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Preparing Preservice Teachers Through Service-Learning:
Collaborating with Community for Children and Youth of Immigrant Backgrounds
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Abstract

This paper offers findings from a collaborative study that combined service-learning with a social-justice-themed university course that was an existing component of a teacher education program. First, the authors present a model for a community-led collaborative service-learning program in teacher education. Second, the paper explores the student learning outcomes emerging from this service-learning program. Drawing on existing literature from the fields of service-learning in teacher education and multicultural education, the authors suggest that this innovative, collaborative, community-led, service-learning program presents an effective model for better preparing preservice teachers for working with children and youth from immigrant backgrounds. The research findings emerge from a range of data sources including qualitative interviews with preservice teachers, field notes, and informal interviews and field observations with community partners. A key finding is that community-led efforts in service-learning can successfully realize the goals of teacher educators as well as those of the community partners.

Preparing Preservice Teachers Through Service-Learning:

Collaborating with Community for Children and Youth of Immigrant Backgrounds

Service-learning is recognized increasingly as an effective pedagogical tool in teacher education. Service-learning is credited with pushing teacher candidates to rethink their own roles as teachers (Wade, 2000), to undo prejudicial or deficit-model thinking towards students who are different from themselves (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007), and to offer opportunities for learning that are starkly different—and more effective than—those offered in either in the classroom or through practicum experiences (Sleeter, 2000). At the same time that it is celebrated for its contributions to teacher education, research on service-learning has been critiqued for its inattention to community perspectives and the voices of those who host service learners (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009).

The goal of this paper is two-fold. First, we present a model for a community-led collaborative service-learning program, as outlined originally in Lund, Lee, Kaipainen, and Bragg (2012). We suggest that our model is unique in that service-learning allowed for the broader community goals to be met instead of focusing primarily on student outcomes. Second, we analyze the learning outcomes of the preservice teachers who participated in this program. We do so in order to argue that community-led efforts in service-learning can be mutually beneficial—both for student participants and community partners—and that service-learning is an effective tool for meeting the needs of both stakeholders.

Context and Theoretical Framework

Our case study is situated in a large Western Canadian city that has experienced a relatively rapid shift in demographics. As a global centre for the oil and gas industry, Calgary,

Alberta, has grown tremendously in the last 25 years (City Clerk's Election and Information Services, 2011). The city has not only grown in numbers but also has diversified with an increasing number of immigrants now calling Calgary home (Canadian Press, 2012; City of Calgary, 2007). Estimates predict that by 2016, 17 percent of young Calgarians (i.e., 15-24 years) will be immigrants and 36 percent will be members of visible minority groups (Cooper, 2006a, p. 54).

While research indicates that a high percentage of youth from immigrant backgrounds are doing extraordinarily well (i.e., civically engaged, succeeding at school and moving towards post-secondary education and careers), it is also true that a number of barriers and challenges exist specific to growing up as an ethnocultural minority in Canada. Persistent issues of racism, social exclusion, isolation, and poverty can create situations where ethnocultural minority youth are left marginalized and disenchanting (Cooper & Cooper, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 1994). These challenges can be particularly pernicious for children and youth from immigrant families who experience nearly double the poverty rate than the average for non-immigrant households (Cooper, 2006b).

Overall, children and youth from immigrant families can perform as well or better than their Canadian-born counterparts (Kunz & Hanvey, 2000). High school completion rates, however, are much lower for English Language Learners with drop-out rates estimated at 60-75 per cent (Watt & Roessingh, 2001). In addition, youth who come to Canada as adolescents struggle more than those who arrive as children. A variety of factors contribute to school success for children and youth from immigrant backgrounds: socio-economic status, experiences in their

country of origin, English proficiency, and issues of racism and marginalization upon arrival in Canada (Cooper, 2003).

Community-Led Collaborative Impact

Given the diversity of experiences that children and youth from immigrant families bring to Calgary classrooms, teachers and schools have been increasingly aware of the need to be prepared better to support all students who come through their doors. In an effort to both understand the complexity of these issues and to offer solutions, a long series of community consultations began in 2004. Through these consultations, c.a.r.e for Ethno-Cultural Children & Youth (formerly CARE Strategy) was developed and is housed within the Immigrant Sector Council of Calgary (ISCC). ISCC is a group of 21 representatives and decision-makers from government, immigrant-serving agencies, funding bodies, public institutions, ethno-cultural/multicultural organizations, and other sectors contributing to the wellbeing of newcomers. “Conversations for Change” began as a cross-sectoral dialogue between leaders of various stakeholders, and grew into the c.a.r.e. strategy, currently made up of leaders from funding bodies, immigrant-serving agencies, broad-based agencies, public institutions, and government. The collaborative model of c.a.r.e. convenes key stakeholders of child and youth sectors to address systemic and institutional barriers faced by children and youth of immigrant families, contributing to improvements in the quality of life for children and youth of immigrant families.

A key area of focus for c.a.r.e. has been the academic underachievement of some children and youth from immigrant backgrounds, and c.a.r.e. is particularly interested in the role of teachers in helping these children succeed in school. Research in Alberta echoes what is known more broadly about teacher education in North America: Teachers typically belong to the

majority culture (which is white and middle-class) and often feel unprepared to work with children who come from backgrounds different than their own (Arthur, Guo, & Lund, 2007; Sleeter, 2005; Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, & Campbell, 2005). Given this disconnect, a critical question for c.a.r.e. became, “How can we better prepare preservice teachers to work with children and youth from immigrant backgrounds?” The hope was that efforts to address teacher preparedness might lead ultimately to improving the academic achievement of those who were falling behind.

In collaboration with the Faculty of Education at the University of Calgary, Calgary school boards, and various community organizations, c.a.r.e. was instrumental in developing the Service-Learning Program for Preservice Teachers pilot program, which was launched in January 2012. One of the authors, Dr. Darren Lund, is a professor who had been involved in initial c.a.r.e. conversations and agreed to support the development of pilot program. He added a service-learning component to his existing B.Ed. course, Educating for Social Justice. Preservice teachers who participated in the service-learning program were placed at c.a.r.e. member organizations. An important component for the ongoing design of the program included the Working Group that c.a.r.e. established to collaborate with Dr. Lund and the University of Calgary’s Centre for Community-Engaged Learning to inform the structure and layout of the program.

Multicultural Teacher Education

The cultural make-up of Canadian teachers has not kept pace with the diversity in Canadian classrooms; the majority of preservice teachers continue to be white, middle-class women. This presents unique challenges for schools and school boards as well for teacher-

education. Research clearly indicates that teachers generally feel unprepared to work with students from different backgrounds than their own (Arthur, Guo, & Lund, 2007). Kubota (1998) described how teachers often fail to recognize that cultural differences exist between themselves and their students. Research on “hidden curriculum” (or teaching material and using examples that depend on cultural knowledge) shows that teachers, perhaps unwittingly, reinforce the “hegemonic marginalization of students” (Domangue & Carson, 2008, p. 350). The social justice framework of our work (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012) sought to counter this tendency and invite students to challenge normative behavior that further marginalizes students.

Others have written about the “deficit-model thinking” that informs the relationship between teachers and preservice teachers who encounter and victimize children and youth from minority backgrounds (Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001). For example, Marullo found that many of his preservice teachers believed that English language learners (ELL) “would learn English quickly ‘if they really wanted to’” (as cited in Pappamihiel, 2007, p. 44). Despite these challenges, it is also the case that teachers play a critical role in the success of English language learner students. The key, then, as Pappamihiel writes, is to move these student teachers from ethnocentric to ethnorelative perspectives in the classroom.

Teacher education plays a critical role in helping prepare preservice teachers for working with children and youth from immigrant backgrounds. At the heart of this service-learning program was a desire to create not just “culturally competent” teachers but rather to increase the cultural humility of preservice teachers in Calgary. That is, following Sonia Nieto (2004), James Banks (2007), Christine Sleeter (2005), and other scholar-educators who have written about the importance of a “critical” multiculturalism and pedagogy, we hoped to push students beyond

surface level understandings of diversity and encourage them to think about their own subject position implicated, as it always is, within complex hierarchies of race, class, sexual orientation, and gender.

Critical to the achievement of this goal was giving preservice teachers the opportunity to engage in meaningful ways with children and youth from immigrant families so that they could move beyond deficit model thinking or superficial understandings of “diversity.” The merit of service-learning in teacher education has been well documented. Service-learning helps develop critical consciousness, racial awareness and “cultural competency” (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Cipolle, 2010; Domangue & Carson, 2008; Wade, 2000). Service-learning is often more effective for developing critical analysis and racial awareness than practicum experiences (see Sleeter, 2000). For example, Wade (2000) documented the following student outcomes for teacher education students who participated in a service-learning program: increased awareness of those who are culturally different from themselves; acceptance or affirmation of youth of color, their lifestyles and their communities; awareness of self, prior assumptions, and beliefs—including becoming aware of their own prejudices; and the development of a more complex ways of thinking. Clearly, this additional set of experiences during teachers’ professional preparation can offer much in the way of rich and relevant cultural learning moments. Our goal with this project was to find an approach that honors the contribution of community groups as fully engaged partners.

Method

For the winter semester of 2012, 28 students registered in the course, EDTP 512: Studies in Pedagogy and Schooling. These students spent seven weeks at their community placement,

with a minimum of three hours per week. The course ran from January to April 2012, with all of the usual course components, including weekly readings, writing assignments, and a final research essay in addition to the service-learning expectations. The students' time in the community was bracketed by three courses at both the beginning and the end of the term. The course was an elective taken in the last term of their last year of the teacher education program. Students were informed before registering that there would be a service-learning component included in the course. There were six participating community agencies that agreed to host students from the course: Calgary Bridge Foundation for Youth, Calgary Catholic Immigration Society, Calgary Catholic School District, Calgary Immigrant Women's Association, Coalition for Equal Access to Education, and YMCA Calgary. These organizations, in addition to the Calgary Board of Education and the City of Calgary, were all part of the c.a.r.e. Working Group who had helped structure and design the program. Frontline staff at the organizations went through an orientation led by the c.a.r.e. manager and the Director of the Centre for Community-Engaged Learning. Organizations signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Calgary. The majority of the programs in which the preservice teachers were involved were after-school programs for children and youth from immigrant families. Some students were placed at in-school lunch hour programs, while others were placed at organizations serving immigrant families.

Participants

Research participants for this study were limited to preservice teachers registered in EDTP 512 who opted to participate in the research as well as staff at the community organizations. Of the 28 students registered in EDTP 512, 16 opted into the research component.

Along with the preservice teachers from the university, frontline staff at the community agencies also provided their written consent to participate in the research, and all protocols for ethical research were followed according to the Conjoint Faculties Research Ethics Board of the University of Calgary.

Community Activities

Preservice teachers engaged in a variety of activities with students who are English-language learners (ELL's); these activities were based on the type of community program. Preservice teachers placed in after-school/life-skills programs typically engaged in one-on-one and group activities around themed lessons such as global citizenship, community, identity, friendship, and healthy living. The preservice teacher placed at the school board engaged in interviews with ELL's and their families who wished to enroll in public education; these interviews included a language proficiency assessment and coding process for English as a Second Language, as well as an introduction to supports and services for newcomer families. Preservice teachers placed at literacy support programs engaged in activities that improved the reading and writing skills of ELL students, including buddy-reading and themed writing activities. Those placed in recreation programs engaged in small and large group sports activities that aimed to develop the ELL's skills in conflict management and leadership.

Regardless of the type of placement, community mentors were expected to create opportunities for preservice teachers to gradually increase their leadership role. This involved the following opportunities: observing programs for the first couple of weeks, participating in one-on-one and group activities the following few weeks, planning two lesson/session plans by the mid-point of the program, and implementing two lesson/session plans by the end of the program.

The process used to determine these activities (i.e., who decided what they would do and how these decisions were reached) was developed collaboratively by the Working Group members, which consisted of senior management from community organization partners, Dr. Darren Lund, c.a.r.e., and the Centre for Community-Engaged Learning. The Working Group collaboratively developed a program logic model in order to determine the community placement activities. First, the Working Group agreed on the long term, intermediate, and short-term outcomes of the program. Second, the Working Group developed indicators of success. Third, the Working Group established outputs necessary to meet the indicators. Lastly, a set of activities was established to align with the outputs.

At all stages of development, Working Group members had opportunities to provide input and suggest changes. Also, at all stages of development, c.a.r.e., Dr. Darren Lund, and the Centre for Community-Engaged Learning referred to research regarding intercultural training and service-learning to ensure the logic model aligned with best and promises practices.

All community mentors and preservice teachers were expected to engage in an initial, intermediate, and final meeting. Each meeting included a set of guiding questions to encourage reflection, trouble-shooting, and dialogue. Although the meetings were not recorded or documented, community mentors remarked that these meetings provided opportunities to critically discuss the preservice teachers' experiences and to collaboratively develop learning goals.

Course Content

EDTP 512: Educating for Social Justice was described in the course syllabus in the following terms:

This course will allow B.Ed. students to engage in serious study of issues surrounding pedagogy and schooling, with particular attention to diversity, equity, social justice education, and activism. Participants will be invited to engage in critical readings, activities, and inquiry from a variety of sources. The course will have relevance to all levels of formal and informal education, and across subject disciplines.

The two required textbooks for the course were: *The Great White North? Exploring Whiteness, Privilege and Identity in Education* (Carr & Lund, 2007), and *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Along with the required weekly readings and the service-learning component, students wrote an individual inquiry paper on a subject of their choice related to social justice.

For each of their field placements, students were invited to keep a weekly personal journal related to their service-learning experiences. Each week students discussed a range of social justice issues and topics based on course readings and those discussions. The use of an online Blackboard course shell allowed additional conversations among students and with the professor while students were away from the university.

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

This research was undertaken following critical ethnographic inquiry, which has a “primary orientation to social justice, a primary concern for those marginalized and dispossessed, and a relationship of entering solidarity, authenticity and action towards progressive social change” (Madison, 2012, p. 7). In giving their consent to be included in the research, students agreed to participate in the following activities: one pre-placement interview, one post-placement

interview and the potential to be observed by the research assistant while at their community placement. Only the research assistant was aware of which students from the course were participating in the research component. All the research data along with the list of participants was kept confidential until the final grades of the course had been submitted to the Faculty of Education. Participants also were sent copies of their transcripts of their two interviews and given the opportunity to make any changes or clarifications. No students made any substantive changes to the verbatim written accounts of their interviews.

Thus, the research material presented in this paper is derived from 32 recorded interviews with preservice teachers from the university class, the transcripts, and additional field notes collected during the research assistant's visits to the community placement during the seven weeks of the service-learning component. These field notes were supplemented by informal interviews with several managers from the community partner organizations, notes taken during the working group meetings, and informal conversations with frontline staff from the community organizations.

Transcriptions of interviews, field notes and survey data were analyzed using independent coding and thematic analysis following a critical ethnographic approach (Madison, 2012). The initial coding revealed multiple units of data that were then re-analyzed, triangulated with the other researcher, and then collapsed to be integrated into broader themes that are summarized below.

Findings and Discussion

During the interviews that followed their time at their community placements, preservice teachers identified increased awareness in several key areas as well as the development of more

effective teaching strategies. Community partners also shared several insights into how the service-learning placements added value to their programs. Findings also revealed challenges encountered during the service-learning program. The following sections highlight these findings.

Student Outcome 1: Increased Awareness

A key outcome emerging from the service-learning program was an increased awareness of previously unfamiliar neighborhoods and communities. Calgary is a large city with four distinct quadrants, each unique in its demographic composition and history. It is not unusual for Calgarians to be unfamiliar with certain quadrants of the city. Preservice teachers, unless they had been placed in these communities through their practicum experience, tended to be unfamiliar with certain neighborhoods and communities. Several participants identified that the service-learning experience had increased their awareness about communities with which they had been unfamiliar. For one participant, the service-learning component placed him in a community where he had previously never worked:

Well Forest Lawn, it's not one of the greatest socio-economic status neighbourhoods, and there's quite a bit of crime in that neighbourhood. So going into it I thought I'd be going into a school from [the film] *Dangerous Minds*. . . but it was actually the complete opposite. . . the kids were great. The staff at the school were really nice and even the kids who weren't in the program just around the school were really good kids. I think it was a good experience just to show that your associations can be totally incorrect.

As this anecdote reveals, service-learning gave some participants the opportunity to dispel negative or prejudicial stereotypes that they had about particular communities and schools. Other students were placed in after-school programs that operated out of subsidized housing cooperatives. Students in these placements indicated that this experience gave them a better understanding of the community and home life of the students who might end up in their future classrooms.

Along with their exposure to new neighborhoods and communities, students indicated that this experience gave them a greater understanding of the issues facing immigrant families. As practicum teachers, their interaction with parents and families was often limited to the occasional parent-teacher interview. Through the service-learning component some students were given much more direct access to families and parents. Students reported developing better strategies for how to engage parents and families in the classroom and school, how to improve teacher-student-family communication, and how to support families in supporting their children in their education. Preservice teachers credited the fact that they were not in a teacher-role with allowing them to get closer to families than previous experiences had allowed. In addition, some of the community organizations in which the preservice teachers were placed had a real emphasis on how to include immigrant families and parents in the education process and system. One student reported that this emphasis on including families helped her think in more complex terms about how to include families in the education process.

Student Outcome 2: Critical Self-Reflection

For many students in the program, their time at their service-learning placement had presented an opportunity to reflect more critically on their position vis-à-vis the students with

whom they were working. This was particularly true of white participants, many of whom felt like this experience—where they were often the only white person in the room—encouraged them to think more deeply about their whiteness, privilege, and identity: “I felt like I had to constantly acknowledge my own position and my own privilege in order to even be there, which was, it’s hard. It’s not hard, it’s strange to have to do that all the time.”

Some of the students who reported having a “heightened awareness of their whiteness” also explained that this shaped the role they assumed at their community placement. They stated that they “held-back” more than they would have in other contexts: “I felt like I was quieter than I normally would have been. . . more reserved. . . because it’s not outside of my comfort zone, but it’s closer to the edge of my comfort zone.” In the on-campus portion of the course, students read Peggy McIntosh’s (1988) “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack.” Several participants indicated that their time in the placement helped them think about their whiteness in new and critical ways, encouraging them to step back and reflect on their assumed authority.

While many of the students who participated in this course were drawn to it because of previous experience with social justice, there were several students who, during their pre-placement interviews, indicated that they had a “really weak” understanding of social justice issues or exposure to diversity. It was among these students where the clearest shifts in perspective took place. Two participants stated outright that their experience in the community dispelled negative stereotypes about particular neighbourhoods and schools as well as immigrant children and youth more generally. One student stated that she felt her previous understandings had been “ignorant,” and that this service-learning experience had “demystified” working with immigrant children.

Student Outcome 3: Hidden Curriculum

The service-learning component served as an effective means of getting preservice teachers to think critically about the kind of tacit messages and teaching practices they take for granted in the classroom. Several students indicated an increased awareness of the “hidden curriculum.” Working directly with children from immigrant backgrounds, some of whom had arrived in Canada relatively recently, encouraged the preservice teachers to examine and, in some cases, rethink their pedagogical approaches. One participant shared this example:

Realizing that things that I didn't think were issues of sensitivity are, in fact, issues of sensitivity. . . We played charades and I think one of things was “build a snowman.” And there was a kid who had just moved here and had never seen snow and no clue what a snowman was. And I was like, “Why is that not obvious to me? That these things are not globally apparent?” But they are not, so it was a huge wake-up call for me.

Along with becoming aware of the need for “culturally-responsive teaching” practices, students also reported having a better understanding of the needs of English language learners (ELL) and how to better support them in the classroom. The following comment from one participant indicates how her time in the community shifted her perspective on teaching English language learners:

I have more strategies when it comes to working with English language learners. And I've kind of decided that maybe there isn't one set of strategies that will work. Like you kind of have to figure it out. I don't know why I was looking for something

really specific because it's obviously going to be like anybody else. It depends on the student, what works for them. So I think that's helped me.

Both this comment and the one that follows indicate that working with children for whom English is an additional language, outside of the classroom and in more informal community-based settings, allowed preservice teachers to deepen their understanding of how to support these young people:

We had a kid in [the program] who spoke almost no English and so I thought that was so important because sometimes all you need to do is sit next to a kid and watch what they're doing. So if they're building a puzzle, you build the puzzle with them, so that's a simple kind of bonding that happens between you and then slowly you can get to the language issues. But without building a relationship with that kid, they're going to be terrified.

Other research participants indicated that this experience also helped them understand how needs-assessment for English language learners works and what schools are required to do to support English language learners, something that they had not necessarily learned through their practicum experiences.

Community Outcome 1: Awareness of After-School Programming

Along with documenting the impact of this program on the preservice teachers who participated, we feel it is important to share highlights from the feedback received from the community partners who hosted these students. As discussed previously, feedback from community partners was solicited at all points of the program. Community partners were instrumental in the program design. The Working Group met at the mid-point of the project to

discuss how the program was going and then again at the end for a final evaluation. The research assistant also spoke with frontline staff from the programs when she visited the research participants on-site.

A critical insight shared by both community partners and preservice teachers was the increased awareness on the part of the preservice teachers about the value of after-school programming and the organizations that provide these programs. The preservice teachers spoke about a renewed understanding of the value of play as a teaching tool. It came as a surprise to many of them that there were pedagogical aspects of these after-school programs and that these programs offer far more than “free babysitting.”

Community Outcome 2: Appreciation of the Value of Community Programming

Understanding the importance and value of this kind of programming was something community partners were enthusiastic about as well: “Having teachers in the schools who understand what we’re about and value our programming is a hugely important outcome for us.” Along with having more culturally competent teachers in the classroom, staff at the programs hoped that this experience would create teacher-allies down the road who could endorse and support these organizations in the future.

Community Outcome 3: Enthusiasm for the Engagement of Skilled Professionals

The frontline staff also seemed enthusiastic about the contributions that the preservice teachers were making to their programs. In addition to simply being an extra body to help manage the “chaos of after-school programming,” these “bodies” were skilled and experienced preservice teachers who had already had months of practicum teaching behind them. In this way, many of the preservice teachers were able to step in and provide support and leadership early on.

The initiative shown by the majority of the preservice teachers was welcomed by the frontline staff, many of whom were juggling multiple responsibilities and occasionally having to travel great distances between programs. Thus, it was important that the preservice teachers were adaptable and willing to “get their feet wet.” For the most part, both community mentors and preservice teacher “mentees” were pleased with their relationship, and they felt that the community-university partnership was mutually beneficial.

Challenge 1: Time Limitations in Program Placements

While the results of this research indicate that most participants—both community members and preservice teachers—had a positive experience with the service-learning program, there were a few related time challenges that bear consideration. Overwhelmingly, the primary challenge faced by both parties was the amount of time allotted to the program. The preservice teachers indicated that they would have preferred to spend more time at their placements. Several students chose to devote significantly more time than the required three hours per week because they felt their experience would be lacking if they did not make the additional time. Similarly, students felt they would have benefited from more time in the classroom as well as in the placement. Several preservice teachers indicated that they would have preferred to meet twice a week, once at their community placement and once on-campus. While this would certainly present an optimal learning experience for the students, it is difficult to create these conditions within the current structure of the Faculty of Education.

Similarly, frontline and managerial staff at the community agencies indicated that time was the biggest barrier for them because of the additional workload with time required for meetings, training sessions, and supporting a preservice teacher. Time also was a barrier in view

of the short time that these preservice teachers were at their placement. Many frontline staff commented that the amount of time that students were placed in the community was not adequate for relationship building: “The little time that they had in their placement made it challenging to get their lessons in and also to truly develop significant bonds with the students.”

In their book, Stoecker and Tryon (2009) comment that “the most consistent theme that emerged was the frequent reference to challenges associated with short-term service learning” (p. 16). They wrote that issues of time came up so consistently as a complaint or barrier for organizations who host service learners that they restructured their original work to focus on this issue. Our research echoes what Stoecker and Tryon found: Short-term service-learning placements present challenges for community organizations both at the level of organizational capacity and in terms of relationship building between service learners and the clients of an organization. Because the lack of adequate time came up as the primary challenge within the program, we are working to integrate solutions to this issue as the program develops and evolves. It is also critical that the challenges presented by short-term service-learning experiences are further explored in the research on service-learning.

Challenge 2: Focusing on Student Outcomes Over Community Impact

First, as a community-led, collaborative effort, we recognize that our research places greater emphasis on student outcomes than it does on examining the community impact of this service-learning program. The dearth of research on the impact of service-learning on the communities they serve has been critiqued (Cruz & Giles, 2000; Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). These critiques are essential to the evolution of service-learning and community engaged scholarship,

and have helped inform our own thinking on the pragmatics and ethics of service-learning and community-based research.

While it is important to be mindful of the potential pitfalls of service-learning, especially when community voices are left out entirely, we believe that our service-learning program provides a good example of what meaningful community-led collaboration can look like. Community partners were involved from the point of inception in shaping the structure and organization of this service-learning experience. Thus, while we acknowledge that the research represented in this paper does emphasize student outcomes, we believe that community voices were not “unheard” (Stoecker & Tryon, 2009). In addition, the authors are presently working on a paper that focuses specifically on the nature of our community-university collaboration.

Challenge 3: Student Self-Selection

Another limitation regarding our data set surrounds the issue of student self-selection. First, EDTP 512 was an optional course taken in the last semester of the second year of a two-year teacher education program. Thus, students chose from a number of other courses to attend Educating for Social Justice. As we learned through the pre-interviews with students, this choice was not accidental. Most students explained that they were drawn to the name of the course because of prior experience with social justice or a clear interest in the subject. In addition to this, many students identified the service-learning component as another motivator for signing up for the course. Thus, we suggest that the students represented in our study are not “typical” preservice teachers. The majority had extensive prior experience working with vulnerable populations, teaching or volunteering overseas, working, or volunteering with non-profit organizations or an academic background related to social justice. Some of these students also

self-selected to participate in the research component. It is important that these choices be considered when interpreting these data, as it is quite likely that results would be different with a more randomly selected group of preservice teachers who were required to participate in service-learning or a course entitled Educating for Social Justice.

Implications and Conclusions: Educating for Social Justice

In her article, Nieto (2000) reminds us that “social justice and diversity are not the same thing” (p. 183). This seemingly self-evident observation is worth bearing in mind as we approach the question of how to prepare teachers to teach in contemporary classrooms. The distinction between social justice and diversity was not lost on the students who participated in this course. Part of their attraction to the course title, Educating for Social Justice, was driven by a fatigue over the ubiquity of the theme of “diversity” in their education training to date. They felt that this training had, until now, left them without real skills on how to be “culturally responsive” teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1994). As one student told us, “We’re taught to teach for diversity but not how.” Another student stated,

I think we’re all taught to be tactful and accountable to our audience. So not just the students but the parents and the admin. So in terms of being equipped that way, I think we’re mindful of how we treat diversity. But I think in terms of really understanding it, I would say no.

The challenge of moving beyond a superficial understanding or “appreciation” of diversity is a critical one for teacher educators.

Pushing students to reflect on their own privilege and encouraging them to think critically about the deeply racialized, gendered, and class structures at play in the contemporary classroom

requires more than one elective course on “diversity” (Nieto, 2004; Phuntsog, 1999). This comes back to a question at the heart of service-learning: How can service-learning push students beyond charitable understandings of the world, which reinforce power structures and engender pity, toward a critically informed social justice lens? In other words, “How can teachers help students develop a critical awareness of their world, build empathy, and create a desire to change society?” (Cipolle, 2010, p. 85).

A number of studies from the U.S. have indicated that when preservice teachers engage in service-learning with students from cultures different from their own, the result may include the reinforcement of negative stereotypes held by the preservice teachers (Bell, Horn, & Roxas, 2007; Wade, 2000). We sought to avoid this through a specific focus on social justice, with ongoing intensive readings and discussion, and critical self-reflection as described in the sections above. As we found through our research, this approach to service-learning provided an opportunity to help students develop that crucial critical awareness. These preservice teachers were not only exposed to new and different experiences but also were given the opportunity to reflect critically on these experiences. Our research supports what others have found, namely, that service-learning allows students to move through what Cipolle (2010) calls “stages of white critical consciousness”—charity, caring, and social justice (p. 13). Through service-learning, students are given the opportunity to reflect on their own position in the world as well as the wider structures that shape the lives of their students. Service-learning provides not only greater context—interacting with students outside the traditional classroom environment—but also the opportunity to think critically about their own privilege and identity (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Cipolle, 2010; Wade, 2000).

In the interviews that followed their time at their community placements, the preservice teachers that participated in this research reflected on how their experiences had deepened their critical understanding of issues of social justice. They gave many examples of how this experience had altered their perspectives. Students reflected that they felt better supported now, knowing which organizations were working in the community to support children and youth from immigrant backgrounds as well as the resources available to teachers in terms of community support. For some preservice teachers their placement also gave them the opportunity to work with a different age group. This helped deepen their understanding of the supports and interventions that took place at different academic levels; for example, secondary teachers had the opportunity to see what work was being done at the elementary level.

Preservice teachers also reflected on the value of working with community partners who really valued and cared about children and youth from immigrant backgrounds. As one student put it, her practicum teaching experience had shown her that encounters with multicultural student body are sort of approached with frustration:

We say that we approach it with enthusiasm and we put up posters of all of these diverse faces, and it's so exciting and we're so happy. But in reality, teachers are frustrated and confused about how to deal with these students, and so they see every encounter as a struggle and a challenge.

In the community placement the opposite was true. A frontline staff member used the word privilege to describe her understanding of the service-learning program: "It was a privilege for the university students to get to work with the children in her after-school program."

Participants in the service-learning component were thus given the opportunity to move from a deficit perspective to one that valued the assets these children brought to the classroom.

It is critical to emphasize that the goal of this project was never to do service-learning but, rather, to better prepare preservice teachers for working with children and youth from immigrant backgrounds with the ultimate aim of better supporting these children and youth in school. The program emerged out of years of collaboration and dialogue between community partners—school boards, community organizations, academics, and government—who shared a common vision of improving the experiences of immigrant children and youth in school.

Service-learning became a tool to help bring this broader community goal to fruition.

We believe that the community-led nature of this work makes this a unique and worthy model for others to consider. This project supports the notion that professional education cannot be the responsibility of one stakeholder; rather, it is a collective responsibility. It also echoes what Marilynne Boyle-Baise and her colleagues found about the value of “shared control” in service-learning: When efforts emphasize mutuality, reciprocity, and shared power, all parties benefit (Boyle-Baise et al., 2001)

Service-learning is most effective when it draws on the collective wisdom and experience of the communities familiar with the issue trying to be addressed; in our case, we focused on school performance of children and youth from immigrant backgrounds. When communities drive the structure of the program, the risk diminishes of those communities being taken advantage of, left out, or ignored. Having a constant feedback mechanism, in the form of the c.a.r.e. Working Group, allowed the voices of community partners to be heard and not overshadowed by the preservice teachers and their learning outcomes. Our collaborative model

allowed for constant input from each stakeholder at all stages of the project, and points to the need for greater community involvement in planning and implementing service-learning at the post-secondary level.

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