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Service-Learning for Multicultural Teaching Competency: Insights from the Literature for Teacher Educators

RAHIMA C. WADE

NEED FOR FIELD EXPERIENCES IN DIVERSE SETTINGS

The growing disparity between the largely White teacher population and the increasingly diverse student body in the United States (Hodgkinson, 1991; Jordan, 1995) has led to greater interest in how to enhance preservice teachers' multicultural competencies (e.g., knowledge of diverse cultures, ability to teach children of color successfully, positive attitudes toward children and families of color). Given the low expectations for achievement held by White teachers for children of color and White teachers' lack of interest in working with students from cultures other than their own (Zeichner, 1993; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996a), it is imperative that teacher educators seek out successful strategies for educating preservice teachers to teach effectively in diverse settings. The literature on multicultural education has clearly shown the shortcomings of using course work and didactic methods alone to achieve this goal (Grant & Secada, 1990; McDiarmid, 1992; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996a).

Many educators have asserted that field experiences in diverse schools and community settings may lead to preservice teachers' educational and psychological growth in regard to teaching children of color (Bennett & Jay, 1997; Garcia, 1996; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Moll, 1992; NCATE, 1990; Zeichner, 1993, 1996; Zeichner & Melnick, 1996a). Most arguments for preservice teachers completing field experiences in diverse settings emanate from the disparity between the backgrounds of White teachers and youth of color. Preservice teachers are predominately White and have grown up in mostly rural or suburban settings in which they have had little exposure to diverse populations (Banks, 1991; Finney & Orr, 1995). While the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education's (NCATE) (1990) Standard on Field Experience requires that preservice teachers have field experiences with both culturally diverse and exceptional populations and within accepted notions of good practice in the field of multicultural education (Zeichner, et al., 1998), rarely are such experiences actualized in teacher education (Zeichner & Melnick, 1996a).

Several researchers have argued that students should combine practica and student teaching in diverse settings with experiences in the diverse communities served by these schools (Hilliard, 1974; Mungo, 1982; Noordhoff & Kleinfeld, 1993; Zeichner, 1996). While practica and student teaching placements in diverse schools are more prevalent and offer potentially significant learning opportunities for preservice teachers, this review is concerned with the outcomes and challenges associated with field experiences in community agencies, cultural centers, recreation programs, and the like. Simple activities such as community walks or interviews with community members can provide key insights for preservice teachers. Several educators have found the "cultural plunge" (field research in halfway houses, neighborhood cultural festivities, ethnic churches, etc.) beneficial in promoting self-awareness and cultural empathy (Wilhelm, Cowart, Hume, & Rademacher, 1996; Young, 1993). Others have found value in immersion experiences in diverse communities (Cooper, Beare, & Thorman, 1990; Mahan, 1982; Noordhoff & Kleinfeld, 1991). For example, Cooper and his colleagues (1990) placed 18 White student teachers from Minnesota in a Mexican-American community in Texas with positive results in terms of the student teachers' multicultural competencies and Mahan (1982, 1984) immersed 291 student teachers in the Navajo and Hopi cultures, resulting in positive gains in students' attitudes, involvement, employment success, and supervising teacher evaluations.

This article focuses on gleaning insights for teacher educators about a specific type of community field experience: community service-learning in diverse settings. Two questions guided this inquiry. First, what outcomes have resulted from preservice teachers' involvement in service-learning activities in diverse community settings? Second, what challenges exist to enhance preservice teachers' multicultural teaching competencies through service-learning? The discussion of these challenges points to several recommendations for teacher educators attempting to enhance preservice teachers' effectiveness and interest in teaching children

of color through community-based, service-oriented field experiences.

COMMUNITY SERVICE-LEARNING

Field experiences with a service-learning component offer preservice teachers and community members exciting opportunities to work together on needs or goals important to the community. Service-learning, an educational innovation currently engendering great interest in K-12 classrooms and teacher education programs alike, can be defined as:

a method through which young people learn and develop through active participation in thoughtfully organized service experiences: that meet actual community needs and that are coordinated in collaboration with the school and community, that are integrated into each young person's academic curriculum, that provide structured time for a young person to think, talk, and write about what he/she did and saw during the actual service activity, that provide young people with opportunities to use newly acquired academic skills and knowledge in real life situations in their own communities, that enhance what is taught in the school by extending student learning beyond the classroom, and that help to foster the development of a sense of caring for others. (Alliance for Service-Learning in Education Reform, 1993, p. 1)

The practice of service-learning is supported by the premise that learning is a social and community endeavor. Service-learning provides a context for students and teachers to learn outside of the traditional school building. For example, student teachers living on a Native American reservation might assist with herding sheep and cattle or with food preparation at tribal fairs. In an overseas project, preservice teachers have provided adult literacy instruction, assisted on village planning committees, and served as leaders for Girl Guides and scout troops (Stachowski & Mahan, 1998). Their forays into the community bring them in contact with others in new ways that lead to changes in what and how students learn, in how teachers understand the communities in which their students reside, and in the health and well-being of the community itself.

RATIONALES FOR SERVICE-LEARNING IN MULTICULTURAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Why focus specifically on service-learning versus other types of community field experiences in diverse settings? There are at least four rationales for including service-learning in multicultural teacher education.

Enhanced Student Outcomes in Both K-12 and Teacher Education

Advocates have asserted that service-learning may positively influence the following student outcomes: academic skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, moral reasoning, social responsibility, self-esteem, assertiveness, empathy, civic responsibility, political efficacy, and career awareness (Alt & Medrich, 1994). While service-learning programs do not always fulfill their potential, there is substantial evidence to be cautiously optimistic about the personal and social outcomes of quality programs (Wade & Saxe, 1996). An additional benefit for teacher education programs is found in the reciprocal nature of high quality service-learning experiences. Whereas in some field experiences preservice teachers may be seen as "using" the school or community for their own learning, authentic service-learning activities ensure that preservice teachers are also giving something back to the youth and community members with whom they work.

Academic Achievement and Social/Emotional Growth

Teachers in the twenty-first century are challenged to find effective means for engaging *all* youth in the learning process and, therefore, must be concerned not only with students' academic progress, but with their emotional and social development as wells. Root (1994) noted that there is a growing recognition among educators that schools cannot address children's cognitive needs in isolation from the often difficult circumstances of their lives. In a learner-centered classroom, teachers can employ service-learning as one effective means for motivating students to grow personally, socially, and academically through meaningful involvement in their schools and communities. Service-learning experiences can also contribute to developing student-sensitive curricula and instructional tools, establishing caring relationships with students, and enabling prospective teachers to act as advocates for youth in partnership with youth service providers (Root, 1994).

Preservice Teachers' Enhanced Reflection Skills

Placements in unfamiliar settings in the community can encourage teacher education students to question prevailing policies, to examine their assumptions about classroom practice, and to begin to develop habits of personal reflection (Sullivan, 1991). Through reflection on their own learning, preservice teachers "gain experience working with their colleagues to research issues, make decisions, and solve problems" (Allam & Zerkin, 1993, p. 12). Research has shown that reflection is a critical component in helping students learn from their experience (Conrad &

Hedin, 1991; Serow, 1991). Carefully structured reflection activities may enable preservice teachers to question their assumptions, overcome prejudices, and develop healthy expectations for the children of color they will someday teach in their classrooms (Young, 1998).

Understanding the Preservice Teacher's Role

Through service-learning, teacher education students can learn about the variety of roles associated with teaching in contemporary society. Increasingly, teachers are being called on to serve as counselors, community liaisons, and moral leaders for their students. Through service-learning, prospective teachers can learn to use community resources and youth-serving systems, as well as to gain a better understanding of the home and community environments influencing children's lives (Allam & Zerkin, 1993; Toole, Toole, Gomez, & Allam, 1992; Wade & Anderson, 1996; Young, 1998).

RESEARCH ON SERVICE-LEARNING IN MULTICULTURAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Several studies have focused on the benefits and limitations of preservice teachers' service-learning activities in diverse community settings. These studies reveal promising findings in terms of using service-learning experiences to enhance preservice teachers' multicultural teaching.

Increased Awareness of Those Who Are Culturally Different from Themselves

The most frequent finding of studies of preservice teachers' service-learning involvement in diverse community settings is teachers' increased awareness of youth who are culturally different from themselves (Beyer, 1991; Boyle-Baise, 1997, 1998; De Jong & Groomes, 1996; Fuller, 1998; Hones, 1997, 1998; Kwartler, 1993; McKenna & Ward, 1996; Seigel, 1994; Sleeter, 1988; Tellez, Hlebowitsh, Cohen & Norwood, 1995; Vadeboncouer, Rahm, Aguilera, & LeCompte, 1996; Wade, 1993, 1995). For example, teacher candidates at Knox College who had the option to complete a community field experience as part of the school and society course working with the poor in various community agencies or homes found themselves, often for the first time in their lives, directly confronting social inequality (Beyer, 1991). Preservice teachers who worked in diverse community settings heightened their awareness of others and subsequently sought ways to build bridges to diverse youth (Hones, 1997). Twenty hours of service in urban social service agencies challenged other teacher education students' notions of poverty and increased their understanding of urban concerns (Tellez et al., 1995). Boyle-Baise (1998) noted that most preservice teachers saw service-learning with children of color as "getting exposed" and "becoming more aware" and McKenna and

Ward (1996) observed a recurrent theme in preservice teachers' logs and discussions: a new awareness of diversity issues and how they impact student learning.

Acceptance or Affirmation of Youth of Color, Their Lifestyles, and Their Communities

A significant step beyond just becoming aware of others' lives is to accept, or even better, affirm youth of color. Several researchers provide evidence that some preservice teachers developed more positive views of diverse youth than they held before beginning the service-learning experience (Boyle-Baise, 1997, 1998; Hones, 1997; Seigel, 1994; Tellez et al., 1995). Boyle-Baise (1998) asserted that, for some students, general awareness moved to a level of acceptance, often expressed as a willingness to make changes in curriculum or instruction to accommodate learners' interests or needs. Following their work in urban agencies, many preservice teachers expressed a stronger commitment to teaching children in inner-city schools (Tellez et al., 1995). Fuller (1998) noted that most of her preservice teachers, after working in either a Salvation Army or Native American tutoring program, said they could see themselves teaching diverse children, and a few said they would be actively seeking positions in classrooms that included children of color or children living in poverty.

Difficult Feelings and Personal Satisfaction

Both Wade (1995) and Boyle-Baise (1997) noted that some students experienced frustration, sadness, or feelings of being overwhelmed as they encountered children and families with many needs. Wade (1993) also observed some students' initial feelings of confusion and fear as they embarked on getting involved with "different" others. However, most students in these studies overcame these feelings to find value and personal satisfaction in their service-learning experience (Boyle-Baise, 1997; Wade, 1993, 1995). The end result in these two studies is consistent with other research studies that have revealed preservice teachers' largely positive attitudes toward and experience with service-learning (e.g. Anderson & Guest, 1993; Flippo, Hetzel, Gribonski & Armstrong, 1993; Green, Dalton & Wilson, 1994).

Awareness of Self and Prior Assumptions and Beliefs

As preservice teachers confront the realities of diverse students' lives, many develop a new awareness of themselves and begin to question their prior

assumptions and beliefs about children, families, and communities of color. Kwartler (1993) noted that students who began a service-learning experience with negative views about the homeless began to rethink their values and beliefs as a result of their first-hand contact. In two other studies, teacher education students working with youth from cultures different from their own became aware of their prejudices (Boyle-Baise, 1997; Seigel, 1994). Preservice teachers working with Native American children began to identify their misconceptions about families and became more aware of Native American stereotypes (Fuller, 1998). Seigel's (1994) teacher education students began to look at how their own prejudices and racism might affect their teaching. In a service-learning program that focused on having teacher education students analyze how at-risk situations associated with poverty could influence development (particularly academic motivation and achievement) in school-age children, preservice teachers slowly began to understand their own beliefs and prejudices (De Jong & Groomes, 1996). O'Grady (1997) found that assisting Latino newcomers in rural communities aided White teachers' understanding of their own culture and caused them to question how they considered their life experience as the norm.

How Societal Issues Influence Individual Lives

Findings on teacher education students' abilities to think about the larger societal context influencing people's lives are mixed. Several researchers have noted limitations in some students' abilities to question the economic aspects of living in poverty (Boyle-Baise, 1997), or engage in serious reflection about diversity issues (Hones, 1998) as a result of their service involvement. Boyle-Baise (1998) noted that preservice teachers' efforts to debunk their stereotypes were stalled by the ways they held onto notions of certain cultures being deficient, though some students began to unravel the workings of poverty and challenged the notion that low income parents don't care.

Others have noted service-learning's contribution to teacher education students' complexity of thinking about social problems (Batchelder & Root, 1994; Vadeboncoeur et al., 1996). In one study, students who initially tended to categorize others according to stereotypes developed more thoughtful and complex responses by the end of the semester:

In general, the sophistication of student responses reflected a developing "critical consciousness" or awareness of social structures in the reproduction of inequality. More specifically, by the end of the semester, most students attributed social problems to social structural factors and institutionalized patterns of dif-

ferential treatment rather than to individual characteristics or personality traits. (Vadeboncoeur et al., 1996, p. 195)

However, these same researchers also noted that "although consciousness raising was achieved by most students, and personal growth was evident, few students really increased their level of social activism by the end of the class" (p. 201).

Both Fuller (1998) and Hones (1997, 1998) also noted the variable success achieved in regard to preservice teachers' abilities and willingness to question larger social and political issues. While some students questioned their stereotypes, others

appreciated the service-learning project for putting them in contact with the lives of diverse children, but failed to challenge many of their preconceptions of who was to blame when such children "failed" in school and in life: Rather than analyze the extreme social and economic inequalities that separated the lives of many urban children from their own lives, some of my students insistently placed blame on the family and its inadequacies for the failure of the children. (Hones, 1997, p. 19)

These mixed findings about preservice teachers' abilities and willingness to ask questions about larger societal issues lead to the second question that is addressed in the following discussion of challenges for enhancing multicultural teaching competencies through service-learning.

CHALLENGES TO AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUCCESSFUL MULTICULTURAL SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCES IN PRESERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

Teacher educators developing diverse service-learning experiences for preservice teachers face several challenges in their efforts to enhance multicultural teaching competencies. Each of three critical challenges is discussed here, followed by a recommendation for a strategy to overcome it effectively.

Challenge #1: Dominant Culture (White) Preservice Teachers "Serving" Children of Color

One of the most critical challenges for service-learning experiences in diverse community settings revolves around the issue of White preservice teachers serving students of color. Cruz notes that "in the context of conflicting interests and historical dominance of one racial or gender group over another, it is possible that 'service' in and of itself, can have racist or sexist outcomes despite good intentions" (1990, p. 322). While service-learning might

empower preservice teachers, it does not always promote the common good if it reinforces a sense of inferiority among those served or superiority and prejudice among those who do the serving (Cruz, 1990).

There are no easy answers about how to meet the challenge of dominant culture individuals "serving" youth of color, though several strategies appear to be helpful in creating a more egalitarian experience for all involved. Sigmon (1995) suggested listening to those whose voices have traditionally been marginalized. Cruz (1990) asserted that it might be best to downplay the notion of service and focus instead on the learning that can be shared among all involved. Indeed, some teacher educators opt to avoid the term *service-learning* and instead use terms such as *community-based learning* or *community involvement projects*. Service-learning activities that involve mutual goal setting and collaboration among both the servers and the served should be emphasized over projects in which preservice teachers decide in advance what will be most beneficial for the children of color they are "helping" (Wade, 1997).

Recommendation #1: Carefully choose and collaboratively develop diverse field placements where preservice teachers and communities of color blur the distinctions among those who are "servers" and those who are "served" by working together toward mutually agreed upon goals.

Challenge #2: Service-Learning Activities that Emphasize Charity Rather than Social Change

Teacher educators should think carefully about the reasons they are involving their students in diverse community settings. Kahne and Westheimer (1996) observed that much of current service-learning practice emphasizes charity, not social change. A service-learning project that is motivated by a desire to "do good" and that focuses on providing individuals who "need help" with services, also usually "avoids difficult questions about whether the proposed activity is sufficient to change lives and communities or whether it alleviates social stress without questioning the social order. . . . Failing to question the social, economic, and historical dimensions of the status quo hamstring[s] CSL's effectiveness as an instructional approach" (Jones, Maloy, & Steen, 1996, p. 37). If we neglect these dimensions, "students leave community service with a view of social problems as unfortunate outcomes of a basically fair system that can be remedied by personal good deeds" (p. 40). Jones and his colleagues conclude "that political issues, including the wealth and power in society, are not hazards to avoid but are central questions raised by CSL that can enrich learning" (p. 44).

Service-learning projects that promote social justice need to involve analysis and action focused on the root causes of community problems (Wade, 2000). Thus, in addition to providing direct service with children and

families of color, preservice teachers should investigate societal issues such as poverty, bilingualism, or discrimination and advocate for change through policy, political action, or community education.

Recommendation #2: Provide preservice teachers with a range of experiences in addressing local problems—from direct service with children and families of color to research, advocacy, and/or political action focused on the root causes of injustice.

Challenge #3: Preservice Teachers' Resilient Attitudes Toward Children and Families of Color

Several researchers have noted the resiliency of preservice teachers' negative attitudes toward children and families of color (Aaronsohn, Carter, & Howell, 1995). "Early in their careers, many teachers locate children's problems of learning and achievement not as outcomes of teachers' beliefs about and behaviors toward children in school, but as consequences of children's outside-of-school lives—beyond the purview of teachers, schools, and schooling" (Gomez, 1996, p. 113). Those involved in attempting to change these views have found it a long and laborious process. Even in programs with a coordinated set of experiences to challenge prospective teachers' ideas about teaching children of color, such change is difficult to effect (Gomez & Tabachnick, 1992). Teachers' entering perspectives on diversity and their existing moral commitments play a pivotal role in how they experience and understand the community service in which they engage (Beyer, 1991).

In-depth, structured reflection experience is essential when facing the challenge of facilitating preservice teachers' willingness and abilities to question their prevailing assumptions and attitudes. Rovinescu (1991) noted that critical reflective thinking plays an essential role in prejudice reduction and Boyle-Baise (1998) asserted that strong interventions (e.g. focused discussions, structured journal writing) in service-learning programs are needed to foster more critical regard for inequality. Wayson (1988) maintained that effective preparation of teacher candidates for teaching in diverse settings required direct contact with students of other cultures combined with translation and interpretation gained through discussion guided by a knowledgeable and sensitive supervisor, teacher, or professor. It is important to note that teaching experience without guided reflection can often be miseducative (Zeichner, 1996). Short-term service-learning experiences may reinforce cultural stereotypes (Tellez et al., 1995). "Teacher growth in this area is possible only to the extent that the teacher's own behavior in a cross cultural setting is the subject of examination and experimentation" (Hilliard, 1974, p. 50).

Several educators offer promising strategies for structuring teacher education students' reflection to overcome their resistance. Writing a narrative case study of a child or adult whose background differed substantially from their own challenged some preservice teachers to reflect on their own roles in the classroom, community, and society (Hones, 1997, 1998). Students' reflections on their experiences in conjunction with course readings on poverty, inequality, power, privilege, and related societal issues also proved effective (Hones, 1997, 1998). Gomez and Tabachnick (1992) had teacher candidates tell "teaching stories" to reflect on their practice in diverse classrooms. They present convincing evidence that this activity, conducted in a challenging yet supportive setting, assisted student teachers in reexamining the "scripts" that guided their teaching.

Recommendation #3: Provide preservice teachers with structured reflection experiences in concert with course readings on societal issues and critical reflection on their attitudes about others in order to challenge prevailing negative beliefs.

LIMITATIONS IN THE RESEARCH ON SERVICE-LEARNING IN MULTICULTURAL TEACHER EDUCATION

Several limitations of the research reported in this article should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, almost without exception, the studies described here have been conducted by teacher educators positively predisposed to both service-learning and multicultural education. Second, the researchers by and large conducted their studies on their own students using qualitative data collection methods such as questionnaires, journals, and student interviews. While these methods often provide rich description in these studies, the self-report data and theme generation via qualitative analysis raise cautions, especially in regard to the positive claims of the teacher education students and their professors/researchers. Studies using control groups, pre- and post-testing, multiple coders, and researchers not associated with the service-learning activities would assist in establishing the validity of these studies' positive claims.

There is still much research needed to offer conclusive evidence about the benefits of diverse field experiences, including those involving service-learning. Grant and Secada (1990) asserted that while programs offering field experiences in multicultural settings seem to enhance preservice teachers' multicultural teaching competencies better than those without field experiences, the optimal length and intensity of field experiences have not been determined. Zeichner (1996) maintained that carryover from community field experiences to work in classrooms has not been de-

monstrated. Yet Melnick and Zeichner (1995) noted that field experiences in culturally diverse communities seem to be a common characteristic of teacher education programs that prepare teachers who are effective in teaching children of color. Zeichner and Melnick lend support for including service-learning experiences in teacher education in their conclusion that strong university/public school partnerships are "not sufficient for developing the cultural competence needed by teachers unless these partnerships also extend to the communities in which the schools exist" (1996b, p. 59).

CONCLUSION

While there are several important limitations in the research thus far on service-learning experiences for multicultural teacher education, there is reason for cautious optimism. Service-learning experiences in diverse communities can lead preservice teachers to increase their awareness of diversity, to learn to accept or affirm children and families of color, and to begin to question their pre-existing attitudes and beliefs. While preservice teachers may experience difficult feelings associated with their community encounters and struggle in regard to questioning the root causes of inequity, most judge their experience overall as worthwhile and personally satisfying. The research highlighted in this review illustrates both successes and challenges with service-learning activities in diverse community settings, and points to several recommendations that should be considered when designing quality service-learning experiences. Teacher educators committed to enhancing preservice teachers' multicultural teaching competencies must focus on facilitating collaborative partnerships with communities of color; involve preservice teachers in a range of service experiences including direct service, advocacy, and political action; and provide frequent opportunities for preservice teachers to reflect deeply on their own biases and the political and social institutions that create the need for service in our society. Equally important are educators' continuing efforts to develop sound research studies to further understand the benefits and challenges that service-learning in diverse communities provides.

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