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# Developing Active Citizens: Community Service Learning in Social Studies Teacher Education

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How are social studies teacher educators to prepare teachers for working in a society fraught with social, environmental, and economic problems? If the true mission of our profession is active citizenship, we must help our students learn the value of engaging in long-term efforts to revitalize our democratic society and the skills to respond compassionately to those whose daily needs cannot wait for societal transformation. This article is based on the premise that social studies teacher educators are in a unique position to develop future teachers' commitment to giving their students opportunities for active involvement in the community and the world.

In this article, I describe my efforts to develop forty-one elementary preservice teachers' dedication to active citizenship through a methods course and practicum involving community service learning. Four questions guided this inquiry: Do

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students' self-efficacy and commitment to service increase as a result of service-learning activities? What other types of outcomes are possible in semester-long service experiences? What issues and challenges confront preservice teachers in their service-learning activities? Given the complex nature of service learning and the concerns present for teacher-education students, is the preservice period a viable time to introduce service learning?

The study makes an important contribution to the education of future social studies teachers for at least three reasons. First, the focus of preservice teachers' efforts is directly aligned with social studies' goal of active civic involvement. Second, activities in the methods course are integrated with a practicum in the schools, thus addressing the common theory/practice gap in teacher education (Passe 1994; Puckett 1982). Third, the study employs multiple data sources in an effort to go beyond the largely anecdotal evidence in support of preservice teachers' involvement in service learning.

## Community Service Learning

Community service learning is the integration of meaningful service to

one's school or community with academic learning and structured reflection on the service experience (Cairn and Kielsmeier 1991). Examples of service-learning activities include those in which students gather oral histories from senior citizens for their social studies curriculum or create a bird sanctuary as a means for helping the environment while they learn science and math skills.

A long-standing tradition in American society, community service has recently engendered great interest in the educational arena. The pedagogical notion of integrating service into the curriculum is solidly based on the work of numerous well-known educators including John Dewey, Ralph Tyler, Hilda Taba, John Goodlad, Ernest Boyer, and Ted Sizer (Kinsley 1992). A number of recent research studies and reports dealing with educational change have called for youth-service initiatives (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development 1989; Harrison 1986; Sarason 1991; William T. Grant Foundation 1991). Their appeals have been supported by over 140 million dollars of federal funding for service-learning programs in forty-eight states over the last two years (Commission on National and Community Service 1993).

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The social studies, with its professed goal of developing active citizens, is in a unique position to take part in the national service-learning agenda. Although social studies educators differ in their opinions about what constitutes citizenship, many have promoted citizenship as informed and active involvement in the social and political life of the community (Barber 1989; Clarke 1990; Engle and Ochoa 1988; Rutter and Newmann 1989), and some have asserted that community service learning, in particular, may be an especially effective means for developing active citizens (Barber 1989; Newmann 1975; Rutter and Newmann 1989).

Service-learning activities have many potential benefits for students of all ages. Outcomes for public school students include increased self-esteem and self-efficacy, enhanced motivation and interest in school, and greater academic achievement and social responsibility (Conrad and Hedin 1991; Greco 1992; Harrison 1987). Studies with college students have shown strong effects on students' personal development (Eyler and Giles 1993), career awareness (Eyler and Giles 1993), and self-efficacy regarding their ability to help solve the problems of society (Tullier 1993). Findings on preservice teachers, although largely anecdotal in nature, have revealed both personal benefits and commitment to community involvement in their teaching (Anderson and Guest 1993; Tellez, Hlebowitsh, and Cohen in press; Wade 1991, 1993).

The many benefits of service learning have not exempted the practice from controversy, however. Some parents are opposed to school service projects on the grounds that forced volunteerism is unconstitutional or because they do not see the educational value that can be derived from community service. Liability and safety concerns have led some school districts to shy away from service activities during the school day, thus leading to service being seen as an add-on rather than an integrated component of the school curriculum. Some school district personnel believe that service-learning programs are too difficult or expensive to coordi-

nate. Although none of these problems is insurmountable, they are issues that teacher education students should be aware of and reflect on when they consider the incorporation of service learning in the social studies curriculum.

### **Preservice Teacher Development**

Understanding preservice teachers' professional development is critical to any effort to foster commitment to a new or different teaching strategy such as community service learning. Most students enter teacher education programs with largely traditional views that they have acquired over a dozen years of schooling (Diez 1989; Hollingsworth 1989). Although many preservice teachers develop progressive beliefs during their college years, they often revert, when teaching, to the beliefs they acquired in elementary school (Kennedy 1991; Zeichner 1980; Zeichner and Tabachnick 1981).

Whereas some educators have found that preservice teachers can overcome the powerful influence of prior schooling by actively seeking to alter the established practices in their practicum classrooms (Goodman 1988; Hollingsworth 1988; Zeichner and Tabachnick 1985), challenging belief structures created early in life remains a decidedly difficult task. Furthermore, social studies educators seldom provide students with opportunities to practice what is taught in the methods course or make significant decisions about instruction in practicum settings (Passe 1994).

### **Community Service Learning in the University's Elementary Teacher-Education Program**

Community service-learning experiences in the University of Iowa's elementary teacher education program focus on providing students with opportunities for practical experience with and reflection on service learning in both community and public school settings. Students engage in service learning experiences as part of the social studies methods course and in a related one-credit practicum. In both

experiences, students are given opportunities to make important choices about their service activities and to apply directly the theory and content of the methods course to their work with children and community members.

The course in social studies methods emphasizes democratic participation in the classroom and in the community. Each student is required to complete a personal service-learning project. Because the goal of social education is active citizenship, instructions for the project direct students to "do something to make a difference in your world." Students keep a journal, reflect on the problems and issues that challenge and intrigue them, and then choose a means for taking action. The project is ungraded; thus, students can feel free to choose something that will work for them, within the constraints of time, location, skills, and interests. In class, students discuss their progress with identifying a suitable project and working on a challenging problem. At the end of the semester, each student submits a two-page essay describing the project and what he or she has learned from it (see Wade 1991, 1993 for further details). These three strategies—keeping a journal, discussion, and essay writing—enable students to reflect on their experience, an essential aspect of service learning.

Concurrent with the methods course, students complete a one-credit practicum, working with teachers and children in elementary classrooms on service-learning projects. In preparation for their work in the schools, students review the practical and theoretical aspects of service learning in the methods course. Students watch a video of elementary students engaged in service learning and brainstorm about a variety of service activities. They also reflect on their service-learning experiences through discussions about how service can be integrated within social studies and other subject areas and writing about the problems and challenges they perceive in implementing service learning.

Cooperating teachers for the practicum all receive inservice training

in conducting service-learning activities. Practicum projects vary greatly, from cleaning up a local park to doing oral histories with senior citizens or creating a bird sanctuary. All projects focus on meeting a need in the school or community and integrate the service with structured reflection and academic skills and content. Preservice teachers engage in a variety of activities during this practicum; they observe in the classroom, create bul-

ning and end of the semester. A research assistant led practicum seminar discussions and also conducted standardized, open-ended interviews with ten students. Interview questions, informed by Serow's (1990, 1991) research, focused on students' prior experiences with community service, their present service activities, and what they were learning about themselves, others, and the act of serving. Interviews and practicum evaluations

ing projects; second, changes in students' attitudes toward service; and third, students' reactions to the practicum and their views on service learning as pedagogy.

#### *Personal Service-Learning Project Outcomes*

Students participated in a wide range of activities for their personal service-learning projects. Eight students, citing limitations on their time, participated in projects that did not directly involve others, such as giving clothes to a shelter, collecting pop tabs to raise money for hospitalized children, or recycling efforts. Most of the students' projects, however, involved working with the elderly, at-risk children, special-needs children, the homeless, teenagers, or individuals from a different ethnic group. Students serving others were engaged in visiting, teaching, tutoring, respite-care babysitting, preparing meals, and a variety of other activities.

The students' final papers on their personal service-learning projects were analyzed for the presence of twenty-six possible outcomes. This list of outcomes—generated from readings of student papers as well as from other research studies on college students' experiences with community service—was divided into three general categories: personal outcomes, service-oriented outcomes, and outcomes associated with other people in the project. Table 1 presents the numbers of student papers that gave evidence of each of the outcomes.

Many positive personal outcomes were associated with the social participation projects. In particular, many students enjoyed their service activity and increased their self-efficacy. A number of students wrote an entry such as: "This experience has taught me how a little giving of time can make such a difference." It is notable, however, that close to two-thirds of the students also had some negative feelings about the project. For example, a student working with at-risk children found their home situations shocking. Other students felt frustrated that they were not able to

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## **All projects focus on meeting a need in the school or community and integrate the service activity with some structured reflection and academic skills and content. The preservice teachers are involved in a variety of service learning projects.**

letin boards on the service-project theme, teach lessons to the whole class, take part in the service activity, and guide the children in reflecting on what they are learning.

### **Methods**

#### *The Teacher-Education Students*

Forty-one students completed the practicum and social participation project during the 1993 spring semester. There was only one male in this group, and all the students were white. The students were undergraduates in either their junior or senior year. Although their ages ranged from twenty to forty-two, only nine of the students would be considered nontraditional in age.

#### *Data Collection*

I collected multiple sources of data, including students' papers and journal entries, in the context of teaching the social studies methods course and supervising the practicum. Students completed a semantic differential on "being active in the community" (Conrad and Hedin 1981) at the begin-

ning and end of the semester. A research assistant led practicum seminar discussions and also conducted standardized, open-ended interviews with ten students. Interview questions, informed by Serow's (1990, 1991) research, focused on students' prior experiences with community service, their present service activities, and what they were learning about themselves, others, and the act of serving. Interviews and practicum evaluations

#### *Data Analysis*

I analyzed in-class written feedback, seminar papers, practicum evaluations, and interview data inductively by reading and re-reading the data and developing categories for analysis (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). A graduate student trained in research and I coded the students' papers independently, using these categories and also remaining open to discovering additional outcomes. For each category, we counted the occurrence of an outcome within a student's paper. Interrater reliability for coding students' papers was 82 percent; we resolved any differences of opinion in our discussions until we reached consensus.

#### **Findings**

The findings are presented here in three parts: first, the analysis of outcomes from the personal service learn-

contribute more time or change inequitable situations more quickly.

Twenty-nine students learned something new about themselves as a result of the project. Insights ranged from those of a student in a recycling project who realized how many containers one uses in a week to another student's awareness of the patience and perseverance needed to work with special-needs children. Seventeen students developed some new skill such as a new teaching strategy, improved time management, or effective communication with senior citizens, teenagers, or individuals from another ethnic group.

The most prevalent service-oriented outcomes involved learning new information about community service and planning to continue the present service activity beyond the completion of the

assignment for the methods course ( $n = 15$ ). Although eleven students developed a stronger concern for social issues, only a few students developed a general commitment to service. Outcomes associated with lifetime commitment, life transformation, or becoming an advocate for others were limited for this one-semester project.

Sixteen students perceived a change in their views or abilities as a teacher as a result of the project. Many of the students who worked with children in their projects felt a rededication to teaching. A student who worked with at-risk children wrote, "It also reinforced my decision to become a teacher, not only to teach our youth but also to give them the courage to believe in themselves and go after their dreams." A few students discussed the importance of

understanding children's home lives if one is to teach them effectively in the classroom.

Two of the outcomes associated with other people were prevalent among about two-thirds of the students. Students developed both greater knowledge of and strong personal connections to others through the project. In a few cases, students enjoyed the camaraderie of serving alongside others or began to think about the social, economic, and political issues affecting the people with whom they were working.

Interviews with ten of the forty-one students provided an opportunity for deeper understanding of the students' reactions to the personal service-learning project. For the most part, interview data supported the findings cited from students' papers. Some students, however, spoke more frankly in the interviews about their frustrations and sadness in working with individuals in need. For example, one student criticized an agency that did not adequately prepare her for her involvement, "I wish somebody would have sat down with me. . . . They need to get their act together. They threw me into it without saying anything and, I don't know, I just feel bad."

The interviews also gave students opportunities to respond in greater depth about how they saw the project influencing their teaching. One student concluded, "Teaching doesn't just include teaching the basics—reading, writing, arithmetic. I mean, you have to be friend and nurse sometimes. . . . So many other roles you have to play besides the teacher role."

#### Attitudes toward Community Service

A pretest/posttest semantic differential on "being active in the community" (Conrad and Hedin 1981) provided a measure to assess students' changes in attitude toward community service over the semester. Students rated each of the eleven dimensions on a scale from one to seven. Scoring of some of the items was reversed so that scores closer to one were more positive about commu-

**TABLE 1—Self-Reported Student Outcomes of the Personal Service-Learning Project,  $N = 39$**

Type	No. of Responses*
<b>Personal outcomes</b>	
Increased self-esteem	19
Increased self-efficacy	32
Increased self-knowledge/awareness	29
Received material benefits	0
Reduced my guilt	5
Increased gratitude for what I have	7
Had fun or other good feelings	29
Developed new skills	17
Felt sadness, anger, or frustration	24
<b>Service outcomes</b>	
Had positive influence on teacher	16
Developed general commitment to service	4
Developed specific commitment	15
Developed life commitment to justice	0
Became advocate for others	2
Transformed my life	3
Developed concern for social issues	11
Increased knowledge about serving	36
Plan to continue service	19
<b>Outcomes associated with other people</b>	
Recognized similarities in people	4
Dispelled assumptions about others	7
Developed respect for others	5
Increased structural knowledge	11
Increased knowledge of others	26
Developed personal connections	28
Enjoyed serving with others	6

\*Note: Two students chose not to be included in this part of the study.

**TABLE 2—Pretest to Posttest Changes on "Being Active in Your Community," *N* = 35\***

Dimension	Pretest		Posttest	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Unusual to usual	3.4	1.2	3.9	1.1
Mature to youthful	5.4	1.2	5.0	1.2
Difficult to easy	4.6	1.4	4.0	1.3
Unimportant to important	1.6	.7	1.2	.4
Boring to interesting	2.3	.8	1.9	.9
Old-fashioned to modern	3.7	1.2	2.9	1.4
Selfish to unselfish	1.9	.9	1.6	.8
Useless to useful	.5	.6	.5	1.1
Dishonest to honest	2.1	.8	1.6	.7
Something I won't do to something I will do	2.1	.9	1.5	.7

\*Note: Six students were absent for either the pretest or the posttest or chose not to be included in this part of the study.

nity service and those toward the higher end of the scale were more negative.

The direction of change in students' attitudes over the semester was largely positive. On the whole, the students came to see being active in the community as easier, more important, and more interesting, and many expressed a stronger commitment to engage in community service following their service experiences. Table 2 provides the means and standard deviations for the pretest and posttest data on all eleven dimensions of the instrument.

### Service Learning as Pedagogy

The service-learning practicum gave students the opportunity to apply their understanding of community service to the classroom setting and to assess the viability of service learning as an educational strategy in the public school setting. Before beginning the practicum, students wrote journal entries in response to the following question: What problems or challenges do you think teachers might experience in implementing service learning in an elementary classroom? Three themes emerged from students' responses: concerns focused on children, logistics, and approval from other adults in the school and community.

Child-oriented concerns, the most common theme, included ensuring that

all the children would be kept interested ( $n = 23$ ), maintaining order in the classroom, helping children feel they were making a difference, and ensuring that they learn from the project. Logistical concerns included time ( $n = 20$ ), money ( $n = 11$ ), transportation ( $n = 7$ ), organization ( $n = 3$ ), and need for additional adult help ( $n = 4$ ). Sixteen students expressed concern over potential disapproval from parents, eleven students thought there might be problems with administrative or staff support, and eight students cited concerns with potential lack of support or interest from community agencies.

During a seminar shortly after the beginning of the service-learning practicum, students talked about their perceptions of the teachers' and children's attitudes towards service learning. A few of the students said that their cooperating teacher had not mentioned service learning yet and therefore they could not tell the children's reactions. (Almost all of these students were placed with two teachers who were not well organized.) Most of the students, however, used the same words when talking about the teachers' and the children's responses to service learning: "excited," "enthusiastic," and "interested." The students' observations were confirmed by the teachers' and the children's written reactions to the service-learning activities.

At the end of the semester, I asked the students to reflect on what they had learned about public schools, teachers, children, themselves, and service learning from their practicum experiences. Their responses indicated that they had developed a realistic view of the use of service learning in a public school setting. They noted the children's eagerness to be involved in projects, especially if they could modify them to fit their needs and interests. Although they talked about other positive aspects of service learning, such as the benefits to student motivation, the community, and the ease of integration in the curriculum, they also noted that successful service-learning projects take a lot of time, planning, organization, and support from others.

Despite a few problems with miscommunication, scheduling, or unclear expectations, thirty-eight of the forty-one students indicated an interest in trying service learning in their student teaching, although most added, "if my cooperating teacher is willing." Many of the students connected their interest in trying service learning in the classroom with their practicum experience. For example, one student wrote, "From my experience at [the elementary school], I can honestly say that service learning is an enjoyable project for both students and their teachers." Of the fourteen students from this class who were student teachers during the 1993 fall semester, seven completed service-learning projects, and three others tried but were unsuccessful in convincing their cooperating teachers to undertake such a project.

### Discussion

The findings of this study hold at least five implications for structuring service-learning projects in preservice teacher education programs. First, it is likely that students will benefit more from direct rather than indirect projects. In particular, students who tutor, teach others, or work with children are more likely to learn skills or develop values that can be applied to their future teaching. Second, teacher educators

should prepare for the inevitability of difficult feelings associated with service activities and help students discuss and learn from their sadness or frustration. Third, it helps to have reasonable goals for small scale projects. It is unlikely that students will develop life commitments to service or become advocates for the disenfranchised in just an hour or two a week for one semester. Fourth, most students are unlikely to consider larger, structural issues behind the need for service in their community on their own. Teacher educators need to plan research projects carefully that require students to learn about an issue affecting the population they are working with at the state or national level. Ideally, students would be encouraged to take some type of action to educate others or to influence policy. Fifth, students need to be encouraged to reflect on the connections between their service activities, the social studies curriculum, and active citizenship. The social studies methods class can include assignments and discussions focused on helping students see the interrelationships of these themes.

As they did with the personal service-learning projects, the students recognized both benefits and difficulties in their service-learning practicum placements. Students observed teachers and children being enthusiastic and excited about serving others, yet they also recognized the difficulties in implementing service learning in the public school classroom. Students worked with some teachers who had difficulty organizing their service-learning activities or connecting with a community agency willing to assist the class. In one classroom, the students encountered parental concerns about safety in cleaning up a local park and noted the teacher's subsequent response: obtaining rubber gloves for all of the children from a local medical supply store.

Despite the challenges noted by the students, almost all expressed an interest in trying service learning in their own teaching. Although a specific cause-and-effect relationship cannot be determined from this study, this out-

come may be the result of the positive feelings associated with serving others. Through their projects, students experienced the fun, enjoyment, and personal meaning in service learning firsthand, and most had the opportunity to observe the excitement and enthusiasm on the part of both teachers and children in the schools. The emotional element of students' experiences appears to be particularly salient in this study.

The findings of this study lend further support to the potential for preservice teachers' development based on powerful and thoughtful experiential learning (Goodman 1988). Many students reported on their feedback sheets that seeing service learning in the classroom and their participation in service activities contributed to their interest in using this method in their teaching. In this study, students' reflections on their experiences were central to their learning about themselves, others, the act of serving, and the potential benefits of service learning in the social studies curriculum. Teacher educators need to be skilled at guiding students' reflections. Otherwise, students may simply end up "feeling good" about their service and never examine the underlying social, political, and economic issues inherent in societal problems.

Preservice teachers' commitment to service learning will likely be enhanced by the combination of three program components. First, teacher educators should provide students with opportunities to develop a personal commitment to service through actively meeting others' needs. Second, students must learn how to put service learning into practice in the classroom through practicum experiences with teachers and children who are enthusiastically involved in service-learning activities. Finally, teacher educators should structure seminars and coursework so that students can plan units and lessons incorporating service learning, reflect on their experiences, and discuss the challenges of using service learning in their future teaching.

Developing such a comprehensive approach to service learning in teacher education programs takes time and

effort on the part of teacher educators. These activities cannot be sandwiched in between the rest of the social studies methods course. Clearly, the content of existing methods courses will need to give way to the practical experience and reflection activities described here. Two facts justify these changes. First, teacher education students retain little of what they learn from textbooks and the lectures in their education courses (Kennedy 1991; Zeichner 1980; Zeichner and Tabachnick 1981). Second, the instruction of K-12 social studies students through the use of textbooks has not led to the achievement of the goal of students' active civic involvement (Ferguson 1991). Service learning has the potential to overcome the ineffectual nature of social studies instruction at both these levels by developing future teachers' commitment to giving their students opportunities for active involvement in their communities and the world.

## Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that through extensive reflection on practical experience in community and school settings, preservice teachers can develop a belief in the importance of community service while still recognizing the difficulties in attempting to make a difference. They can learn to value service learning as a teaching strategy while acknowledging that teachers face time and organizational issues. The preservice period thus appears to be a viable time to introduce service learning to future teachers. I hope that preservice teachers, within supportive school environments, will enhance the goal of social studies by involving their students in meeting important needs in their schools and communities.

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