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What Really Happens? A Look Inside Service-Learning for Multicultural Teacher Education

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This is a qualitative, interpretive, case study which utilizes ethnographic to discover what happens, and what preservice teachers think about what has service-learning field experience for a multicultural education course. Three perspectives that can be related to multicultural learning are described and

playing it safe, teacher/helper, and companionship. Although preservice teachers tend to play it too safe to fully realize the aims of the course, the study suggests service-learning still holds promise for multicultural education.

What really happens in service-learning, particularly when it is utilized in conjunction with a multicultural education course for preservice teachers? In this paper, we investigate the extent to which service-learning provides the kind of experience that preservice teachers need to become multicultural people and educators. As Nieto (1996) notes, most prospective teachers, regardless of cultural or social background, are raised and educated in pervasively monocultural, Eurocentric, English-speaking environments. Often, they know little about (and hold biases against) the primary constituents for multicultural education: people marginalized in U.S. society, including children and children of color and/or of low-income backgrounds, children who are lesbian, gay, and their parents or adult supporters, and girls” (Sleeter, 1996, p. 2). Multicultural education seeks to prepare teachers as educational allies and advocates for youth from these groups. Nieto argues that “becoming a multicultural teacher begins with first becoming a multicultural person” (p. 353) and that this process depends on reflection and re-education. Preservice teachers need to question their own biases, learn more about cultural diversity and pluralism, and grapple with multiple perspectives. Otherwise, their approach to multicultural education will be shallow and superficial.

Community-based learning, or learning experiences situated within diverse low-income neighborhoods and organizations, can prod preservice teachers to draw on their life experiences, identify children as community members, regard community as educational resources, and adapt learning to children’s life experiences (e.g., Fortney, & Garcia, 1983; Sleeter, 2000). Yet, community-based experiences are a rarity in teacher education programs (Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). A “field” experience typically refers to placement in a school, not in

a neighborhood context. Even if the school has a culturally diverse and/or multilingual student population, it does not follow that preservice teachers become attuned to community views and concerns. Unless preservice teachers work with teachers and principals who view communities as educational resources—as significant places for youth—school experiences alone are unlikely to foster cultural awareness and support alliance and advocacy (e.g., Tellez, Hlebowitsh, Cohen, & Norwood, 1992; Zeichner, 1992).

Service-learning pedagogy, with its real-world focus, emphasis on critical reflection, and impetus for reciprocity, can structure community-based learning. Good service-learning balances service with learning: it deepens academic curriculum, responds

community needs, and equally benefits all participants (Sigmon, 1994). This offers a viable, affirmative way to connect teacher educators and prospective teachers with youth and families from constituent groups for multicultural education.

Service-learning can provide experiences that inform preservice teachers about the needs of the communities— their issues, strengths, problems, and resources— and the role of the community people as participants in teacher education. For parents and community members who often feel distanced from schools, service-learning can offer opportunities to shape future teachers for their children. For teacher educators and preservice teachers, involvement in real-life, everyday circumstances characterized by cultural diversity, poverty, and inequity can prompt and undergird classroom-based inquiry about race, culture, and power (O’Grady & Chappell, 2000).

A small body of literature indicates that the utilization of service-learning, multicultural or social foundation courses, assists preservice teachers’ professional reflection and re-education.

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Most of this literature describes approaches to service-learning in education courses, not actual encounters during service-learning, and relies upon self-reports (journals, reflective essays, and interviews) of preservice teachers. This literature claims that service-learning: increases awareness and acceptance of cultural diversity (Boyle-Baise, 1998; Hones, 1997; Sleeter, 1995; Tellez, H. Lebowitsh, Cohen & Norwood, 1995); challenges prejudicial, stereotypical beliefs (e.g., Fuller, 1998; O’Grady, 1997; Tellez, H. Lebowitsh, Cohen, & Norwood, 1995); develops more complex understandings of institutional racism (O’Grady & Chappell, 2000; Vadenboncoeur, Rahm, Aguilera, & LeCompte, 1996); and increases commitment to teach diverse youth—particularly for European American preservice teachers (e.g., Fuller, 1998; Tellez, H. Lebowitsh, Cohen, & Norwood, 1995). O’Grady and Chappell (2000) claimed that service-learning yielded data fruitful for a “structural analysis of racism” (p. 425), but other teacher educators found it difficult to spur structural change upon service-learning (e.g., Boyle-Baise, 1998; O’Grady & Chappell, 2000; Vadenboncoeur, Rahm, Aguilera, & LeCompte, 1996). O’Grady and Chappell (2000) worried that service-learning can reinforce “we-they” divisiveness between white college students and communities of color, especially when there is a “lack of true partnership between the college and the community of color” (p. 214).

Missing from this research are field reports— observations, interviews, and

documents— that allow interested parties to see “inside” actual service-learning experiences. What really happens “out there” in service-learning experiences that is pertinent to multicultural teacher education? What do preservice teacher supports or limits reconsideration of their monocultural, Eurocentric worldviews? Do certain experiences spur self-examination and realization? Are there constraints on the learning process? Are there ways that experiences can be altered to motivate social insights and critique? These questions are explored in relation to the study presented here. This study, then, describes what happened within the field aspect of service-learning, and it considers the meanings prospective teachers made of their experiences.

The Course and The Service

A few clarifications are in order. Service-learning was a companion, field experience component of the course— Multicultural Education—intended to strengthen and deepen the course but not the whole of it. It is a three-credit bearing class, and the service-learning component earned one additional credit hour as a field experience. For the purposes of this study, multicultural education was defined as the development of cultural

knowledge and insights as well as the examination of social and cultural dynamics and power (Sleeter & Grant, 1994). Course goals included: to understand one's own identity and social location, to learn about historically-oppressed groups, to address educational inequality, and to gain strategies to promote educational excellence for all youth. Servicelearning was utilized as a vehicle to connect preservice teachers with minority communities and to learn from them. Aims for the service-learning component included: to interact with culturally-diverse and lowincome groups, to disrupt stereotypical perceptions, to raise awareness of community problems and resources, and to learn to work positively with diverse youth.

Prior to the fall semester, six community organizations which served culturally diverse and/or lowincome youth were invited to participate in the service-learning component of the course. Service sites included an historically black church, mixed by race and class, two community centers, two girl scout troops for “at-risk” girls, and a mentoring program. Sites were chosen because they fostered a self-help, rather than a compensatory, ethic. Only one of these organizations had not worked before with the instructor. Leaders/directors of these organizations attended an orientation session in August. They discussed: community-based learning as part of multicultural education; service-learning as a vehicle for community connections; findings from a previous service-learning project; and possibilities for current involvement. Community leaders were asked to explain local contexts to preservice teachers, to define the needs of the youth which they could serve and learn, to monitor their learning, and to challenge common stereotypes. Leaders' requests for service included tutoring, teaching small

assisting recreational programs. They agreed to encourage preservice teachers and/or help organize site events and to foster acquaintance with youth, adult families at their sites. Mixed race inquiry teams of three to five preservice teachers worked together at each site.

In-class reflection about community experiences occurred biweekly. Preservice teachers wrote four reflective essays, and, often, in-class discussion questions were derived from them. Topics were selected because of their general significance to multicultural education and their reiteration across essays. Topics included: problems with selecting after-school care, assumptions underlying the “at-risk” label, the construction of poverty, and discipline norms across race or ethnic groups. These discussions served as “windows” to preservice teachers’ perceptions of the sites they provided key opportunities to debunk stereotypes and question social structures. In cases where

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questions were linked intimately to particular sites, participants were asked to provide further information from their organization’s leaders. An African-American woman, active in local community affairs and a liaison for one of the service sites, participated in reflective sessions and contributed her unique points of view.

Other class activities were intended to correlate service-learning and multicultural education in ways that strengthened both. As examples, preservice teachers in Bafa Bafa, a simulation of cross-cultural differences and misunderstandings, read *There Are No Children Here* (Kotlowitz, 1991), analyzed the book in terms of issues pertinent to community life, and then considered implications for service-learning. They conducted ethnographic, mini-inquiries called “Why?” Studies (based on questions which probed site-based questions of interest to the team; mini-inquiries included: Why is the Black church important for Black children? and Why is Girl Scouts important for “at risk” girls of our county? An alternative project was the development of curriculum units pertinent to youth at sites served. As examples, one site teacher read tales, then helped children at a community center analyze the stories for racism and sexism. Another team helped youth learn numbers and colors in Spanish, and the bilingualism of one team member.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative, interpretive case study that utilized ethnographic

It took place at a large, Midwestern, research university with a predominant student population. The city was fairly small and dominated by the university. Distinctions existed, especially between citizens who struggled economically and citizens who were highly educated and financially comfortable. Over a three-year period, the author developed partnerships with community organizations that serve adults of color and/or from low-income backgrounds. Preservice teachers contributed their time and service to these organizations. In return, adults and children in the community welcomed, befriended, and taught preservice teachers about themselves. The study was completed during the academic year of 1998 and 1999; however, most data were collected in the field during the fall semester of 1998.

Participants

Twenty-four preservice teachers were studied as one case. Of the group, twenty-two teachers were white: seven were male, thirteen were female.

Four women were of color: two were Latinas, two were African American. A demographic survey, all but two preservice teachers were instate students, from small or middle-size towns. Most described their neighborhoods as middle-class. Five were from high-income and three were from low-income backgrounds. All preservice teachers had minimal direct experience with cultural diversity (one had a semester of a multicultural course). Several had traveled internationally with the armed forces, and a few others had worked at summer camps for low-income youth or for children with disabilities.

Data Collection

One of us was a participant observer and collected the data. The other was a participant and taught the multicultural course (Gold, cited in LeCompte, 1993). The participation of the instructor in the research was disclosed fully and approached as secondary to the teaching role. We practiced a "hands-off" approach in the field; once the service-learning commenced, community directors had discretion over activities and supervision. We intervened only on two occasions when our data alerted us to on-site situations contrary to course goals. On these occasions, we shared our information with community leaders, and they determined appropriate responses to our concerns. The two of us met weekly to discuss field data and the content of reflective essays. We shared what we "saw" as participant observations and developed questions for small group interviews.

Each site was observed from four to twelve times, depending upon the number of teams placed there. Overall, thirty-three site visits were made. Field notes were collected on an observation schedule was used. Observations lasted one to three hours, depending upon the activities underway. The field observer stayed until a cycle of activities

completed and until he “got a feel” for the repetitive nature of what happened. Preservice teachers were interviewed as site-based teams three times—at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the service-learning experience. Organization directors were interviewed after the service experience. In order to safeguard the privacy of the children, we did not interview children without explicit permission of their parents. Reflective sessions were audio-taped and field notes were taken as well. Also, written assignments were included in our data.

Data Analysis

We studied multiple forms of data (e.g., interviews, observations, and reflective essays) from various

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various sources (i.e., preservice teachers, organization directors). Reference to multiple sources triangulated our interpretations. Interviews and reflective essays were read and analyzed for recurrent ideographic themes (Spindler & Spindler, 1997). While we looked for frequency in which ideas were mentioned, this was not entirely helpful. It was important for respondents to answer questions or raise concerns in a myriad of ways. If an idea was reiterated by several respondents, it was considered influential (Youniss & Constant). Constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to search for patterns within reflective papers and discussions. Attention was paid to site-based influences of race and gender. For observation data, we searched for repeated behaviors and reasons behind behavior, then, we contrasted norms with “critical” incidents that stood apart as unusual.

We read the data separately, then, we crosschecked our interpretations. For each site, in part, we identified similar trends. Meanings and actions often were restated and compared across sites, which served as an internal check for our interpretations. When we rechecked the data. Usually, from our alternate standpoints, one of us “heard” something the other did not, and we were able to amplify our categories. Most puzzling were differences between preservice teachers’ expressions of their understanding of assessment and seemingly limited field activities. This potential disjunction between theory and practice became a focal point for our deliberations.

Limitations

As one of the researchers was the course instructor, issues of power might

influenced the investigation. Care was taken to reduce potential feelings of instructor did not interview or observe respondents. Preservice teachers completed the study after the assignment of grades for the course, although none did use on reflective essays, and frankness could have been impacted. For this were counted as completed assignments, but not graded.

The constraints of space always challenge a descriptive, interpretive work. It was made to include expressions and actions of all of the key “players.” College directors read an early draft of this paper, and some thought their perspectives underplayed. More data was included and their views were detailed more fully.

Roles/Perspectives

The roles and perspectives of preservice teachers related to service-learning fell into several categories. These groupings are described separately,

although their borders were fuzzy and overlapping. Factors that influenced teachers’ views and actions are discussed in relation to the several roles and

Playing It Safe

To their credit, most preservice teachers did not hesitate to become involved; they did not sit back and observe, but jumped right in, eager for the experience. Yet overwhelmingly, they were concerned with “fitting in.” Early on, service learning was an accommodation to site routines. Preservice teachers played it “safe;” they showed up, they were timely, polite, and obliging. Involvement at the multiracial center exemplified safe interaction. Preservice teachers clapped and swayed during the song but did not sing or call back to the pastor’s remarks with the rest of the congregation. Preservice teachers participated just enough to fit in.

There seemed to be several “safe” types of interactions. One safe interaction focused on the task at hand. For example, when pre-service teachers tutored at the Boys and Girls Club, they kept the children focused on doing homework. The focus was evident across gender, but was more pronounced with the male at the site. Preservice teachers were more apt to talk casually with students before returning to homework. This focus extended to “mentoring” situations where preservice teachers played the role of brother or sister. The conversation centered on the activity at hand: a discussion about a play in a touch-football game; a question about the design of an art project. Conversation about homes, families, and life outside the center occurred, but was uncommon. Task talk constrained chances for cross-cultural learning.

A second “safe” interaction was to keep comments to the students positive. During the reading program at the community center a preservice teacher encouraged a young man to read by saying, “You read better than I” (J.K., 11/11/98). At the Hea

program, praise was a common response for almost everything children did nicely at the lunch table or picking up toys. At Girl Scouts, a preservice teacher who worked on a badge, “You guys got your stuff done really fast, thank you” (E.W., 10/19/98), although the scouts were done early because they had no more as expected. Negative comments were rare, except when physical safety was an issue. Then, preservice teachers restrained children from unsafe actions.

A third safe interaction was to respond to youth, rather than to initiate interaction. Preservice teachers listened actively to children; rarely, however, did they probe for further information. Over time, pre

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service teachers took more initiative, especially among the females. While some preservice teachers initiated informal conversations with youth, and other preservice teachers attended parent meetings, most continued to describe their activities as “fitting into the status quo.”

Why did preservice teachers play it safe? For some, caution indicated uncertainty, especially about cross-cultural interactions. In a reflective essay, one white preservice teacher wrote:

When I first set foot in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, I was unsure of what to expect. I felt like an ambassador and an invader at the same time. I wanted to make a good impression and I was unsure how I would fit in. . . Before a word was spoken, I had learned a valuable piece of information. It is intimidating to walk into a place where you are the minority. (C.S., 10/7/98)

While it is natural to be anxious about novel situations, for some white preservice teachers servicelearning was a powerful encounter with difference. For these preservice teachers, the outward appearance of compliant service work often masked an inner struggle and reassessment.

Another reason for playing it safe was that it was the easy thing to do. One preservice teacher described her feelings this way: “It was my long day. I thought kids will get bored, but they were obnoxious. Then, it was actually fun, you get to play with them, it doesn't require a lot of brain activity. You're just hanging out with them” (J.F., 9/29/98). Another white preservice teacher expressed this view as participation in a “community service project” or “sitting service” (M.H., 9/29/98). For preservice teachers like these, servicelearning was a “no-brainer” opportunity to interact with children.

Playing it safe was expected by some community leaders, but disrupted by example, one pastor praised preservice teachers as “really cordial,” “they fit had no complaints” (W.M., 2/18/99). Friendly adjustment to site routines to “good volunteer” or “polite visitor.” Three sites exhibited these expectations: teachers assisted in Sunday School, fit into a tutoring program, or served as an aide. At three other sites more leadership was encouraged: preservice teachers in charge of an Eager Reader’s program, organized a Hallelujah party (a church alternative to Halloween), and lead a girl scout troop meeting. Some preservice teachers attended site events, including parent and board meetings, but tended to be silent observers.

The extent and nature of on-site guidance seemed to impact playing it safe. Community leaders

offered orientations to their organizations. For most, there was minimal guidance beyond these meetings. One pastor took a laissez-faire approach; he wanted preservice teachers to feel free to assist in ways they chose and he accepted an observational role. Another center leader was satisfied that preservice teachers were reliable, “they did well,” and extended routines (B.E., 1/5/99). One director, “scrambling to keep the project afloat,” felt he “failed” the project by providing too little supervision (C.T., 1/10/99). He more echoed his concern and wished they had offered more support. In at least two cases, expectations for service-learning did not “trickle down” from agency leaders to their staffs. According to one preservice teacher at Head Start, “I started playing it safe with the kids because I didn’t know what else to do. The teacher didn’t say one word and I didn’t know what to do” (S.R., 9/29/98). In contrast, in two contexts where guidance was direct, explicit, and ongoing, preservice teachers moved beyond playing it safe and implement activities and events.

Playing it safe impacted preservice teachers of color in ways similar to their white counterparts. Two preservice teachers appeared to play it safer than they were. One young woman, described by her community director as “monotone” and “quiet,” outwardly perceived herself as fully engaged and gaining self-assurance. In a journal entry she wrote:

I would never go anywhere without a way back from where I come from. At my site I went three times without a way back and had no problem getting home. I would ask any stranger for a way home, I am expressing how I improved my self-confidence. (N.G., 12/10/98)

Another preservice teacher spent most of her time in a “safe” tutor role, yet she focused her assistance on youth of color at her site. Two other women of color took confident actions: one accompanied a family to a football game, another par-

overnight lock-in. In both instances, multiple factors were at play. The first teacher shared a strong interest in marching band with her young commu the second was prompted to stay overnight by her gregarious, white dorm classmate.

Most preservice teachers considered themselves increasingly comfortable i placements. Yet, they continued to operate within prescribed service tasks overlooked opportunities to reinterpret them from a multicultural perspec example, at one community center, preservice teachers developed a readir instructor encour

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aged them to construct the initiative around multicultural children's litera the team played it safe and reinforced an ongoing reading incentive progr encouraged youth to read a quantity of the books on site, regardless of thei potential.

Teacher/Helper

The teacher/helper role dominated service-learning interactions. When asl with a task that was "school-related," such as assistance with homework or preservice teachers immediately fell into a teacher role. They offered praise encouragement, gave hints and asked questions. As noted earlier, they kep This seemed not only comfortable, but a default position as well—preservi taught when uncertain about what to do. For example, when asked to help scout badge, one preservice teacher developed a worksheet of questions to in learning the necessary background information. All tasks were not schoo preservice teachers responded as teacher/helpers. The teacher role was eas after all, this was a field experience for a teacher education course. Howeve helping" usually was confined to the "correct" completion of worksheets or assignments. Discussion of youths' personal interests or home lives was ca primarily outside the teaching/helping role.

"Helping kids" sometimes was coupled with a "feel good" rationale. One pi teacher of color explained it this way:

The first day the kids asked us: 'Can you help me and be my mentor?' I was that the children were willing to receive all the help they can. Knowing tha

to work with them made me feel well inside. (C.R., 10/7/98)

Further, a white, female, preservice teacher told us: “So far, all I thought about going to get out of this. Is this going to make me feel good? How can I help? Will I be doing good?” (S.J., 9/29/98). This grouping of “feeling good,” “doing good,” “helping” was reiterated across race and gender lines. For many preservice teachers, helping kids was a major impetus for their service. Through helping, preservice teachers felt important to children’s lives, they “made a difference” through assisting as a mentor, or friend. While viewed as positive by preservice teachers, responses had missionary tones. Preservice teachers offered something they felt youth needed: stability, attention, and strong male role models.

For most preservice teachers, across subgroups, service-learning was viewed pragmatically, as beneficial to “becoming a better teacher.” According to one female preservice teacher: “This is a total learning experience for me. I try to help kids, just to learn. So, I’ll be more comfortable in my classroom” (L.A.). Another preservice teacher eschewed the “feel good” rationale for a more practical approach: “I am not at Girl Scouts to feel good about myself or have fun. This will prepare me for problems that will arise in my classroom” (S.J., 11/2/98)

“Becoming a better teacher” had two meanings: understanding more about especially culturally diverse or low-income youngsters; and gaining teaching management, techniques. As an example of the first view:

Their church life is more a main thing than mine. The people at my church love to see me perform because I wasn’t their child. It’s a family atmosphere that as a teacher, I need to keep in mind what things are going on different from what’s going through. (C.M., 10/19/98)

As an example of the second view: “I’m learning that kids don’t respond to me. If I do this, then I’ll give you some candy, doesn’t work. I need to be street smart. I need to know how to get kids to get them to do things” (L.A., 10/19/98). The first view was attuned to the community influences on children and teaching. The second view was focused on social issues, particularly in regard to children of color or from low-income situations.

Most preservice teachers of color expressed the multicultural position—thoughtful and attentive to cultural and economic differences. One middle class preservice teacher struggled to accept youth from low-income backgrounds. In reflective essays, she denigrated youth from low-income homes as uninterested in educational achievement and overly streetwise. In her final essay, she expressed willingness to learn from and work with, youth from low-income backgrounds. Two other women of color from segregated backgrounds, described themselves as becoming more comfortable and prepared to work in mixed race situations. The fourth preservice teacher, k

comfortable with multicultural situations, utilized service-learning to extend knowledge about an ethnic group different from her own.

Of the seven white males in the course, four selected church placements (since the Sunday schedule worked for them). This group talked and wrote about youth through enthusiasm, compassion, and parent involvement.

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They described their experience as “eye-opening,” particularly about ways racism and minority status affected children’s lives. The other three males worked at community centers or Head Start. They struggled with deficit notions about youth in poverty. Two of the three asserted that youth needed positive male role models themselves. Site placements seemed to matter. Deficit views were not expressed as much at the churches. There, they witnessed the presence of supportive families including affirmative male role models.

Among the thirteen white women, becoming a better teacher had several dimensions. Mostly, these preservice teachers disrupted stereotypes and gained a realistic knowledge about diverse youth. As examples, preservice teachers realized the “perfect vision” of a future classroom was faulty (M.M., 10/7/98); discovered deficit assumptions, especially about parents, were misleading and wrong; learned not to misjudge the reality kids lived (M.M., 10/20/98); and realized they knew more about “sex, drugs, and violence” than expected (J.K., 10/21/98). The ability to “handle” problematic situations related to difference was repeatedly cited as a major aspect of service-learning.

The teacher/helper role was reinforced by most field situations. Part of the agreement that underpinned the project was the provision of quality volunteer return for opportunities to learn from the community. Of the six sites, five provided the ability to render additional services, however temporary, was a major benefit. For most agencies, service centered around tutorial or teacher aide activities. For example, preservice teachers served as a “third person” in Head Start classrooms; their volunteer hours were counted as part of the “in-kind match” for the agency’s funding. The churches enjoyed extra help with various events, but assistance was kept away from the teacher/helper role.

Regardless of the limits of the teacher/helper role, most community directors reported the following: the “experience itself was huge for them. I’m sure that it was

1/27/99). One pastor talked about “bonds” and “friendships” that preservice teachers “may carry with them the rest of their life” (W.M., 2/18/99). Another Christian Community Center Director felt that preservice teachers learned about culture, particularly the influence of the Black church upon its children. Although preservice teachers focused on one-to-one encounters, some translation to the larger picture was necessary. For example, at Boys and Girls Club: “Students [preservice teachers] get excited working with

kids, large numbers of kids at one time. They work one on one, but they expect to work with a hundred twenty kids in here. You know a big group of kids, you know how those situations” (B.E., 1/5/99).

For legal and confidence reasons, community directors rarely shared in-depth information about children’s backgrounds or pushed relationships beyond what was helpful. Instead, they cautioned preservice teachers to refer problems back to the community directors. Community directors tended to teach indirectly about cultural diversity or generally preferred to let the “experience speak for itself” (C.T., 1/27/99). From an atmosphere of welcome and acceptance, to messages of God’s love across 10 principles of respect and equality, each site practiced high regard for human dignity and equality. Regardless of preservice teacher’s immediate activities, directors encouraged them to “soak up” some of the realities of diversity, poverty and community via direct immersion in local life.

Companionship

Service-learning offered opportunities to “hang out” with children, something not often found in other teacher education classes. According to one preservice teacher: “We’re always teaching everyday, but rarely get to just spend time with kids. Service-learning is a good reason to spend time with kids. That is why we are becoming teachers in the first place” (S.J., 3/5/99)! Companionship took time to build and became evident later in the preservice teachers’ experience. During early visits, preservice teachers actively engaged in activities with children, working at the playdough table at Head Start. However, interactions were adult-child oriented, one had the power to question or direct the other. Also, conversations often turned into teaching/helping situations. As preservice teachers became more comfortable with the situation, companionship evolved.

In the companion role, preservice teachers did activities with students, coming from a more equal, less forced by the adult, and more casual. Preservice teachers still played the teacher/helper role, but generally, interactions exhibited that of two children rather than an adult and child. Companionship was more pronounced in sessions with older youth, particularly at one community center, where preservice teachers spent a lot of time playing pool and video games, watching television, or just talking with

Significantly, this rapport had a teacher-oriented end—preservice teachers sought youth’s respect in order to encourage them to participate in a reading club. As companions, preservice teachers avoided the assumption of authority. What was needed to

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to counter the wishes of youth, they placed blame on an outside force. For example, to quell arguments about the reading quota for earning a free pizza, a preservice teacher responded with, “I don’t make the rules” (J.K., 10/12/98). Further, “I don’t make the rules” was an indicator of compliant participation in service-learning; often it was the rule that happened to preservice teachers, rather than being enacted by them.

The time optimally needed to become a companion often exceeded the service-learning cycle. However, increased knowledge of, trust for, and interest in youth and youth culture was mentioned across all subgroups of preservice teachers. It was illustrated by comments made over time by one white male preservice teacher:

(Early in the experience) We need to be able to teach kids, not solve their family problems. If I were closer to James and knew his family maybe I could talk to him, but I think it is important for me to accept that he has family problems, and that could affect his learning, and move on. (M.H., 10/7/98)

(Later in the experience) The kids and I sat down on the steps in the front of the building. They began to question me, to learn who I was. They wanted to see my wallet, and car. They counted my money and told me their dads let them do that sometimes. At this moment I realized that not every child at the Club came from a broken home. I wish I could have had more time to get to know the family and history of these kids. (M.H., 11/5/98)

To some extent, companionship was eased by preservice teachers’ perceptions of youth as “normal.” Once the novelty wore off, preservice teachers began to see youth as “normal.” To most, kids were similar, regardless of ethnic or economic differences. According to one white male: “The kids at Head Start are mature and independent. Other kids’s moms stay home and do everything for them. So here they work it out. For the most part, kids are kids” (G.P., 9/29/98). “Kids’ problems tended to be articulated by white preservice teachers. This view shifted the focus from differences from deficits to human universals. While intended positively, “

sometimes glossed over real differences, such as opportunities related to it. Although similarities and differences, among and within groups of people, in the multicultural education course, prospective teachers tended to see

A few preservice teachers pricked at the edges of this idea—children were t
As an

example, “Just when I had decided that all kids were the same, something
change my mind (I think I will go back and forth with this for a long time)’
10/21/98). This conceptual maturity eluded many preservice teachers. Sev
teachers of color, one white, nontraditional student (and mother), another
preservice teacher from California, and one white male who had attended
schools, grappled with notions of similarity and difference. Prior life experi
especially with diversity, seemed to influence this realization.

Companionship depended, at least in part, on time, and time was too sho
community director identified time constraints as the low point of the cou
to the parent coordinator at Head Start: “They just get to know the kids an
know them and they leave” (N.M., 2/9/99). One director worried that prese
left with just a glimpse of the context. Another pastor was concerned that l
temporary and unreal:

I get disappointed when I see that if our children pick up a bond, it’s a ten
real at the time, but not for real... When they see another set of students [p
teachers] come in they might get the attitude—I don’t want anything to do
(B.H., 1/26/99).

Some directors suggested an extension of servicelearning projects to the n
order to offer longer-term relationships.

These three roles and perspectives do not constitute a continuum, from pl
teacher/helper, to companion. Preservice teachers commonly operated wit
safe roles. This approach is sensible for short-term visitors to another’s wo
usually functioned as teacher/helpers, but often this task was prescribed fo
contrast, one preservice teacher (and likely others) was remembered by he
director as always holding a baby or young child, at ease, and willing to tac
She gave and received companionship from the moment she walked in the
there does seem to be a progression toward companionship, as a function
time. Companionship had the most potential for the course aim of learnin
youth and families, but general experience “in the thick” of a diverse conte
for multicultural education as well.

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What really happens in service-learning experiences? What do preservice teachers' supports or limits reconsideration of their Eurocentric views?

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Do certain experiences spur self-examination and realization? Are there core learning processes? Can experiences be altered to generate cultural insights and social critique?

In this case, what really happened was learning through service, mostly in roles, in affirmative, culturally-diverse situations. Preservice teachers focused primarily as teachers and helpers for them. This constrained their knowledge of families, and community resources, but opened their eyes to cultural norms and situations of youth. They received some instruction and guidance from coordinators—enough to function in the context, but rarely enough to fully understand. Nevertheless, the experience spoke for itself. Preservice teachers were immersed momentarily, in neighborhoods from whence many of their future students came. There was quality to “being there.” Preservice teachers had opportunities to engage cross-culturally, disrupt stereotypes, experience community resourcefulness, and work positively with diverse youth.

Preservice teachers certainly could have gone beyond the roles and perspectives described. A major challenge is to rethink such projects in ways that support assertive engagement by preservice teachers and offer them deeper connections with youth, families and communities. The factors which strongly influenced this experience serve as a starting place for this reconsideration.

Sites

If experience speaks for itself, then service-learning sites matter a great deal. The service-learning sites were located in a lower income neighborhood of a small affluent college town. Outside the university, the population of color was small. The church sites included many African American members, and congregations with lower education and income levels. The lower income neighborhood was modest. Conditions of poverty (as indicated by subsidized housing) were limited. All preservice teachers interacted with a wide range of people of color, and with lower income situations. For these preservice teachers, many from small or in-state, homogeneous towns, interactions with these groups offered powerful experiences with diversity. The biographies of preservice teachers impact

or outside their prior life experience; this point is considered in a following

In order to reinforce the major messages of the multicultural education component, it is fundamental that what happens inside service-learning sites affirms cultural diversity, challenges inequity, and supports educational equality and excellence. Each site did so, but in ways that opened different doors for preservice teachers. In churches, preservice teachers were able to interact with entire families. Preservice teachers placed there expressed positive views of parents and families. In community centers, where preservice teachers primarily worked one-to-one with youth, they articulated more information about children, especially about teaching techniques responsive to diversity. A mix of these knowledge bases is necessary to achieve the goals of multicultural education. Site locations should be potentially rich in contact with youth and parents and willing to involve preservice teachers in situations that connect them to families.

Tasks

While the teacher/helper role had its place, and companionship was desired, preservice teachers themselves these roles played it too safe for multicultural education. Preservice teachers often perceived children as learners, much as they would in a school-based experience. A primary reason for service-learning beyond school boundaries was to situate children as family and community members and to view both as sources of knowledge about and strength for youth. Interactions with families and involvement in community issues occurred here, but it was spotty. An expansion and diversification of educative tasks, across all learning sites, could strengthen service-learning experience for multicultural education. For example, attendance at community events such as evening reading circles and parent meetings at Head Start, offered preservice teachers adults and motivated reconsideration of stereotypes, particularly of "poor" youth. The development of an event, such as the Hallelujah party, opened doors to access and interaction with a wide range of community people. The completion of mini-inquiries in Cultural Studies, which required in-group (insider) and outgroup (library) sources, moved preservice teachers in conversations with site directors and other adults and beyond within agencies. The use of such tasks as required dimensions of service-learning could move preservice teachers beyond one-on-one tutoring roles. The completion of these tasks could offer more insight into diverse and/or low-income communities.

Community Contact Person

Community directors were selected primarily for their potential to serve as cultural brokers to the local community. Either the person was a member of the group or had grown up in the neighborhood, and/or had worked effectively in the local community while. The promise of community connection was realized partially. The d

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dissatisfied with their guidance and supervision of preservice teachers and more. To some extent, they were crippled by other, heavy demands on them. This will always be the case. How can educators tap into the potential of community brokers? The framework set by the course instructor for service-learning was to motivate vigorous involvement from community directors. Given the work of community directors to do more, a specific list of service-learning activities that bolstered multicultural education might motivate and guide their leadership. Movement toward a true partnership, possibly the designation of directors as coteachers, might also increase interest and commitment. For example, in the development of a variety of service-learning tasks, community representatives should play a collaborative role.

Student Biography

The major “punch” or power of this service-learning experience was exposure to settings significant to preservice teacher’s future classrooms, yet outside of their previous life experiences. Service-learning jolted most preservice teachers from their (often biased) views of culturally diverse youth, of poverty, and of teaching in challenging situations. Because prospective teachers came from varied backgrounds, the service-learning experience “spoke” differently to each person. For many white teacher candidates service-learning in culturally diverse contexts was a “first” interracial interaction with people of color. For many preservice teachers with enough privilege to attend a major university, service-learning was a real confrontation with youth of color. For preservice teachers of color who grew up in segregated, minority communities, service-learning offered extended experience in multiracial situations. The service-learning experience matters. Service-learning is a developmental endeavor that challenges previous life experience. If service-learning is to foster heightened awareness of race, class, and power, then situations and activities must be carefully considered for their power to offer new insights. Advance knowledge of preservice teacher’s background is key, particularly to structure potentially powerful learning experiences for them.

Course Instructor

The instructor was committed to service-learning; in her mind multicultural education without a community touchstone was abstract and shallow. Familiar with service-learning, she carefully structured the course and the field experience to build on each other. It is impossible to disentangle the effects of one upon the other. (C

constraints

of field roles and activities, however, some of the inward struggles of students and their biases must be attributed primarily to the multicultural education course. The instructor was responsible for teaching and monitoring the multicultural education course and the field experience. Oversight for service-learning was a teaching overload and the instructor's time could not stretch to offer much presence in the field.

The instructor organized a service-learning orientation, detailed assignments, reflective essays and mini-inquiry projects, suggested possible field activities, and provided time for reflective sessions. Once the framework was in place, field placements were left to the discretion of community directors. This stance relinquished the instructor's field experience and stymied some of the instructor's expectations. A message was sent: hands-on, continually collaborative orientation to community connection is necessary for in order to fully meet university and community aims and needs.

Conclusion: The Promise of Service-Learning

What really happened did not fully realize the promise of service-learning for multicultural education. Preservice teachers reported a great deal of self-growth, bonded with new friends across cultural and economic lines, they grappled with their own biases, and they gained responsive teaching strategies. Yet, preservice teachers had to and understandings of families and community strengths and problems. Some shortcomings can reasonably be resolved through reconfiguration of the service-learning project, and several proposals for impacting influential factors were discussed.

But there is certainly a "long way to go" to create experiences that assist preservice teachers in becoming "better" teachers for the natural constituents of multicultural education. As teacher educators, we need to consider ways in which service-learning can be intensified and redirected to further undergird and augment multicultural education. Knowledge about what really happens is a necessary first step for all of us.

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