

The Impact of Service-Learning on Preservice Professionals' Dispositions Toward Diversity

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Abstract

As service-learning becomes more widespread in schools and classrooms, it is similarly becoming more common in schools of education. A particular area of exploration is the use of service-learning to prepare preservice teachers to learn about diversity. This article provides a description of a project designed to positively influence preservice teachers' dispositions related to working with linguistically, socioeconomically, and culturally diverse families and initial analysis of that work. Further, this study examined what might make the service experience more transformational for participants. Specifically, the findings suggested that engaging in service work in the varied contexts of children and families allows preservice educators to see students' multiple lived identities, something not possible when service is performed solely in a school context.

Introduction

There continues to be an urgent need to restructure traditional PK-12 educator preparation programs to prepare culturally responsive teachers who recognize multiple ways of thinking and support a wide range of cultural perspectives and practices (Barnes, 2006; Oakes & Lipton, 2003; Taylor, 2010; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Students of color whose teachers teach in culturally responsive ways fare better than those whose teachers do not use culturally responsive teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Engaging PK-12 preservice teachers in service-learning opportunities that allow them to interact meaningfully with children and families from nondominant cultures and backgrounds may support the development of culturally responsive educators. The question remains, however, as to whether service-learning makes such a difference and if so, what types and elements of service-learning lead to these transformational ends for preservice professionals.

According to a 2012 NCES report, "students of color made up more than 45% of the PK-12 population, whereas teachers of color made up only 17.5% of the educator workforce" (Deruy, 2013, para. 4). Because the teaching force in the United States remains stubbornly White and middle class while the PK-12 student popula-

tion grows more diverse (Latham, 1999; NCES, 2005), it is critically important to provide preservice teachers with experiences that enable them to develop a positive disposition toward diversity, a disposition often lacking in those who enter preservice teacher education programs (Zeichner, 1993). Research has suggested that traditional courses in diversity that privilege reading and discussion as pedagogical means, although important, provide limited success in changing education students' dispositions toward diversity (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Dee & Henkin, 2002; Rueda & Stillman, 2012). In contrast, introductory preservice courses that immerse students in diverse settings have the potential to positively impact their thinking regarding diversity (Freeman & Swick, 2003).

In theory, service-learning can provide one avenue for preservice professionals to learn what it means to teach and work with diverse children and their families in the community, an avenue that moves beyond the traditional diversity course. Wade, Boyle-Baise, and O'Grady (2001) wrote, "A teacher education program that incorporates effective multicultural service learning opportunities can provide compelling learning experiences for pre-service teachers and may orient them positively to the communities where they will teach" (p. 248). These service opportunities can enable preservice teachers to "apply course content in community settings" (Buchanan, Baldwin, & Rudisill, 2002, p. 30) and thus to connect theories of diversity with the lived experiences of the individuals with whom they interact in the community. They also provide opportunities to experience dissonance, as theories and reality may at times clash in unexpected ways. Regardless of the outcome, such opportunities offer real-time learning for teacher candidates that they often find more meaningful than content knowledge alone; furthermore, the experiences can be meaningful not only to preservice teachers but also to the communities in which they serve (Carrington & Sagers, 2008). A handful of studies document the impact of service-learning on teacher candidates' dispositions toward diversity (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Bollin, 2007; Boyle-Baise, 2005; Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 1998; Dudderar & Tover, 2003; Root, Callahan, & Sepanski, 2001). Although research in service-learning has begun to explore its impact on teacher quality, disposition, and performance, there is a need to examine in particular "the degree to which teacher education students' civic responsibility, commitment to social justice, and development of an ethic of care are developed through service-learning experiences designed to achieve these goals" (Anderson, 1998, p. 5).

This article provides an overview of a project designed to engage preservice teachers in service-learning to support the development of positive dispositions toward diversity. Analysis of data gathered from the project enabled us to begin to determine how participation in community-based service-learning affected preservice teachers' dispositions toward working with linguistically, socioeconomically, and culturally diverse families. Our research has begun to illuminate further for us the components necessary to make service-learning transformational.

Setting the Context

The University and School Context

The University of North Carolina located in Chapel Hill employs more than 3,200 faculty members and in 2012 enrolled more than 18,000 undergraduate students and a combined total of more than 29,000 graduate and undergraduate students. Many programs across campus support UNC's own diverse student population, including an active Carolina Covenant program that provides extensive financial support to enable low-income students to graduate from Carolina debt-free.

Among other things, Carolina is well respected for its commitment to community service. The Carolina Center for Public Service, an active entity of the university, includes a program that allows Buckley Public Service Scholars to link extensive service work to their academic endeavors. More than 1,700 students participated as scholars in 2011–2012. In addition to this program, the center provides extensive opportunities for student and faculty involvement in local and distant communities. According to the center, over 2,000 students provided nearly 950,000 hours of service in 2011–2012 (see <https://ccps.unc.edu/files/2014/01/CCPS-Brochure-Final-Web-Res.pdf>). Many of these students participated in these service opportunities through coursework at UNC. The APPLES service-learning program, an arm of the center, provides opportunities for students and community partners to work together. One way this occurs is through the development of service-learning-specific courses in which students must complete a minimum of 30 hours of service work as part of the designated course. Funds to support service-learning course development are available to faculty. Faculty across the School of Education at UNC have consistently been recipients of APPLES course development grants.

Other resources to support School of Education faculty in service-learning course integration include subgrants through the Student Coalition for Action in Literacy Education (SCALE). SCALE is a grant-supported organization at UNC. In 2008, SCALE received a grant supporting Learning to Teach, Learning to Serve (LTLS), a project designed to examine the integration of service-learning and teacher education in particular. As a recipient of a subgrant through SCALE, the School of Education at UNC participated in these integration efforts. Teacher education faculty in the School of Education were invited to submit proposals for courses that integrated service-learning into the curriculum, including requiring their students to provide opportunities for their K-12 students themselves to engage in service-learning.

The School of Education

Service-learning is therefore not a new concept at UNC or within the School of Education itself. The School of Education's deep commitment to equity and social justice is reflected in the school's conceptual framework:

Within the School of Education, equity is seen as the state, quality, or ideal of social justice and fairness. It begins with the recognition that there is individual and cultural achievement among all social groups and that this achievement benefits all students and educators. (*UNC at Chapel Hill, School of Education, 2013, "For Equity and Excellence" section, para. 2*)

Service-learning in support of preparing teachers to successfully teach diverse students, the goal of the project described here, aligns well with the School of Education's mission.

The subgrant received by the School of Education from SCALE prompted a more focused effort to increase service opportunities for preservice teachers in particular. Not only was service-learning infused into some of the courses within preparation programs, but we also began to examine its impact on students. Participants in the project described here were students in one of two teacher preparation programs: a preservice elementary education program that lasts 2 years and a year-long preservice master of arts in teaching (MAT) secondary program. Both programs provide students opportunities to intern in schools and prepare students to teach through a variety of courses in teaching methodology and educational foundations. When students successfully complete each

program, they are licensed to teach in their identified grade level and subject area in the state of North Carolina.

The Community Context and Partnership Efforts

The School of Education, like the university, is located in a middle to upper class majority White suburban community. A short drive from campus are other, less affluent and more culturally and linguistically diverse communities, comprising both rural and urban populations. Our preservice teachers are exposed to many different school contexts and thus to a range of schools and a range of student populations. The School of Education has had a long history of partnership with local schools and communities, most significantly through an arrangement called Research Triangle Schools Partnership (RTSP). RTSP is a collaborative initiative dedicated to school improvement as well as student and teacher learning. In this collaborative model, the School of Education and its partner schools identify common issues of concern and then work together to tackle these issues. Past issues of collaborative focus have included supporting English Language Learners (ELLs) in schools (and preparation of our preservice teachers to work with ELL students) and integrating the arts into elementary schools (and similarly preparing preservice teachers for this work).

The project described in this article stemmed from these local partnerships, as faculty and school-based personnel identified needs that could be addressed through our preservice teachers' engaging in service-learning in particular. Specifically, the two schools involved in the partnership, both in the same diverse urban context, sought ways to better support their at-risk students. For the elementary school partner, the goal was to help parents in particular better support their children's learning. In the MAT partner school, the goal was for our students to help support middle school student learning of literacy and math in particular. Goals for our preservice teachers included the development of new dispositions toward diversity, ones that would enable them to better support diverse parents and students when they stepped into classrooms. The hope was that service-learning would provide a critical entryway for schools and the university to meet these proposed ends.

Review of the Literature

"Service-learning is the integration of community service activities with academic skills, content and reflection on the ser-

vice experience” (Karayan & Gathercoal, 2005, p. 79). Service-learning therefore combines the elements of coursework with work in the community that illuminates the content studied. In addition, service-learning requires that students perform critical reflection to consider the connection between course content and fieldwork. Service-learning is distinguished from more traditional field or internship placements in preparation programs by the ongoing reflection required and the mutual benefit to the recipient of the service and the student providing the service. Service-learning experiences are designed to meet the identified needs of a community or school, whereas field placements are typically geared to optimize preservice student learning, with the needs of placement schools treated as a secondary aspect.

Some studies have suggested that service-learning is a more effective pedagogical method than more traditional clinical or field placements in helping preservice teachers come to understand the realities of the students they will teach (Baldwin *et al.*, 2007; Mitchell, 2008; Wade, Boyle-Baise, & O’Grady, 2001). Community service-learning experiences in particular have the potential to allow teacher education candidates to see firsthand the diverse experiences and contexts of children and families, an important goal given the vast differences that can exist between preservice teachers’ experiences and lives and those of their students (Baldwin *et al.*, 2007; Guadarrama, 2000). The intended main effects of service-learning are to foster teacher candidates’ connections with students, their communities, and the broader society; to increase critical thinking and practical problem solving skills; and to develop multicultural competencies (Bollin, 2007). Thus, a benefit of service-learning is that it can enhance preservice teachers’ sense of social and civic responsibility in ways that regular field experiences may not (Vaughn, Seifer, & Mihalynuk, 2004). Although service-learning has been a nearly regular practice in PK-12 settings across the country, it has only recently begun to be embedded within the preparation of teachers for these contexts (Karayan & Gathercoal, 2005; Spencer, Cox-Peterson, & Crawford, 2005).

The benefits service-learning can provide for preservice teachers are potentially great, particularly with regard to preservice teachers’ development of dispositions toward diversity. These benefits include “a deeper understanding of oneself in relation to diverse members of a community . . . [and] a greater awareness of the influence of social issues in the lives of children and families” (Dodd & Lilly, 2000, p. 77). For example, a study focusing on 24 preservice teachers of color engaged in a community-based

service-learning project provided evidence that service-learning engagement in diverse communities may help preservice teachers generate dialogue about issues of diversity with members of the community, faculty, and peers (*Boyle-Baise, 2005*). In a study examining the impact of service-learning on the teaching philosophy of five preservice teachers, participants designed and implemented service-learning activities over a 10-week period at a local urban high school made up of a culturally and linguistically diverse student population. The researchers' analysis of the preservice teachers' narratives about their experience supported the idea that the service-learning experience increased the preservice teachers' social justice sensitivity and their commitment to culturally responsive teaching (*Brown & Howard, 2005*). Further research has suggested that service-learning can help teacher candidates apply their content knowledge and develop skills in individualizing and addressing the diverse needs and priorities of families and students, which then increases teacher candidates' understanding of and empathy for others (*Jenkins & Sheehy, 2009*).

Although these studies and others have contributed to the literature on service-learning, there remains a paucity of research on the extent to which the service-learning experience impacts preservice teacher dispositions toward working with diverse students and families. The project and related research described here is in part a response to those (e.g., *Anderson, 1998*) who have argued for expanding the work in this area.

Program Overview

As previously stated, this project was conducted within two programs in the School of Education: the Elementary Education program and the Master of Arts in Teaching program. The service-learning initiative was carried out within courses in these two programs as described below.

The Elementary Education Program

Through a required course in the Elementary Education (EE) program focused on working with socioculturally diverse families—families whose race, class, or schooling experience differed from those of the primarily White, middle-class females in the program—we explored the impact of service-learning on the dispositions of the 32 elementary education preservice teachers in the course. The course introduced students to the various populations with whom they will work as teachers. The focus in the course

moved beyond the student to the family. Of the 32 students in the course in the year studied, 28 self-identified as White, three as African American, and one as Latino. All of the participants were 20 or 21 years of age. All students in the course were required to participate in service-learning as part of the course; however, the students chose whether or not to participate in the IRB-approved study.

The focus of the course included an examination of diversity among and across families to help prepare future teachers to support all children and their families. Topics covered in the course included issues regarding diversity, family-professional partnerships and communication, families of children with developmental delays, and the legal and ethical rights of families. In addition to the service experience described below, students were assigned readings and additional activities like self-reflections that prompted their thinking about working with diverse families.

Service-learning requirements for this course were twofold. Students were matched with families from a local diverse urban community with whom they spent 15 hours, both participating in family routines and providing service activities for these families. Families were recruited from area schools where students were placed in internships for other education classes as well as from local family centers and family support organizations. Students were placed in teams of two with a family identified as different from the students' backgrounds. Family diversity included single-parent households, parents who were African American and Latino, and parents who had a child with disabilities. Approximately half of the parents with whom students were placed were middle or upper class; the remainder were working class. Service provided to the families was based on family requests and priorities. Sample service activities included providing homework help to children, providing childcare and playing with children, and helping families locate community resources for their children. In addition to the family-based work, these students were also involved in one of two service efforts in a local school context where the children of many of the host families attended school. Approximately 12 students tutored low-performing elementary students at the school site, and an additional 20 students researched local free or inexpensive summer opportunities for low-income families and then shared these resources with families. These needs had previously been identified by the school's principal, the teachers, and parents. These two student groups together then planned and facilitated a "Family Fun Night" event for children and families at the school site where

they introduced families to home literacy and math games and provided families with the information they had gathered about free or inexpensive summer learning opportunities for children and families. At the Family Fun Night, each family received a packet of activities for home (developed by the preservice education students) to facilitate their children's ongoing learning and development and information about summer opportunities for student learning.

The MAT Program

Students in the 13-month MAT program are involved in an intense full year of coursework and fieldwork. In the first summer of their program, students take two courses: one that provides an overview of schools and the school's role in American society and another that introduces students to teaching, broadly speaking. Within these courses, students learn about multicultural education, instructional strategies, diverse learners, classroom management, reflective practice, cultures of schools, and meaningful family and community involvement. A central text in these courses is Grant and Gillette's (2006) *Learning to Teach Everyone's Children: Equity, Empowerment, and Education That Is Multicultural*. Like the elementary education course described above, these courses provide students with some readings and discussions related to diversity. However, the elementary education course is more specifically focused on this particular topic. We discuss later in the article the potential impact of this difference on our research findings. In both the elementary education and MAT courses, students reflected on their service experience as part of the course both in writing and in instructor-facilitated classroom discussion, linking course readings to the experiences they were having in the community.

Students in the MAT program could opt to participate in a service-learning-infused section of the required summer courses or one that did not include that component. Of the students who participated in the service-learning section of the courses, 16 students (12 females and 4 males) then participated in the IRB-approved study. All but four of these participants self-identified as White. The other four were African American. All participants were between 21 and 35 years of age. The preservice teachers were required to perform 30 hours of service-learning over 5 weeks at a summer Children's Defense Fund Freedom School operated at a local historically Black university. All students attending the Freedom School identified as either African American or Latino and were from a lower or middle-class SES. This particular Freedom School,

serving rising third through ninth graders, was developed as part of an initiative to introduce hip-hop pedagogy into area schools in order to foster school readiness and academic preparedness. The school's mission was to inspire students to read, speak, and transform the world around them through the Children's Defense Fund Integrated Reading Curriculum and the Hip Hop Program's Arts and Leadership Curriculum. For their service work, all preservice teachers were placed in one of six classrooms (each containing approximately 10 Freedom School students) based on grade level or subject interest to assist teachers with a variety of classroom-related activities. Students provided assistance in classroom management, tutored students in reading, taught short lessons, and read to students. In addition, the students helped facilitate a final student performance. This effort included creating a gallery of school students' visual artwork and coordinating the students' performances. Exploring the difference in the nature of the service work across these two courses and the impact of the service experience on the preservice teachers enabled us to begin ascertaining what difference the type of service-learning makes in impacting preservice teachers' dispositions toward diversity.

Tracking Program Impact

Methodology

During this pilot year, we collected data from two sources. First, students completed service-learning contact logs that were collected at the end of the experience. These logs tracked participation at service sites. Second, focus groups were conducted with all class sections at the end of the semester. The focus group discussions were audiotaped and facilitated by a faculty member who did not teach the designated course and whom the students had not known previously. In the focus groups, students described their service-learning experiences; how the experiences did or did not assist them in understanding students' diversity characteristics; and how they benefited, if at all, from the service-learning experiences.

Review of the contact logs signed by community members or teachers at the school site allowed us to determine at the most basic level whether or not students were present during the service experience. Through analysis of the focus group data, we then developed an understanding of the experience of the service-learning participants. Analysis of the focus group data included reading verbatim transcripts and noting themes across the data using a con-

stant comparative method protocol (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This was done for both the MAT and elementary education sections. Researchers coded the data individually and then compared themes to determine interrater reliability, ultimately reaching consensus on identified themes in the data through discussion and data review. After coding for initial themes, basic sociolinguistic analysis was performed on the data in order to examine more closely how individuals talked about the identified themes.

Initial Findings

Some important themes were evident across data from both classes. As described below, participants (a) sought similarities between their school and home experiences and those of the diverse students with whom they worked, (b) held deficit views of participants, and (c) developed a view of difference that overrode a deficit view in some cases. It also became evident that the transformations of the elementary education students exceeded those of the MAT students, providing us with some important information to use in future iterations of service-learning in teacher education classes.

Focus on similarities. The elementary education students' descriptions of their service experiences revealed an initial privileging of the perceived similarities between their own experiences and those of the families with whom they worked. Comments during the focus group discussion included such things as "I thought that was really neat because I didn't expect this [family] to have any similarities [to mine]," and "I kind of have that experience of having a single parent." This same privileging of similarities was evident in the data from the MAT focus group. For example, the MAT students also referred—often to their stated surprise—to the many similarities between their own experiences or lives and those of the students with whom they worked at the Freedom School. One student commented, "They talked about their parents the same way *my own background* talks about them" (emphasis added). Although the examples of similarities were evident in the data, particularly early on during the hour-long focus groups, also evident was students' recognition of differences between their experiences and those of the families and students with whom they worked.

Recognition of differences. Later in the focus group, as students described their work, they shared examples of the ways their lives differed from those of the students and their families. In some

cases, those differences were stated matter-of-factly as points of information. For example, one elementary education student talked about having a stay at home mother present throughout her own childhood, whereas the family she served had a mother who needed to work outside the home. As this student noted, “This mother worked multiple jobs to keep her children fed and clothed—she didn’t have time to help with homework and attend school events.” In other cases, the acknowledgment of difference revealed either a deficit perspective or a sense of recognition of—and respect for—difference.

Deficit perspective. Throughout both focus group discussions, students sometimes utilized an us/them dichotomy, *us* being the population of preservice teachers (primarily White and middle class) and *them* being families whose socioeconomic or cultural status differed from that perceived norm. The descriptors used in these examples suggested a deficit viewpoint held by the students. For example, another elementary education student who worked with a family headed by a single mother who held multiple jobs commented, “[We] took them to educational places and just had fun. Because of how *their* financial situation is, *they* don’t get to go out much” (emphasis added). The phrasing of this comment suggests that because the family does not have financial resources, they are unable to go to “educational places” or “have fun.” Additionally, one student, in discussing the school-based service she engaged in, shared that during the service work, she reflected that the preservice teachers “talked about a lot of different ways to get involved with *those kinds of parents*” (emphasis added). She did not specify what she meant by “those kinds of parents,” but the implication here and in other examples is that these are parents who are not as good as the parents of the preservice teachers themselves.

Recognition of and respect for difference and challenging assumptions. Despite some evidence of a deficit perspective, also evident were instances of participants recognizing difference as just that: difference rather than deficit (Purcell-Gates, 2002). There’s not a negative judgment in these examples. For instance, participants in the MAT course commented on the difference between the topics of conversation that came up at the Freedom School and those topics they remembered from their own school experiences. Of particular interest to the preservice teachers was the fact that race—an often-silenced topic in schools (see Morrison, 1989)—was spoken about explicitly at the Freedom School. As one preservice teacher commented, “I learned in the long term that it’s probably better to just go ahead and talk about the big issues, espe-

cially at that age.” The MAT students also marveled at the Freedom School students’ ability to “express themselves” in ways that differed markedly from how they had expressed themselves in school. Examples included the young students expressing themselves in song, in dance, and in rhyme. The MAT students were impressed by the sophistication of the topics of conversation as well as the ability of these young students to share their thoughts and ideas on these challenging topics in intricate and powerful ways.

Purcell-Gates (2002) explained the significance of the distinction between deficit and difference: “[W]hether we interpret differences among children—or adults—as deficit or difference depends primarily on our preconceptions, attitudes toward and stereotypes we hold toward the individual children’s communities and cultures” (p. 130). During one focus group, two of the elementary education students talked about attending a religious service with their host families. In both cases, the student was the only or one of a few White attendees in predominantly African American congregations. One student explained, “It was a culture shock, walking in, sitting down and getting into the service.” The difference prompted these two students, for the first time, to consider what it must be like to be a person of color in a predominantly White institution, like a school. One of the two participants commented,

I never really thought about that because I went to a private White middle class school. Pretty much, like all through, so I never really thought about the fact that that would be really difficult if someone of a different background came in and tried to get acclimated, and even if you tried to get them involved, it’s still intimidating to be the only one who’s different.

Difference in these instances was not perceived as deficit but rather as difference and, in this case, as an eye-opening experience for the students.

Through students’ service-learning experiences, some prior assumptions were challenged. For example, another elementary education student commented that when she went for the first time to spend a Saturday with her family, she expected that she would “watch them play video games, because we assume that’s what kids are into these days.” However, this family of limited income suggested going to an Earth Day festival to be outside and learning. The student commented that she thought to herself, “This is great.”

She further recognized that she had specific assumptions entering the home and learned from this “not to underestimate parents.”

Rethinking one’s assumptions about parents became a common theme during the focus group discussion in the elementary group in particular. The students’ talk reflected a growing recognition that positive parent involvement can be manifested in ways other than a parent being at school during the course of a normal school day, a particularly middle-class assumption (*Lareau, 1987*), such as a parent seeking out activities to support students’ learning or providing a home environment supportive of the school culture. For example, one participant commented, “I hate to say but before this class, I would think, if a parent’s not involved, they don’t care. Now I realize we talked about how dropping your kids off at school is staying involved. You’re doing as much as you can for them. Just like some parents who struggle, work so many jobs, that that’s what they’re doing for their child. They’re providing them with food and shelter so they can go to school.” Furthermore, these participants recognized that a lack of parental involvement within the school context itself did not necessarily equate to parent uninterest in their child’s education. One elementary education participant commented, “[The mother] was really busy but she was doing everything she could for her daughters. She valued their education and was advocating for them in other ways.” This comment and others like it resonate with research that suggests that teachers often falsely perceive a lack of traditional involvement in schools (e.g., volunteering, attending school events) as a parent’s lack of interest in their child’s education (*Lareau, 1987*). Recognizing otherwise is critical and something these students came to understand in part through their involvement in a family-based service effort.

Discussion

Analysis of focus group data suggested that on the one hand, students’ understandings of diversity had grown more complex in part due to their experience in the field. This was particularly evident in the more complex understanding that preservice teachers had developed of the various ways parents might support their children’s education beyond the perceived norm of parent involvement. On the other hand, focus group data seemed to suggest that preservice teachers firmly retained some dichotomous views of culture and social class as evidenced, for example, in their continued use of us/them typologies through the conversation. These us/them dichotomies were more evident in the MAT data than in the elementary education data.

What Difference Makes a Difference?

Review of the students' descriptions of their service experiences led us to reflect on an important distinction between the MAT students' experiences and those of the elementary education students. All students spent the same number of hours in the field working in some service capacity. However, those hours looked different, as described earlier in the article. Initial analysis of focus group data from the participants in the MAT group suggests that the particular service experience—supporting the work of the teachers at the Freedom School—did not allow preservice teachers, for the most part, to develop relationships with the students they served or feel integral to the context in which they served. This was prominent in the data not only evidenced in what participants said but also in what they neglected to say. The preservice teachers shared vague descriptions of the work they did at the school site and of those with whom they worked (e.g., “I helped out *the kids* and helped out *the teachers*”; “The first couple of visits I joined the class, I helped *them* read . . . I read the readings with *them* as a whole” [emphasis added]).

Analysis of the MAT focus group data suggests that a perceived inability to develop relationships with those at the school left the preservice teachers feeling somewhat conflicted about the impact of their service experience. Furthermore, this inability to build relationships led many of the students to continue to perceive the students with whom they worked as a collective group rather than as individuals who are part of larger cultural and social groups. In other words, individual students they encountered stood for the larger community (“them”), at least in the eyes of these students.

In contrast, analysis of the elementary education students' data revealed a real specificity in terms of how they talked and wrote about the service work they did with children and families. For example, one participant commented,

[We went] a couple of times to meet with them while they ate dinner. We babysat. She had a birthday party and we went and supervised for them. And also the summer events planning and putting together packets. We did fourth grade packets. We put together crayons and coloring books.

Another participant described this experience:

We generally worked at the home, actually, only at the home, while the mother was there. We tutored the student for about half the time. So say 45 minutes each week. And for the other 45 minutes, we'd either play outside, ride a bike, or try to play a game.

The opportunity to come to know and build relationships with families and children inside and outside school enabled the elementary education preservice teachers to begin to develop a more complex understanding of culture and social class than the MAT students, which was reflected in the way they talked about some of their new understandings. Students who were more intricately involved with children and families in their homes and communities through home visits and community networking appeared to develop more positive dispositions toward working with diverse families and children and a more complex understanding of culture and class relative to school experience. As identified in the analysis, sample preservice teacher comments reflected a greater appreciation for what families from low-income neighborhoods do to ensure their children's school success, more empathy for single-parent households, and a better understanding of why children come to school without completing homework or other paperwork requirements, for example. Their comments suggested that they were beginning to recognize those they worked with as individuals who were part of larger cultural and social communities rather than as representative of those communities.

We suggest that rapport and relationship building looks different—that is, such activities are operationalized differently—in school settings as opposed to community or home settings. These experiences amount to differing social constructions of local realities. Having the opportunity to observe and participate in students' lives outside school may have led to a relationship in which the children and families taught and the preservice teachers learned from and with them—about culture, social class, and life more generally. This possibility resonates with work by other scholars (e.g., Baldwin *et al.*, 2007; Bollin, 2007; Lareau, 2003; & Sleeter, 2000), who suggested that engaging in the multiple contexts of children and families allows preservice educators to see students' multiple lived identities, something not possible when service lies in schools alone.

Limitations and Future Research

Although we believe that this study represents a valuable first effort at examining how the specific type of service-learning experience differentially impacts students' dispositions toward working with diverse children, youth, and families in low-income, urban communities, we recognize some limitations of the current study. In this first effort, we relied on two data sources rather than on multiple data sources that would enable close exploration across students' experiences. Analysis of student reflection journals and classroom conversations would enhance future research of this sort. In addition, we recognize the need to explore more closely other possible reasons for the differences we noted across the courses. Factors that may have affected the outcome of this study include teacher and course content influence (each course researched was taught by a different instructor, and the content of the MAT course differed from that of the elementary education course), participant experience and/or interest (secondary vs. elementary education students, graduates vs. undergraduates, first program course [MAT] vs. second program semester [EE]), and the actual logistics of the service experience or at the service site (e.g., how the preservice teachers were welcomed into the school or family context). Additionally, specific school sites certainly influenced the types of experiences our students had. For example, the Freedom School had a fairly homogeneous grouping of students and was focused on the empowerment of African American students in schools. This environment, along with working with a group of students as opposed to just one or two, may have made it easier for the MAT students to make generalizations about those they served rather than teasing out differences between individual students and cultural markers that might be more visible in a heterogeneous grouping. We could better ascertain these differences through gathering and analyzing different and additional data, including student reflections. Additionally, seeking feedback from the service-learning recipients (students, parents, and teachers) would allow us to assess the impact of students' service on these individuals.

Educational Significance and Implications

Understanding the direct benefits of service-learning in pre-service teacher education is critical in helping teacher educators develop civic-minded educational professionals who are committed to educating children and youth for equity and excellence. The evaluation of this project enabled us to begin to better deter-

mine the potential use of service-learning in fostering this end. As we continue this line of work, we will encourage faculty members and course instructors to craft better defined service experiences that allow students to gather more specific and sophisticated understandings of the community and the students they serve, through encouraging engagement in service inside and outside schools.

We believe that providing our preservice teachers with a more community-based service experience (ideally one that combines out-of-school and in-school service experience within a single community) that offers opportunities to develop relationships with others might be the ideal in helping to transform and make more complex preservice teachers' understandings of culture and diversity. Unfortunately, most service-learning experiences in teacher education programs are focused exclusively in school sites and are fairly short-lived. We were pleased that a small 30-hour window of service provided a meaningful learning experience for the elementary education students in particular, but we recognize the need to expand that window. Widening the discussion of service so that it becomes service to and with the community over time may both enhance the role of teacher education in communities and broaden preservice teachers' understanding of the role of teacher and how to most effectively work with all children and their families.

In future iterations of this work, we intend to craft service opportunities that allow our students to build relationships with individuals in communities. We recognize that these efforts will likely require more than a 30-hour, one-semester service commitment. Ideally, students might begin building relationships in the community early in their preparation experience and extend that connection across the preparation program, working with the same family, students, and/or organization over time. We look forward to examining the impact of these changes.

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