing limericks and funny stories. The students' written pieces went through several drafts until students felt prepared to deliver the results of their work to their elders. Finally, the students then engaged in limerick-reading sessions for the senior citizens. Even a casual task analysis of this project would note specific learning activities in writing, reading, decision making, mathematics, and public speaking.

Service-learning projects aimed at developing beginning or advanced teachers' competence are also numerous. At Kentucky State University in Frankfort, Kentucky, Carole A. Cobb integrates service-learning into her Introduction to Teaching course (see p. 155ff.). Students are placed as tutors and coaches in preschool and elementary classrooms, where they examine the nature and critical issues of the teaching profession via 20-hour service placements. These placements resemble traditional clinical placements with their emphases on community involvement in schools and society and opportunities for critical reflection and skill-building practice.

At California State University in San Marcos, Joseph F. Keating assists his San Diego-area secondary education students to critically examine important social issues through self-selected community service projects. One example (see p. 186ff.) was a Spanish language preservice teacher who chose to work with a tutoring organization developed for non-English-speaking parents at a local secondary school. The student learned that some of the grandparents of the secondary students with whom she worked actually had day-to-day responsibility for the students yet knew little English, so they could not work effectively with the school. In response to this need, the student developed a weekly seminar for these grandparents to learn basic English. Her lesson plans were broadened to include her upper-level Spanish class (whom she was student teaching) in tutoring with the grandparents. The preservice teacher provided needed community service that not only connected directly with her curriculum but also developed her leadership skills.

Theory and Principles of Service-Learning

The application of the specific pedagogical technique we call "service-learning" is relatively recent, but its roots are very old.

Many religious and cultural traditions have attempted to impress upon their adherents a service ethic, from the common-good value of Native American cultures to the Good Samaritan story in the Christian tradition (Olszewski and Bussler 1993). Each of these traditions has held in high regard the importance of education for the common good. Field-based experience aimed at addressing the common good characterizes much of the theoretical basis of service-learning (e.g., Barber 1992; Cohen and Kinsey 1994; Giles 1988; Hutchings and Wutzdorff 1988; National Commission on Youth 1980; Newmann 1985).

The theoretical groundwork for service-learning's approach to learning has generally been provided by traditional experiential learning theory. Kurt Lewin's experiential learning cycle, as adapted and elaborated by Kolb (1984), gave the field a practical tool for analyzing the manner in which we introduce students to new ideas and the ways students integrate this new knowledge into their lives. This four-part cycle — concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation — is utilized in the field as a means to structure learning activities and to provide a structure for their assessment.

One way to classify the multiple theoretical threads of service-learning is to sort the various approaches into five camps (Anderson and Guest 1995): experiential learning (Dewey 1938; Kolb 1984), transformational or social reconstructionist theory (Allam and Zerkin 1993; Miller 1988), multicultural education approaches (Sleeter and Grant 1987), critical reflection (Sparks-Langer et al. 1990; Sullivan 1991), and education as preparation for civic responsibility (Coleman 1974; Martin 1976; National Committee on Secondary Education 1972). This analysis helps to identify the various competing movements that have motivated and continue to motivate the service-learning movement.

While much of the work at developing a theoretical and philosophical base for service-learning has emphasized either the common good or the role of experience on learning and cognition, few theorists have studied both. Many advocates emphasize service-learning, while others appear to accentuate service-learning (Littlefield 1996; Sigmon 1994).

A promising new attempt at simultaneously addressing both service and learning issues is found in Liu's recent discussion (1995; see also the Philosophy volume of this monograph series). In this paper, Liu structures an argument that service-learning's epistemology is distinct from and incompatible with the traditional view of learning as observed in most higher education institutions. He then builds a case for a new interactional base for learning that embeds the values of community, diversity, and engagement. By doing so, his argument takes a completely different tack that avoids the familiar service-or-learning dichotomy.

Connections to Other Educational Reform Movements

During the past 20 years, calls for educational reform at the K-12 and postsecondary levels have often included community service as one method for producing accelerated learning outcomes in both the cognitive and attitudinal domains (Boyer 1983, 1995; Goodlad 1984, 1990, 1994; Sizer 1992). Service-learning is philosophically in line with other educational reform initiatives, such as authentic assessment, cooperative learning, school-to-career experiences, site-based management, and teacher empowerment. Teacher educators have connected service-learning with professional development schools, Goals 2000 projects, integrated curriculum, and constructivist teaching as well. Service-learning can be a convenient and practical vehicle for implementing many of these reforms. For example, when conducting a well-planned service-learning project, preservice teachers and K-12 students assume leadership roles through engaging in higher-order thinking, problem solving, collaborative decision making, and the application of numerous academic and career skills, all within the context of addressing authentic community needs (Wade and Anderson 1996).

Several recent reports on educational reform have also advocated for youth service initiatives, including the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1989), Sarason (1991), and the William T. Grant Foundation (1991). Prominent educational organizations such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and the National Association of Secondary School Principals have strongly endorsed service-learning. In addition, the Corporation for National Service has provided hundreds of millions of dollars of federal funding for service-learning in K-12 and higher education programs since being established in 1993 by the Federal National and Community Service Trust Act. With the reelection of President Clinton in 1996, it is likely that this level of funding will continue through this decade. Given this ground swell of interest in service-learning, it is not surprising that all across America teacher educators are taking strides to ensure new teachers have the knowledge and experiences necessary to utilize service-learning as a teaching method with their K-12 students. Service-learning is now poised to move from the margins into the mainstream of K-12 and teacher education.

Purpose of the Monograph

While service-learning is compatible with other national educational reform movements, we contend it represents a powerful and unique philosophical and ethical stance regarding the role of youth and community in the learning process. This monograph is an attempt to bring together the best recent work in the field to assist teacher educators in developing successful service-learning in their programs and to promote policies and procedures that will foster successful service-learning activities at the local, state,

and national levels.

To achieve these goals, the monograph is organized beginning with more theoretical and research-oriented essays, then progressing to discussions of some of the practical challenges involved in preparing teachers to effectively employ service-learning. This is followed by perspectives of individuals in diverse roles in service-learning teacher education sharing their experiences. Part 3 of the monograph presents detailed descriptions of 14 models of teacher education courses and programs that integrate service-learning. The monograph concludes with an annotated bibliography of frequently cited resources and a listing of helpful organizations in service-learning.

It is our position, as editors, that this monograph could best serve teacher educators interested in service-learning by dealing directly with practical models and issues in the field, and placing these issues in a theoretical and research framework. As a result, this monograph does not include a primary focus on issues in K-12 service-learning (other than Sue Root's review of K-12 service-learning research, beginning on p. 42). Due to space limitations, several of the theoretical rationales for the use of service-learning, such as citizenship education, community cohesion, school-to-career education, character education, and moral development, have been referenced but not discussed in depth. Readers are encouraged to examine the annotated bibliography to obtain additional resources in these areas.

Integrating Service-Learning Into Teacher Education: Critical Issues

Based on our personal experiences integrating service-learning in our teacher education programs, we would like to raise several important issues and provide suggestions regarding possible solutions and improvements in the practice of service-learning in teacher preparation. While we believe it is imperative that individuals licensed to be K-12 teachers through our teacher education programs should have the competence and desire to pursue such learning activities in their classrooms, there are real deterrents. Teacher educators commonly provide one or more of the following three reasons why they do not incorporate service-learning preparation into their preservice programs:

1. Service-learning is experiential. Teachers learn it just by doing it; therefore, explicit preparation is unnecessary.
2. Preparation in the use of service-learning is not productive until after teachers have resolved many of the challenges faced by novice teachers; therefore, it is not useful in preservice teacher education programs.
3. There is no room in our program for anything else. If we added service-learning, what would we take out?

Each of these concerns requires a thoughtful response. Regarding the first issue, our experience suggests that service-learning preparation is a necessary component of preservice programs if our goal is to have graduates who engage their students in high-quality experiences involving learning through service. Many teachers who are "self-taught" tend to engage their students in community service rather than service-learning projects. While frequently addressing real community needs, community service projects fail to capitalize on the numerous opportunities to enhance student learning that pop up frequently throughout most service experiences. These teachers may neglect to incorporate reflection activities before, during, and after students' service experiences, thereby reducing the educational value of the service. Instruction and experience in how to utilize reflection with service projects and how to tie service to the academic curriculum would strengthen the learning component of these valuable community service efforts.

In response to the second issue, service-learning can be used effectively in preservice teacher education programs. Preparation in the use of service-learning as a teaching method has resulted in many preservice teachers' employing service-learning during their student teaching experience. The academic gains and personal growth experienced by their K-12 students who participated in service-learning projects has stimulated interest in service-learning in experienced cooperating teachers and helped novice teachers begin to incorporate service-learning into their schema of what teaching, learning, and schools are all about. We have also found that approximately 25 percent of our graduates utilize authentic service-learning with their K-12 students during their first year of teaching (Anderson et al. 1996). What is needed to facilitate these teachers' use of service-learning is not the elimination of preservice preparation but rather the addition of inservice technical assistance, mentoring, funding, increased scheduling flexibility, and administrative support. In most cases, these types of support have been extremely limited or nonexistent.

There are at least two responses to the third issue, "What should we take out of our program in order to make room for service-learning?" One response is don't take anything out but rather use service-learning experiences as a method to teach current course content. For example, service-learning has been successfully used to enhance students' understanding of motivation theory, authentic assessment, the meaning of active citizenship, interdisciplinary units, and cooperative learning. It can also be effective in influencing preservice teachers' awareness of multicultural issues, individual differences, and the realities of issues of educational reform and collaboration.

The second response involves a recognition that integration of service-learning into teacher education implies work in two areas: (1) using service-learning as a pedagogical technique in the postsecondary setting, and (2) teaching licensure-seeking students how to integrate service-learning into their own repertoire of teaching techniques for use with K-12 students. This instruction would include not only principles of effective service-learning practice (how to do it) but also background in the theoretical underpinnings and history of service in education (why we do it). For this to occur, it is likely that something would have to be removed from the existing teacher preparation curriculum. Although never easy to do, this choice is easier to make once teacher educators have experienced the powerful potential of service by themselves participating in a service-learning project.

The choice to alter the amount of instructional time on other topics is also made clearer after learning the responses of K-12 and teacher education students who have had in-depth, meaningful learning experiences through service-learning. In one case, a teacher education program chose not to eliminate but rather to reduce time spent on classroom management, motivation theory, assessment, and lesson planning in order to make time for service-learning. Ironically, each of these four areas frequently resurfaces in service-learning reflection sessions as preservice teachers address them as challenges at their service-learning sites. Direct instruction provided in these areas at this time (when students' interest has been heightened through seeing a practical use for the information) has proven to take less time and be more beneficial to students. (See "Teacher Education and Service-Learning: A Critical Perspective" on p. 113ff. for additional discussion of this issue.)

Suggestions for Integrating Service-Learning Into Teacher Education

We would also like to offer several suggestions to those considering the implementation of a service-learning component in their teacher education program. First, spend time with both teacher education students and K-12 teachers to develop an understanding of key principles of effective service-learning practice. In particular, focus on the distinctions among service-learning, service, internships, and field education (Furco 1996). This is an area of continuing confusion.

Traditional student teaching placements are most often not service-learning experiences. The "service" provided by teacher education students often doesn't address a real need of the K-12 teachers and students with whom they work. (If the student teachers were making significant contributions to the schools in which they are placed, there would be a waiting list of teachers requesting our students' services. This is not the case in most teacher education programs.)

Also, student teachers usually are not given much input into determining the specifics of their placement. Effective service-learning includes providing the students involved with decision-making authority regarding the service they provide. If in some cases student teachers have input into determining where their placement will be, they frequently have less voice in deciding the curriculum they will teach and the methods used for instruction.

In addition, successful service-learning involves an emphasis on "service" — the importance of helping others and problem solving as an essential component of full citizenship. Most student teaching placements are set in a context of experiential learning but not one that highlights the creation of an ethos of service.

Second, we have found the experiential component of service-learning courses essential for preservice teachers to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to implement service-learning projects. Teacher education students retain little of what they learn from textbooks and lectures in their education courses (Kennedy 1991).

Providing preservice teachers with the opportunity to be "service-learners" themselves can be a successful teaching method to help students in learning course content. It can also serve as an effective model of how to employ service-learning as a teaching approach. However, for teacher education students to make optimal use of service-learning's potential, they need to have instruction and experiences involving the use of service-learning as a pedagogy to employ with their future K-12 students.

Third, seek out K-12 and community partners who receive support and technical assistance from organizations such as the Corporation for National Service or the National Youth Leadership Council. The confluence of energy and commitment to quality service-learning created when these partners work together is greater than that achieved with isolated, unsupported schools.

Fourth, integrate service-learning throughout a variety of courses in the teacher preparation program. Service-learning conducted in this fashion can result in a positive experience for preservice teachers (Wade 1995). For example, service-learning is now a part of four different courses in the Seattle University Master in Teaching program: (1) an educational psychology course, (2) the service leadership course, (3) an action research project, and (4) the student teaching experience (described on p. 221ff). (A similar sequence of integration at the undergraduate level is proposed by Olson and O'Connor in the Augsburg College model described on p. 203ff.) This helps ensure that prospective teachers receive a solid grounding in both service-learning knowledge and experience; it also allows students to experience a model of integrated service-learning rather than an "add-on."

Fifth, work to create service-learning field placements in K-12 schools that extend over a substantial period of time.

High-quality service-learning projects take time to plan and carry out, and relationships among teachers, students, and community members take time to blossom. These long-term community-based relationships will also assist teacher education programs in demonstrating outreach and collaboration to accreditation bodies that demand these sorts of ongoing partnerships (e.g., the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) or the state board of teaching).

Sixth, service-learning field placement sites do not need to be practicing ideal models of fully developed service-learning projects. In fact, most students tell us they learn more about service-learning in new service-learning projects where teachers are still grappling with start-up issues. This may be because teachers in new projects provide students with tasks to complete that are crucial to the success of the service project. In well-established service-learning programs, students are sometimes seen as teacher aides and given more routine, less challenging tasks to perform.

Seventh, prospective teachers need to be encouraged to "start small, but jump in" with regard to beginning new service-learning projects during their student teaching or first year of employment. They sometimes are overwhelmed with the number of components that need to be integrated into a fully successful service project and the time needed to facilitate this process. As a result, they choose to do nothing at all. We explain to them that the integration into their curriculum is a developmental process and that they can begin with a small project — perhaps one that doesn't require leaving the school site — such as cross-age tutoring, a school garden, or writing letters to soldiers.

Eighth, and last, we have found it is essential to support beginning teachers in their use of service-learning. It is not enough to give them a solid base of knowledge and experience with service-learning during their preservice education. If we want them to integrate service-learning into a new, complex environment when they have just started to teach, we must provide them with resources, technical assistance, and moral support.

Important Areas for Further Investigation

As the use of service-learning in teacher education programs continues to grow, there is a pressing need for research on a myriad of issues in the area. What experiences do preservice and inservice teachers find most valuable in helping them employ service-learning with their students? What are their reasons for using service-learning? What are the rewards and challenges of service-learning involvement? How crucial is peer and administrative support? What are the characteristics of teachers most and least likely to engage in service-learning projects? Research is under way to answer these and other questions, but more knowledge in the field is needed urgently. We encourage all who work in the field of service-learning teacher education to benefit themselves and others by systematically examining their service-learning program features and outcomes.

There is also a need for a set of standards or principles of best practice in service-learning teacher education to help guide practitioners in designing high-quality preservice and inservice programs. With a rapidly expanding number of teacher educators in this field and many research efforts currently under way, it is our hope that the knowledge of successful practices will soon be sufficient to create such a set of guiding principles.

Although the integration of service-learning into teacher education programs takes a considerable investment of time and effort, the results we have seen in terms of benefits to the community, academic and personal gains for K-12 students, and the pedagogical growth in both preservice and experienced teachers make a commitment to service-learning very worthwhile. Working with teachers, students, and community agencies in the design and implementation of service-learning projects provides fertile ground for the seeds of commitment to service to grow. Prospective teachers can learn that, although full of challenges, service-learning can be done successfully and that they can make it a part of their approach to teaching. By helping to develop an ethos of service and caring in K-12 students and teachers, preservice teachers simultaneously gain leadership skills, enhance the academic and social education of their students, and serve as agents of educational reform — all prior to obtaining their first paid teaching position.

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