Can We Develop a Professional Ethic of Service in Education?

Reese H. Todd
Texas Tech University

Abstract

The study describes the use of service-learning pedagogy to develop an ethic of service in a teacher preparation program and to enhance mutually beneficial community partnerships. A group of instructors modified assignments for the field-based course, using an action research plan that emphasized the role of community engagement among professional educators. Students gained knowledge and skills in observing and identifying needs within the school, developing plans to meet needs, providing service with school partners, and reflecting on the experiences. School partners gained active citizens adding recognizable value to the mission of the school community. As a result of the service-learning projects, administrators and teachers welcomed more preservice teachers from the university into their schools. The community engagement emphasis benefitted school partners while students acquired valuable practical knowledge as future teachers.

Introduction

"Today's service-learning movement extends traditional interpretations of service to include a community-based engagement that is informed by an ethic of service" which is particularly relevant in teacher education where "pre-service teachers increase their understanding of being a teacher, while members of the community benefit from the efforts of the pre-service teachers and the university" (Buchanan et al., p. 30). The following case study describes an effort to coordinate a set of teacher education undergraduate courses with the University's outreach and engagement initiative and build better community partnerships. In the third semester of the elementary education program, students enroll in four methods courses which blend on-campus study with field-based observations in local schools. Most public schools welcome university students for 3-5 weeks, but not all teachers and principals participate each semester.

A year ago when instructors began contacting principals seeking placements for more than 80 pre-service teachers for a 5-week field experience, we could not find enough placements. Administrators deflected requests with comments such as: "We have a new assessment program; we have changes in our administration; we are expecting a high turnover in students; we already have some student teachers." The surface reasons varied, but one unspoken message lay beneath their comments. The extra work of supervising pre-service teachers was greater than the value they added to the mission of the school. Our work was more than finding placements for our students. We needed to be better partners (Jacoby, 2003). Instructors considered options. Could we become better citizens in the eyes of our school partners? Could our students become ambassadors of good citizenship by contributing their knowledge and skills to the school while learning more about being professional educators? Could we refocus our students' perceptions of the school experience from one of "What will we get from the school?" to the question, "What can we give to the school while we are there?" "How can we be citizens of the school community while gaining skills as future teachers?" The question of the study is how refocusing the assignments made a difference in the collaborations with partner schools.

Examining the role of good citizens by reaching out to the community resonated with instructors in the cohort. The University received recognition from the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (2006) for its commitment to "community-based service and outreach initiatives" and with that came a responsibility to continue an

emphasis on the relationship of academic learning with the needs of the community. "The campuses participating in this [Carnegie Foundation] elective classification provide useful models of engagement around teaching and learning and around research agendas that benefit from collaborative relationships," explained Lee S. Shulman, President of the Foundation. A service-learning model of engagement interfaced well with the ethic of service in a teacher education field-based course (Driscoll, 2008; Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Connecting Teacher Education Standards to Service

Teacher education standards also supported the changes instructors considered. Within the teacher education accrediting agency (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2009) were standards of citizenship and service.

Standard #1: Candidate Knowledge, Skill, and Professional Dispositions. Candidates are expected "To take on leadership roles in the professional community and collaborate with colleagues to contribute to school improvement and renewal."

Standard # 3: Field Experiences and Clinical Practices. Candidates are expected to act as "members of instructional teams in the school and are active participants in professional decisions. They are involved in a variety of school-based activities directed at the improvement of teaching and learning, such as collaborative projects with peers, using information technology, and engaging in service learning."

Preparing outstanding candidates for the teaching profession was more than detached observations in schools or even planning and teaching lessons. It required field-based experiences that clearly engaged candidates in significant activities in the school community.

Standards from the National Council of Social Studies (NCSS, 1994) cited the purpose of social studies education: "To help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (NCSS, 1994). The standards of the professional association further supported community engagement in teacher preparation courses.

Establishing Procedures and Learning to Serve

The instructors used the standards from professional organizations to inform the change in the field-based assignment. The emphasis shifted from what a student was getting from the school to what the student could give to the school. The first part of the assignment required students to make observations, talk with teachers, and think about how they could contribute to the school. Instead of asking a teacher to make time for them to teach a social studies lesson about citizenship, field-based preservice teachers demonstrated active citizenship by helping with the tasks in the school. Before implementing the project, they submitted a plan to the university instructors and received feedback. At the end of the semester, they shared their experiences and wrote reflections in class.

On the first day of the field-based placements in the classroom, students observed everyday activities closely and began to think about ways they could contribute to the teaching and learning environment. They saw their supervising teachers manage multiple responsibilities throughout the day and students found opportunities to use their knowledge and skills to benefit the classroom. University instructors had emphasized the importance of field-based students becoming engaged in the work of the classroom, not just sitting at a table in the back of the room. Within two days, we saw field-based students taking this proactive approach in the classroom. They stepped into tasks of reading out spelling words and taking children to the computer lab rather than only observing and waiting to be told what to do. The students looked at the whole school and the activities on the monthly calendar. They began thinking about how they could contribute to the learning climate. They listened to the

concerns of the teachers and bought into the goals for improving education. They noticed programs such as the school outreach to parents, Muffins with Moms, and a school carnival needing more adults to manage the booths. They found a music teacher preparing a PTA program without enough costumes and scenery to make it a real production. They listened to teachers who were concerned about students without coats in the cold weather and about a school store that no one had time to make appealing to students. They found ways to serve the school in partnership with teachers, principals, communities-in-schools agents, and the PTA. They began taking leadership and responsibility for their own learning experience as active citizens in the school community. Teachers and administrators noticed an attitude of civic-mindedness. Was it enough to prove we were worth the risk?

Building on Research

We began with research showing that "service learning can be a means for enhancing student teachers' empowerment" particularly when students were leaders in planning and conducting the projects (Wade, 2000, p. 189). That sense of empowerment encouraged student teachers to identify needs and take responsibility for solving problems that arose in their classrooms. While the field-based students' time in the school was limited, we expected they would gain some confidence and self-assurance as they planned and carried out the short-term projects. Students who participated in service-learning projects developed habits of civic engagement that included critical thinking, civil discourse, and leadership (Boyer, 1990; Jacoby & Mutascio, 2010; Morton, 1995). As noted in the introduction, Buchanan, Baldwin, and Rudisill (2002) found that in teacher education, service learning "can have the multiple benefits of promoting an ethic of service and social responsibility" (p. 30). It extends teacher education into community–based engagement and "exemplifies reciprocal benefits in which pre-service teachers increase their understanding of being a teacher, while members of the community benefit from the efforts of the pre-service teachers and the university" (p. 30).

Ernest (2007) model of action research provided a framework for the assignment. His work was grounded in community engagement in an Aboriginal school in the Australian Outback. He went into the community and asked why their children were not succeeding at school. What did they need from the school to make it relevant? Together, researcher, community members, and educators made lists of what people could do and matched those skills with the needs. He describes the process as Look, Think, and Act. Using the Stringer approach, pre-service teachers gained skills in identifying problems and solutions that transfer into the kinds of decision-making required of a teacher in delivering quality daily instruction. The research-based process blends the academic strength of the university with the experience and knowledge of the community by giving voice to the community partners and equalizing the power mechanisms between the university and the community (Stringer, et al., 2010). This piece of community building cannot be underestimated. For Stringer and the participants in his projects, setting the groundwork and collaborating makes the difference between success and failure of community-based programs. We needed to become better citizens and the lessons from Stringer clearly focused on communication and engagement with communities.

An integral part of the academic rationale for civic engagement rests on a basic tenet of social studies education; that is, the purpose of social studies is the development of citizens (NCSS, 1994). The service-learning project assignment addressed three dimensions of democratic citizenship education: 1) dispositions, 2) deliberation, and 3) community service and action (Parker, 2009). Dispositions refer to the habits that summarize a person's behavior and values, such as responsibility and fairness. A second dimension, deliberation, recognizes the importance of respectful discussion of issues affecting people with

differing perspectives and is a tool for communication among partners seeking to understand one another's expectations. However, the most visible is community service and action; "The real test of a social studies program comes in the out-of-school lives of children [and teachers]" as they develop an increased civic-mindedness (Parker, p. 90). The service-learning project provided opportunities for future teachers to build these three skills in partnership with professionals in education.

Implementing the Study

Participants. There were 150 students enrolled for the semester with each student carrying a 12- hour course load. Students were distributed into 6 sections with approximately 25 students in each. Students stayed together for the four methods classes (social studies, mathematics, science, and content area reading) each week and met with each of the four instructors as a cohort. Five weeks of the semester, students left the university campus to spend class time in schools. To provide one-on-one classroom experiences, we needed 150 classrooms to accommodate the field-based placements. Initially, we expected to contact principals to confirm places for the field component of the courses. As we contacted schools, we kept a record of the responses. Of the more than 50 elementary schools in the area, fewer than twelve agreed to work with the field-based students in the fall of 2008, while the number of classroom teachers who agreed to have a field-based student stood around 35. We finally found the placements but used most of our collective goodwill capital.

Each student spent a minimum of 2 hours implementing the service-learning project, although many students spent more than two hours. In addition to the social and educational value of the service, a monetary value can be calculated using substitute teacher's pay of $55/day. With an estimated 200 hours contributed to the community, the value of the project totals nearly $11,000 to area schools, plus the expertise of university faculty in focusing the activities.

Setting. The participating schools were scattered across the county. They included schools in all three of the nearby school districts and represented a range of socio-economic levels, academic status, and ethnic diversity. In the study were 4 Title I schools with 48 students; 2 average (moderate income levels) schools with 11 students, 2 affluent schools (one well established, new (2nd year) with 11 students. Three of the Title I schools were new to the cohort placements although they had accepted student teachers in previous semesters. The school populations were 500-650 with an overall district distribution of 35% Anglo, 49% Hispanic, 14% African American, and 2% other. Within the schools in the study, one of the affluent schools was more than 70% Anglo while two of the Title I schools were more than 85% Hispanic.

Each school had different needs. Thus each student, or group of students, had to create their own plan with the partners at their school. The social studies course included instruction on citizenship and the dimensions of citizenship in addition to readings on service-learning. To increase understanding of service-learning, we invited the University Service-Learning coordinator to discuss characteristics of a service-learning project, show examples from other academic fields, and answer questions before students submitted the projects.

Gathering data. Data collection came from three sources. The primary source was the student reflections that described the projects, students' levels of engagement, the relationship to the academic content of the courses, and the impact on their preparation as a teacher. Students learned about engaged citizenship by setting up the service-learning project in partnership with teachers at the field-based school and under the supervision of their university instructors. They used an action research framework based on Stringer, Christensen, and Baldwin (2010) to make observations, identify a need, verify the need with school partners, develop a plan using available resources and their emergent

professional knowledge and skills, carry out the plan, and reflect upon the results. They submitted the plans and reflections to university instructors prior to initiating any action.

A second source of data came from the instructors. They made weekly visits to the schools, observed students, talked with supervising teachers and made field notes documenting their interactions. They recorded information about students' activities in the classroom, progress in developing teaching skills, relationships with school personnel and overall engagement in the school environment. While visiting the schools, instructors held informal interviews with the students and provided constructive feedback on their work. They often met briefly with the classroom teachers and administrators to resolve any potential conflicts. At the end of the semester, instructors met together in focus groups to review these field notes and assess the students' progress in meeting the requirements of the field-based component of the course.

The third source for triangulation of data came from the classroom teachers who submitted a Field-experience Student Evaluation at the end of semester. The 7 items on the evaluation addressed the student's interactions, communication, ability to work with others, professional role, attendance and punctuality, dependability, professional demeanor. Open-ended comments noted the student's engagement in the class room and school activities, awareness of particular needs of the school, creative approaches to solving problems, and understanding needs of students and the community.

Design. Case study focuses on an issue with individuals, programs, or activities and provides insight into the issue identified (Creswell, 2007). With case study methodology, the researcher explores in-depth data involving multiple sources of information and reports findings using themes specific to the study. In this study, the inquiry was based on one aspect of a teacher education program and the changes introduced to foster reciprocally beneficial relationships between the teacher education program and our community partners by modifying assignments to include a service-learning project. Qualitative methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) informed our practice for coding data into categories. The projects were sorted into 5 categories of engagement (A-E) based on the following criteria: 1) the audience that benefitted from the service, 2) the amount of time spent with the project, 3) the student's planning, responsibility, and leadership in the project, and 4) the scope of the project. The students (n=65) gave written summaries of their projects that ranged from picking up canned goods from each classroom for a Thanksgiving food drive to managing an intensive make-over of a school store. Students chose whether to work individually or with peers at the same school.

Implementing the ethic of service

The goals of the service-learning projects followed the criteria of the university and used the action research process for community engagement: Look, Think, Act (Stringer, 2007). First, students observed the work of the school and identified needs with peers and school staff; next they thought about and planned a project with school partners that addressed a need; and last, they took action that demonstrated civic engagement with project. In carrying out these steps they 1) applied teacher knowledge and skills to the project, 2) met the course requirement of committing 2 hours service in addition to the field-based requirement, and 3) at the conclusion of the project, they reflected on the impact of the service-learning project on their personal professional preparation and on the benefits for the general welfare of the school community.

Table 1: Coding of Service-Learning Projects

Meeting goals	Level A = very low engagement, meets only one or two of criteria	Level B = below expectations for engagement primarily additional service for classroom teacher	Level C= moderate engagement, achieves primary goals of service learning	Level D = strong engagement, exceeds expectations project, benefits whole school	Level E = very strong engagement, exceed expectations, benefits school and community
Projects n=65	4	9	10	19	23
Benefit for school and community	Classroom benefit, typical of field-based assignment Service -- 2 hrs or less	Students and teachers in grade level benefit Service -- 2 hrs+	Groups in school benefit Service-- 2-10 hrs	Whole school benefits Service -- 4-10 hrs	Benefit to students, teachers, administrators, and community members Service–10 hrs+
Preservice teacher contribution	Limited planning, responsibility, leadership	Some planning and leadership, limited independent responsibility	Students observed, planned aspect of project, gave responsibility, leadership	Extensive planning, organizing, engagement	Extensive planning, organizing, carrying out of project, follow up with school & community
Scope of service	Service within tasks expected of teacher in classroom	Service in addition to regular classroom duties	Service to grade level classes or meeting responsibilities of grade level assignment for school event	Service to whole school	Service to whole school and to neighborhood community
Example	1)Monitored class while teacher attended parent-teacher conference	1)Collected and sorted cans for school canned food drive	1)Made posters for PTA membership drive 2)Staffed booths at PTA evening harvest festival, grade level responsibility 3)served at parent outreach event "muffins for moms" to moms and kids	1)Prepared and planted garden with primary grade students and parents on Saturday for Earth Day 2) Planned and carried out multiple phases of celebration events for students reaching Accelerated Reader goals	1) Did a total make- over of school store, meeting goal of rewards for positive learning behaviors 2) Created costumes, scenery, and stage support for 4th-5th grade musical for parents

The findings describe the service-learning pedagogy and its influence on developing an ethic of service by broadening the scope of the students' practical knowledge as professionals and fostering a mutually beneficial community engagement with K-12 schools. The information is presented from the perspectives of each of the three groups of participants: the students, the instructors, and the administrators who are the community partners.

Students reflecting on Service-Learning

The majority of students, whether working individually or with others, found meaningful projects that met real needs of the schools, received the support of their teachers, administrators, and faculty supervisors, planned and carried out the project, and demonstrated understanding of the value of the civic engagement in their reflections. The chart shows that 42 of the 65 projects exceeded expectations. The following reflection describes the process from a student at one of the Title I schools:

> I interviewed my mentor teacher, the teachers in the 4th/5th wing, and the principal. From several suggestions, [I decided] the greatest need was in the area of community involvement. So I assisted with two events to bring parents to school, "Muffins for Moms" and "Doughnuts for Dads". In a democratic society, a community of citizens must try to understand one another and work together for the good of the community. Parents are a key to student success and the schools want to encourage them to be involved as much as they can (field-based student 1 in Title I school).

Most successful projects were in Title I schools where greatest needs were evident. In two of the schools, strong leadership from teachers with support from administrators enhanced the projects. Principals supported the instructors'

preliminary meeting with teachers at the beginning of the semester and personally welcomed field-based students when they arrived for their first observations. The students were quickly integrated into the routines and even into school-wide events. One student explains her participation in a school-wide music program.

> Acting as the stage director, crew, and understudy for the armadillo for the 4th grade music program . . .really made me feel like a part of the school and its community. When we had problems, we solved them together. Students helped each other out whenever something was missing. The project showed me, and especially the students, just how important citizenship is. When we all work together, we can achieve our goals (field-based student 2 in Title I school).

Least effective were the projects in the most affluent school. All 4 of the low level engagement projects occurred in those 2 schools. Many of the other students placed in those schools, found ways to assist in ongoing activities such as Math Club or Destination Imagination teams. Family night festivals and other events planned to bring parents to the school, offered students opportunities for service. They reported the engagement with the parents and staff not only extended the school outreach, but also showed them the importance of professional relationships with members of the community.

> In my service-learning project, I engaged in professional relationships with parents and learned the importance of developing relationships with the school community. I actually got to see that in action and be involved in it. If I had not been asked to do anything outside the normal school day, I would have missed a valuable learning [experience]. I saw that even [by doing] a small thing for the school outside

regular school hours, I can help make my school community stronger (field-based student 3, average school).

Even those experiences that were less successful from a student's point of view, achieved the broader goals of the project, that of being good citizens in our community. One student in a Title I school arrived at movie night and tried to help set up chairs. She was asked not to move chairs and the lack of parent attendance stifled her efforts to greet people. She reported that a staff person soon told her, "You probably are not going to be able to help with anything more. You can just go home." Her developing ethic of service showed in her reflections on her expectations and her plans for the next time.

> I saw this as a really great way to get to know something about the school and wanted to show how grateful I was for being part of it. The next time, I will look for a different way to help and show that I am grateful for the opportunity to be in the school (field-based student 4, Title I school).

The study does not include longitudinal data on these pre-service teachers' integration of an ethic of service in their own classrooms. We do not know if these pre-service teachers will continue the practice of community engagement into their professional lives. However, the reflective writings indicate they recognize the value of the pedagogy. As one student said, "Getting to know your school and investing yourself in its programs makes a big impact on you and the children" (field-based student 5, average school).

Instructors Evaluating the Projects

The data derived from focus group dialogues sheds further light on the success of this project. The findings from the cohort instructors came from field observation notes and informal interviews with school personnel. They also brought to the table the classroom teachers' assessments of pre-service teachers

completing the field-based assignments. Classroom teachers completed "Field-experience Student Evaluation" that assessed the field-based student's interactions, communication, ability to work with others, professional role, attendance and punctuality, dependability, professional demeanor. On a 5-point scale, the median score was 4.4, with only 7 evaluations with ratings averaging 3.0-3.5. In the section for comments, classroom teachers specifically noted student engagement in classroom and school activities, awareness of particular needs of the school, creative approaches to solving problems, and understanding of needs of students and the community.

Instructors' field notes reported more collaborative work among teachers and pre-service teachers in contrast to previous semesters in which instructors frequently saw students sitting at a table in the back of the room, not engaged in instruction or waiting for instructors to intervene in scheduling a time to practice teaching lessons. With the expectation of engagement, students found many ways to be involved in the classroom and in the school. They sensed that they belonged there and were an integral part of the success of the young learners. With that acceptance, they demonstrated increasing levels of confidence and self-assurance when addressing problems and making decisions.

Administrators Responding to Projects

The integration of service-learning pedagogy broadened the number of classrooms open for field-based students and showed pre-service teachers the complexities of professional responsibilities associated with teaching. A year later, in the fall of 2009, when we contacted schools about placements, we had more than enough. Typically, one teacher supervises one or two field-based students for the 5-week experience. For some, the field-based student brings an extra pair of hands and eyes to the classroom. For others, however, the university student adds another task to a teacher's workload. The emphasis on the school

service-learning project spread out the supervisory task in a way that less experienced teachers and those who had reservations about accepting responsibility for a field-based student could join the partnership. The teachers in physical education, art, and the computer lab saw how they could be part of the partnership. Students and teachers had ownership of the assignment and had the flexibility to vary from an assigned class or grade level to the whole school community without disrupting the learning routines the teacher established. She did not "give up the classroom" to the field-based student.

The efforts to become better citizens also influenced the effectiveness of communication of expectations among university instructors, students, teachers, and administrators. At the end of the semester (2008), the university Teacher Education Council sponsored a forum for increasing communication between the college and local school districts. The principal from one of the Title I schools reported, "The students from the College of Education added so much to our school. They helped us in so many ways, from tutoring kids to helping us with parent outreach. We want to continue this partnership." Another of the principals called several weeks into the next semester (2009) when we had fewer cohorts with field-placements, "You all were so helpful to us in the fall, I wonder if you have some students available next week for a community event?"

The results of the proactive stance to develop an ethic of service within the field-experience component of the program encouraged other cohorts to implement the assignment (2009). They have continued the assignment in subsequent semesters with similar conclusions about the positive impact it makes on community partnerships.

Our students had been good ambassadors. The school leaders saw us as better citizens in the community and opened their schools for continued partnerships. We had established an ethic of service in a few schools, with one group of students. Service-learning project is now part of the standard social studies curriculum for the field-based semester of teacher certification. Other instructors integrated service-learning last semester, adding rich data to an ongoing study of the role of service-learning in teacher education. The common assignment across cohorts is an initial step in the process of documenting the development of an ethic of service in teacher education.

Results and Implications

The study contributes a dimension of civic mindedness to the field of teacher education through the experience of one team of educators seeking to develop an ethic of service. Within the context of Title I schools, it suggests that an emphasis on citizenship and service can influence pre-service teachers' expectations about Title I schools when combined with the practical personal experiences of field-based placements and better prepare them for early career placements. Issues of social justice underlie the choices of projects and are another aspect of the proactive approach to field-experience assignments for further study.

The study also suggests that a whole school community can accept responsibility for field-based students. The practice links pre-service teachers with teachers in a variety of special programs within the scheduled school day and at alternate times and gives them opportunities to meet parents, families, and other community members.

With a service-learning experience infused into the classroom teacher preparation program,   graduates add a unique line to their resume. Letters of reference from their field – placements give definitive evidence of their leadership, professional work ethic, creativity in problem-solving, and interactions with teachers, staff, and often parents. When they interview for positions, they convey a deeper understanding of the diverse roles of professional educators. Several students have been hired in the schools where they carried out a service-learning project.

As a result of the community engagement emphasis, communications about placements between the university faculty and the local school districts improved. Candidates gain practical classroom experience and K-12 administrators document the benefits of the partnership for their school. Effective university teacher preparation programs require certification students to complete observation hours in classrooms and engage in supervised teaching experiences prior to student teaching (Texas Education Agency, 2009). Occasionally, opposing expectations underlie relationships between university instructors and certification students, and classroom teachers, and school administrators, but the practical experience is essential for well-prepared future teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Certainly, it takes longer to develop a trusting partnership than it does to write a term paper, but the benefits from a field-experience can transform a teacher's career. Our students learned more about citizenship by their involvement in addressing real issues in the schools. They were not just observers, but partners inside the building contributing to the quality of learning in the school. Service-learning pedagogy shifts attention away from an exclusive preoccupation with education as a private gain and seeks to balance that concern with a focus on the common good. Can teacher preparation programs develop an ethic of service among candidates? In this case, the answer is yes.

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