

## Developing Service-Learners into Service-Leaders

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### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of one teacher education service-learning program that fosters the development of service-leaders through a carefully constructed sequence of experiences. Survey data collected from 141 preservice teachers were analyzed to identify what they learned over the course of their service-learning program and to determine areas for program improvement. The findings provided evidence that there were positive outcomes, both professional and personal, for preservice teachers enrolled in this program. Preservice teachers began to see the importance of providing service to the community and instilling a service ethic in the students they teach. They began to appreciate the impact that service-learning can have on their school community. Further, they overwhelmingly plan to use service-learning as a pedagogical tool in their future classrooms. Purposeful curriculum and program design can be a powerful catalyst for developing service-learners into service-leaders.

### Developing Service-Learners into Service-Leaders

This study examines how one teacher education program seeks to foster preservice teachers' intent to use service-learning to promote civic engagement in their future classrooms. Specifically, we aim to nurture an ethic of care (Noddings, 1984) in our candidates that serves as a foundation for practice which contributes to the common good. It is our hope that our candidates will, in turn, nurture this same ethic of care in the students they teach. As noted by Erickson & Anderson (2005), the roots of service-learning are steeped in religious and cultural traditions centered on cultivating a service-ethic among citizens. Education for the common good is essential to accomplishing this aim. Service-learning is aligned with this ideal: "As a philosophy of education, service-learning reflects the belief that education should develop social responsibility and prepare students to be involved citizens" (Anderson, 1998, p. 1).

There are numerous studies addressing the benefits to students who participate in service-learning. Many scholars recognize service-learning as a unique opportunity to foster personal growth and civic responsibility (Colby, Beaumont, Ehrlich, & Corngold, 2008; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Washburn, Laskowitz-Weingart, & Summers, 2004). Others point to the positive effects on students' cognitive and psychosocial development (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda, & Yee, 2000; Castellan, 2011; Fenzel & Dean, 2011; Jagla, Lukenchuk, & Price, 2010; Wade, 1997; Wasserman, 2010). Further, attributes that are positively influenced by participation in service-learning projects may include academic performance, critical thinking skills, and leadership skills (Astin & Sax, 1998). Students construct their understanding of what it means to be a citizen in a democratic society as these and other personal benefits accrue. Involvement in service-learning can produce even greater outcomes for students that lead service-learning

projects. Farzanehkia, Des Marais, & Yang (2000) advocate for a stronger focus on leadership:

“What has rarely been considered is the potential for all young people to develop character, citizenship, and knowledge through leading service-learning not just participating in it” (p. 678).

Perhaps then, it is the leadership component of a program that holds the greatest potential for helping students to learn how to affect change in a community. For preservice teachers, this most certainly can be true. Candidates have the opportunity to help students learn to work for the common good as they organize and lead service-learning projects in a school environment.

Erickson & Anderson (2005) summarize this unique contribution:

By helping to develop an ethos of service and caring in K-12 students and teachers, preservice teachers simultaneously gain leadership skills, enhance the academic and social education of their students, and serve as agents of educational reform—all prior to obtaining their first paid teaching position. (p. 10)

Researchers often link the development of leadership skills with the opportunities afforded students who participate in service-learning projects (Abourezk & Patterson, 2003; Boyle-Baise, Bridgwaters, Brinson, Hiestand, Johnson, & Wilson, 2007; Daniels, Patterson, & Dunston, 2010; Furco & Root, 2010; Hughes & White-Mincarelli, 2011; Stewart, 2012; Wurr & Hamilton, 2012). Learning to set realistic goals, solving problems as they arise, and making wise decisions are just a few of the important leadership skills that can be fostered in the context of leading a service project (Boyd, 2001). While these authors acknowledge that service-learning develops leadership skills, there is little research on the benefits from leading a service-learning project. Scholars have challenged program designers to develop service-leaders as well as service-learners (Stewart, 2012).

Scholars in the field of teacher education call for a stronger focus on research in general in service-learning programs: “As the use of service-learning in teacher education programs continues to grow, there is a pressing need for research on a myriad of issues” (Erickson & Anderson, 2005, p. 9). Among the specific areas cited, Erickson & Anderson (2005) call for more research on the reasons for using service-learning, the experiences that preservice teachers find valuable when leading a project with students, and the rewards as well as challenges of service-learning engagement. Erickson & Anderson state, “We encourage all who work in the field of service-learning teacher education to benefit themselves and others by systematically examining their service-learning program features and outcomes” (p. 9).

We engaged in self-study in an attempt to learn more about the benefits of our service-learning program. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of one teacher education service-learning program that fosters the development of service-leaders by providing a carefully constructed sequence of experiences. We hope to better understand what our preservice teachers learned as a result of their service learning experiences and what suggestions they have for us that will help us improve our program.

### **Background of the Study**

#### **Program Aims**

The ethic of care as espoused by Noddings (1984; 2002; 2006) serves as the foundation for the aims of our program and the design of the curricular experiences. We also use Nodding’s work as a lens for interpreting the data in this research study. At the heart of Noddings work is the central notion that “the ethic of care speaks of obligation” (Noddings, 2002, p. 13). This obligation is to “act not to achieve for ourselves a commendation but to protect or enhance the

welfare of the cared-for” (Noddings, 1984, p. 24). Noddings (1994) further explains this ethic of care:

When we genuinely care, we want to do our very best to effect worthwhile results for the recipients of our care. This means that caring is more than an attitude, much more than a warm, cuddly feeling. It is an orientation of deep concern that carries us out of ourselves and into the lives, despairs, struggles, and hopes of others. To care is to respond, and to respond responsibly . . . ( p. ix).

This obligation to act is what we hope to instill in our preservice teachers. Our program is dedicated to Michael G. Jacobson, one of its founders, who has been a staunch supporter of this goal. The driving motivation behind our service-learning program is a desire for our future teachers to understand that no one can successfully teach within a community without having a deep understanding of that community. More importantly, we hope that our preservice teachers leave our program with a commitment to give back. This ideal is reflected within the program’s mission statement:

The Elementary Education Michael G. Jacobson Service Learning Program at Appalachian State University strives to prepare teachers to be active participants in the life of their school and community. Our program seeks to empower future teachers to work toward social justice through an ethic of caring, commitment and conscience (Appalachian State University Elementary Education Program 2013).

Because this ethic of care is central to the mission of our program, it is the basis for making curricular decisions. Tyler (1949), in his classic work on curriculum design, identifies the first step in this process as defining the purposes that education should seek to attain. However,

even this basic principle is often neglected. Noddings (2013) notes that there is little discussion about aims in education today: “It is as though the whole matter were long ago decided, and the problem to be addressed is how to get all students successfully through the standard curriculum” (p. 399). We have chosen to incorporate “themes of care” when designing our service-learning program curriculum (Noddings, 2003). Noddings discusses the reasons why we should teach caring:

My contention is, first, that we should want more from our educational efforts than adequate academic achievement, and, second, that we will not achieve even that meager success unless our children believe that they themselves are cared for and learn to care for others” (p. 59).

Noddings (2013) notes that themes of care should not be directly translated into learning objectives. Rather, they should “provide a lens through which we select topics, pedagogical methods, organizational features of our schools, and by which we evaluate what we are doing” (p. 400).

### **Program Design**

American architectural designer Charles Eames states that, “Design is a plan for arranging elements in such a way as to accomplish a particular purpose” (Neuhart, Eames, Eames & Neuhart, 1989). Eames understands that the design process is bound by the constraints that one must recognize and the willingness and enthusiasm for the designer to work within these constraints. Our service-learning program was purposefully designed to reflect a developmental approach that would help prospective teachers transition from service-learners to service-leaders (Boyle-Basie et al., 2006; Stewart, 2012). However, we have been, and continue to be, bound by

many constraints that tamper our ideal notions of what we would like our prospective teachers to accomplish during their time with us. As with all teacher education programs, we find ourselves striving for quality in the face of demands for accountability, policies that increasingly restrict access to schools, and limitations on the time and effort involved in sustaining a high-quality program.

Despite this, we have tried to stay true to our vision of designing a program that will nurture the development of service-leaders centered on an ethos of care. With this in mind, preservice teachers in our program participate in a progression of experiences. Our program begins with an exposure to the needs of the community and the importance of civic engagement and ends with a culminating experience where preservice teachers lead a classroom of elementary children through a service-learning project. In accordance with the National Youth Leadership Council Service-Learning Standards for Quality Practice (2008), our program seeks to augment and complement the academic work happening within our classrooms. We endeavor to provide our undergraduate prospective teachers with practical, hands-on experiences while applying a constructivist view to the educational process.

Fenzel & Dean (2011) support purposeful program design as a means to maximize the positive outcomes of a service-learning program: “Long-term effects of service-learning in teacher education are more likely to be realized if service-learning is approached in a programmatic way, such that service-learning courses are sequenced to promote continued candidate development” (p. 27). This concept is echoed by Anderson & Hill (2001) in their sixth principle of good practice in teacher education programs: “Preservice teachers should participate in multiple and varied service-learning experiences that involve working with diverse

community members” (p. 77). Anderson & Hill (2001) contend that with each service-learning experience, preservice teachers increase their understanding of the potential benefits of service-learning for themselves and others.

Our service-learning program moves beyond a project conducted by one professor in one class by systemically building on experiences across a program (Colby, Bercau, Clark, & Galiardi, 2009). While most service-learning programs are designed to “link one course or subject to service or it may join several disciplines” (International Partnership for Service-Learning and Leadership, 2007), the Jacobson program seeks to build on service experiences over time to increase the capacity of the prospective teachers to lead service-learning projects. Perhaps more to the point, our program seeks to prepare preservice teachers to use service learning as a valued and integrated pedagogical tool within their vocation. We have tried to utilize the findings from research that suggest that the duration and intensity of service affect the quality of outcomes experienced by students (Astin & Sax, 1998).

### **A Progression of Experiences**

The Jacobson program, enacted in 2001, originally required students to complete 40 hours of community service/service-learning. Until January 2010, the first 20 hours of service were completed independently in local service agencies. Preservice teachers submitted their proposed service site and project to the program coordinator for approval and then documented the completion of their work. The remaining 20 hours of service-learning were embedded in two methods courses.

In 2010, a change was made to the program that discontinued the community service requirement. Undergraduate student data had revealed that many students did not see the

connection between the first 20 hours of required community service and their program of study. It became clear that the program suffered from a significant flaw. Although students' attitudes and dispositions remained largely positive towards both community service and service-learning, the community service hours had become disconnected from the aims of the program. For too many of our students, the hours of community service were merely one more hoop through which they had to jump. Responses to a 2008-2009 survey question, "In what ways can the program be improved?" elicited information useful for program revisions. Students discussed the need for more connections between coursework and service, more connections to teaching, more structure in the assignments for each course, and more guidance in the first 20 hours of the program. These responses proved helpful in redesigning the program to create more cohesiveness across the phases of the program (Colby, Bercaw, Clark & Galiardi, 2009).

**Instructor led service-learning experience.** As a result of our redesign efforts, the first phase in the program is now housed in a directed elective course. In the directed electives, prospective teachers are introduced to service learning as a pedagogical tool that reflects a constructivist approach to education. Preservice teachers choose from a variety of course offerings that integrate service-learning with the elementary school curriculum including its uses, benefits, and challenges. They select from courses such as *Environmental Literacy; Teacher, Leader, Citizen; Issues of Language and Culture in the Public Schools; Investigating the Past and Present through the Eyes of Children; Seeing the World through Mathematics; and, Children At-Risk.*

Twenty hours of service are completed through a project selected, organized, and supervised by the course instructor in the directed elective course. These experiences are diverse

and largely depend on the content of the course. A significant part of the responsibility of the instructor is to model the possibilities inherent in service-learning and the curricular connections that can be made between service and academic work. Instructors help preservice teachers reflect on their experiences and build connections to future service-learning opportunities in which they will partake over the course of their program. Examples of successful service projects that have been conducted in directed elective courses include: tutoring English language learners in community schools; participating in an environmental conservation project; and leading an oral history project with community elders.

**Self-directed service-learning experience.** The second phase of the Jacobson program occurs in Block I in the *Learner Diversity* course. A primary objective of the Learner Diversity service-learning project is to allow prospective teachers the opportunity to begin to define and refine their own sense of social justice, including commitment and concern. During the semester, ten hours are to be completed through the prospective teachers' own initiative with faculty approval. In these 10 hours preservice teachers are tasked with identifying a community need that aligns with the goals and objectives associated with learner diversity. The Learner Diversity instructor acts as a mentor to his or her prospective teachers, offering encouragement and guidance as needed. A variety of relevant, lived experiences are brought into the college classroom for reflection and discussion under the instructors' guidance. Areas to be addressed in the project may include issues such as poverty, cultural differences, socio-economic inequality, gender roles, sexual orientation, and others.

This service-learning focus is based on evidence of need within the Appalachian State University community and its surrounding areas. Statistics from the most recently available

census data show high levels of poverty in this region. Conversations with cooperating teachers, administrators, and parents have informed us that these issues are having a direct impact on the education of children in the local school districts with which we work. Examples of successful service projects that have been conducted in the *Learner Diversity* course include preservice teachers writing a policy paper describing how they would alleviate hunger in our area after working in a soup kitchen, tutoring homeless children in areas of need, and partnering with children and their families to produce anthologies of family histories which were sent home as keepsakes.

**Preservice teacher led school-based experience.** The capstone experience of the Jacobson service-learning program occurs during Block II in the *Elementary School Social Studies Methods* course. This experience is designed to integrate best practices associated with the teaching of social studies with the constructivist and service philosophies of the program. Armed with their experiences from the directed elective and the *Learner Diversity* course, preservice teachers design, implement and assess a service project within their internship classroom. The project should reflect the needs, concerns, and hopes of the school and community in which the student is placed. Successful projects are based upon input from teachers and children and reflect an understanding of, and appreciation for, the culture of the cooperating school.

As suggested by Anderson & Hill (2001) in their ten principles of good practice, “Preservice teachers gain the most from participation in service-learning when they play an authentic leadership role in the planning and conducting of service-learning activities” (p. 76). In our program, preservice teachers learn leadership skills by collaborating with principals and

teachers to assess and address needs in the school community. Prospective teachers learn how to identify community needs, develop a plan to address these needs, implement the plan, and evaluate their efforts. Crucial to this process is the prospective teacher's ability to reflect on this experience and to promote reflection in others. Anderson & Hill (2001) state that reflection is key to critically analyzing a service-learning experience. Through this culminating experience, our preservice teachers learn to explore their role as a leader in affecting change in the school community. Some examples of successful service projects of prospective teachers include supervising a canned food drive for a local family in need, supervising a letter writing campaign for troops stationed overseas, and creating a living history event in a small town in support of the local community preservation organization.

## **Method**

### **Purpose and Participants**

This study was conducted in an undergraduate elementary education program at a comprehensive university in the southeast. This program graduates approximately 220 preservice teachers per year, which is approximately half of all teacher education majors. The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of the service-learning component of our teacher education program. Data were collected and analyzed from preservice teachers to identify what they had learned over the course of their service-learning program and to identify areas for program improvement.

### **Data Collection and Measures**

We collected survey data in the spring of 2012 from elementary education majors at the completion of their undergraduate program. Data for this study were gathered as part of the

comprehensive program survey given to all preservice teachers in their student teaching semester. Perceptions were elicited about specific courses and the elementary education program in general. These data were used for accountability purposes and program improvement. The electronic survey was sent via email to all 158 elementary education student teachers during the semester of this study. Five questions on this program survey were added to help faculty better understand preservice teachers' perceptions related to the impact of the service-learning program. Prospective teachers were asked to rate their level of agreement on three statements using a Likert scale from 1-4 with 1 as "Strongly Disagree", 2 as "Somewhat Disagree", 3 as "Somewhat Agree" and 4 as "Strongly Agree". These statements were as follows: a) Meaningful connections were made between the coursework and the program requirements of participating in community service, service-learning project, and teaching service learning to K-6 students; b) My service-learning has broadened my understanding of social issues that affect my community; and c) After this experience, I plan to use community service/service-learning in my classroom. Two open-ended questions followed these three statements: a) What was the most important thing you learned during your service-learning experience? and b) In what ways can the service-learning program be improved?

### **Data Analyses**

The aims of our program provided a lens for interpreting the survey results. We wanted to learn more about the effectiveness of the program's progression of experiences and how these experiences helped to foster service-leaders motivated to use service-learning as a pedagogical tool in their future classrooms. Specifically, survey data were analyzed to determine in what

ways the program was fostering an ethic of care through service-learning and to identify areas for program improvement.

Specific processes were followed to analyze the data. For the statements that elicited quantitative results, descriptive statistics were used for interpretation. Responses in the strongly agree and somewhat agree categories were grouped together as were the responses in the strongly disagree and somewhat disagree. Creswell's (2002) process for analyzing and interpreting data was used to analyze the qualitative data. We identified emerging themes using the following four-phase process: coding the data; developing themes from the data; defining themes based on the findings; and connecting and interrelating themes.

### **Results and Discussion**

We received responses from 141 of the 158 student teachers that were asked to respond to the survey. Our response rate was high at close to 90%. Respondents to this survey included two groups: 1) those who had taken the newly-designed directed-elective course and 2) those who had participated in the 20 hours of community service prior to the program revision. It was our hope that we would better understand whether the program change was yielding a positive effect.

Overall, there were positive outcomes for preservice teachers involved in our service-learning program. Participants described important aspects of developing an ethic of care in self and fostering this service ethic in others. They also discussed the importance of using service-learning as a tool to help children meet the needs of their community.

#### **Fostering an Ethic of Care through Service-Learning**

Findings from two of the questions that elicited quantitative data were analyzed to help us determine our prospective teachers' perceptions about fostering an ethic of care through service-

learning. This quantitative data, displayed in Table 1, revealed that most of our preservice teachers broadened their understanding of social issues that affect their community. In addition, they overwhelmingly plan to use service-learning in their own classroom.

Table 1

*Fostering an Ethic of Care through Service-Learning: Quantitative Results*

Survey Questions (N=141)	Agree	Disagree
My service-learning project has broadened my understanding of social issues that affect my community.	80% (n=112)	20% (n=29)
After this experience, I plan to use community service/service-learning in my classroom.	92% (n=130)	7% (n=11)

Findings from the qualitative data suggested that prospective teachers benefitted in both professional and personal ways from their service-learning experiences. Three themes emerged from the data related to the most important thing they learned during their service-learning experience.

First, preservice teachers recognized the importance of leading a project in which elementary students were engaged in service with their community. This helped them to learn the value of helping others reach out to those in need. For example, one preservice teacher stated, “I learned how important it is to give back to your community and to inspire this wanting to give back in your students.” A second prospective teacher had this to say, “I learned about the importance of teaching about the needs and social issues that affect our community. Together we can work as one collective unit to try and better our community.” Prospective teachers also realized the benefits of using service-learning as a pedagogical tool. One preservice teacher stated, “I learned that it can be challenging to design an effective service-learning activity, but

that it is also extremely rewarding to know that you planned something that has helped those who need it most.”

In a second theme, preservice teachers increased their ability to work with diverse learners and broadened their professional viewpoints. They learned new strategies that will help them meet the needs of all students. In addition, they gained an understanding that each student is unique and faces different challenges. One prospective teacher stated, “Throughout my service-learning experience I was exposed to a number of different learners. The most important thing I learned was how to work with, accept, and teach those different learners.” Another preservice teacher mentioned that “no matter the different abilities and levels in a classroom, all kids are able to learn, you just have to have different approaches to benefit all.” In addition, prospective teachers realized that teaching is much more than helping students progress academically. Teaching also involves developing relationships with students both in and outside of the classroom.

The third theme our prospective teachers expressed was how participating in the service-learning program affected them personally. They learned that they could make a difference and that it is important to give back to their communities. Their personal commitment to serve was strengthened. One preservice teacher learned “how to connect with the community in seemingly small ways to make a big difference.” In addition, prospective teachers expanded their knowledge of different cultures and found they enjoyed working with diverse groups. This was affirmed by one student who stated, “I had the opportunity to work with a group of preschool aged Cherokee children. I love learning about a new culture and understanding that similarities are far greater than the differences.”

A few responses from the qualitative data for this question did not fit the primary themes identified. These responses were not related to the question and therefore were classified under a miscellaneous category. Table 2 provides examples from preservice teachers' responses grouped by theme.

Table 2

*Using Service-Learning to Foster an Ethic of Care: Qualitative Results*

What was the most important thing you learned during your service-learning experience? (N=141)	Frequency
<i>Leading Service-Learning Projects (n=61)</i>	
<i>Importance of Service-Learning for Elementary Students</i> Elementary students need to understand why service-learning is important. Students should understand the needs of their community. It is important to teach students how to help others. Students benefit just as much as those in the community. Working with communities helps students grow and provides them with skills to be successful outside of school	23
<i>Service-Learning as a Pedagogical Tool</i> I learned how to incorporate local community in the classroom. I learned how to organize a project. I learned how to create a positive environment for students and community members. I realized how simple service can be. It takes a great deal of collaboration and cooperation. Communication is key. Projects are challenging but rewarding.	15
<i>Involvement with the Community</i> Service-learning projects are a great tool to use in the classroom and can get students involved with the community. There are many different ways you can be involved in the community. The school can make a difference in a community.	9
<i>Student Engagement</i> Children love opportunities to reach out to others. Students are eager to help no matter what their own situation. Students genuinely care and are interested in helping others. Students enjoyed feeling like they had the ability to help others	8
<i>Non-Profit Organizations</i> Volunteer time is essential to organization. This opened my eyes to how many people are in need. I learned what areas of the community need most help.	6

Applications to Teaching ( <i>n</i> =35)	
<p><i>Working with Diverse Learners</i></p> <p>I learned more about diverse learners. I learned how to work, accept, and teach different learners. I learned the many different ways students show that they are learning. I worked with children of all ages and backgrounds. A classroom is filled with diverse learners and not just diverse because of race. Each student is different and has different needs. Treat each child as individual. Each child is unique and talented. I learned about the challenges students face daily</p>	25
<p><i>Teaching the Whole Child</i></p> <p>Putting success of students beyond academics is important. Teaching isn't just about the classroom; it's also about connecting to the community. Service-learning projects are as important as teaching. My relationships with students will exist outside of the classroom. Kids come first. Teachers play various roles and this can be overwhelming</p>	6
<p><i>Broadening Professional Viewpoints</i></p> <p>I learned I liked kindergarten. I learned different philosophies of different schools (Charter). I learned to like 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I learned how to connect pre-K with rest of school.</p>	4
Personal Impact ( <i>n</i> =34)	
<p><i>Impact on Others</i></p> <p>I learned the Importance of showing people you care. I learned the importance of giving back. The community always has needs. A little effort goes along way. Helping others is the best outcome you can have at the end of the day. I learned how to connect with the community in small ways to make a big difference.</p>	10
<p><i>Knowledge of Different Cultures</i></p> <p>I loved learning about a new culture. I learned about the culture I live in. This gave me the opportunity to experience a different culture. I learned about the diverse populations in the area. I enjoyed interacting with a variety of people. I learned quickly how to interact with diverse individuals.</p>	8
<p><i>Personal Commitment</i></p> <p>I need to do more in my community. To be a good citizen I need to be actively involved.</p>	4
<p><i>Increased Self-Knowledge</i></p> <p>So much can be learned from helping others. I learned more about myself. I learned more than they did.</p>	6
<p><i>Negative or No Impact</i></p> <p>I have been already doing this, nothing new. I felt uncomfortable. I didn't enjoy forced service.</p>	6

Miscellaneous/No Response ( $n=11$ )
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### Identifying Areas for Program Improvement

Respondents agreed that the service-learning program had meaningful connections between coursework and activities as noted in Table 3. This seems to suggest that preservice teachers benefitted from their involvement in a service learning program intentionally designed to foster growth over time. This progression of experiences helped to create cohesiveness in the program.

Table 3

#### *Identifying Areas for Program Improvement: Quantitative Results*

Survey Questions (N=141)	Agree	Disagree
Meaningful connections were made between the coursework and the program requirements of community service, service-learning project, and teaching service learning to K-6 students.	87% ( $n=122$ )	14% ( $n=19$ )

Five overall themes emerged from the data related to how the service-learning program can be improved. One theme is that preservice teachers who participated independently in 20 hours of community service prior to the inclusion of the directed elective echoed the responses of participants in the 2008-2009 survey. For example, these preservice teachers commented on the lack of clear expectations and connections to coursework. A second theme is that these preservice teachers had difficulty finding service agencies in which to work and would have benefitted from more guidance during this initial phase. In contrast, preservice teachers who had participated in the directed elective commented on the benefits of having the service hours

directly connected to the course content. While the numbers were not high, the comments of those who had participated in the directed elective do provide guidance. A third theme relates to placements, and prospective teachers agreed that service should be conducted with children and through school-related projects. A fourth theme is that prospective teachers also felt the hours were best spent in the local community that was closer to the university. A fifth theme is that respondents made suggestions concerning improving guidelines, organization, and structure of the program. As noted in Table 4, these comments will be helpful when considering program improvement. Again, a few responses from the qualitative data for this question did not fit the primary themes identified. These responses were not related to the question and therefore were classified under a miscellaneous category. Table 4 provides examples of preservice teachers' responses grouped by themes.

Table 4

*Identifying Areas for Program Improvement: Qualitative Results*

In what ways can the service-learning program be improved? (N=141)	
Respondents Participating in Independent Community Service (n=51)	
<i>Expectations and Accountability</i> Students need clearer expectations. Provide a class on what is expected. Have a mandatory schedule. Have more accountability. We need a better documentation process. Make us aware earlier on	15
<i>Connections with Coursework</i> We need to link community service with coursework. Service-learning was rarely mentioned in courses. Integrate all hours in the curriculum. Make the community service part more like Block I and II.	13
<i>Service Opportunities</i> Have more services/opportunities. Give us more time to complete service. Don't limit choices. Plan more options. Make it easier to contact organizations.	11

<i>Guidance</i> Provide more guidance on how to complete the hours. Set up opportunities for service. Help with placements	9
<i>No Benefit</i> Community service hours seem unnecessary	3
Respondents Participating in Service-Learning in the Directed Elective (n=4)	
<i>Integrated Hours</i> Were thankful hours were integrated.	2
<i>Involvement</i> I liked the service-learning classes because they involved what we were learning.	2
Placements (n=22)	
<i>Opportunities in Schools</i> Require work in schools with children. Projects should benefit children in some way. Do activities related to field of study. Work in high-poverty schools. Provide more opportunities to connect to specific grade level. Provide more meaningful projects with kids.	14
<i>Location</i> Offer hours in the local community. Offer placements on-campus. Work with transportation issues. Have schools closer to campus.	6
<i>Religious Affiliation</i> We should be able to use religious organizations.	2
Positive Outcomes (n=28)	
<i>Effectiveness of Program</i> Program worked really well. I have no suggestions. The program runs smoothly—no reason to adjust. I thought it was great. I enjoyed this part of the program and wouldn't change it. I liked the way it was set up—worked both in and out of classroom. It's an excellent program.	21
<i>Need for Service-Learning Program</i> Program is something useful. This is a great program that future educators should complete. I believe the program is a very good thing to require; it does its purpose.	7
Suggestions (n=21)	
<i>Clearer Project Guidelines</i> Communication could be better. Explain it better. Provide more instructions for projects. Provide more organization. Provide more structure.	11

<i>Time Related Issues</i> I found it difficult to find time. The program should consider how busy students are in college. We need more time for assignments. This is difficult for part-time students.	10
Miscellaneous/No Response (n= 15)	

The data analyzed thus far are based on students' perceptions collected at the conclusion of their elementary education program. This has its limitations. Further research needs to be conducted to better understand the effects of this program and the degree to which the three-course sequence benefits students as they move from service-learners to service-leaders. The data collection methods and instruments need to be expanded. It would be beneficial to gather pre/post survey data as well as conduct focus groups and interviews to better understand the transformation of service-learners into service-leaders. While there are some limitations to this study, it also makes a contribution to the literature in the field. Specifically, these data were collected from a large group of students at the end of their program. The data afforded a view of the outcomes from participating in a progression of experiences, not just one course or activity. Our findings may be helpful for other teacher education programs in describing the effectiveness of a program designed to foster service-leaders who are motivated to use service-learning as a pedagogical tool in their future classrooms.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from the data provide evidence that this service-learning program was beneficial to preservice teachers. There were positive outcomes, both professionally and personally, for this group of prospective teachers. We are encouraged by the results of the survey,

and we believe the results indicate that we are meeting our intended goal of developing service-learners into service-leaders.

The importance of frequent, consistent data collection and analysis for our program cannot be overstated. Because as a faculty there is a strong commitment to service learning and social justice and because our students exhibit high rates of volunteerism, it is all too easy to get complacent in a self-congratulatory routine while missing the real program aims. No doubt, when volunteerism becomes mandatory, there is a shift in the dynamics and meaning of the activity. Therefore, it becomes paramount to check our students' perceptions and lived experiences against our own assumptions and hopes.

Program statistics show that in an average academic year 200 sophomores participate in a service-learning project related to the content of their directed elective; 200 juniors participate in service-learning projects working with underserved populations; and 200 seniors lead a service-learning project with their internship classroom prior to their student teaching semester. These school-based projects actively engage approximately 4000 elementary students per year. The numbers alone speak to the need for us to continue to build and maintain a high quality service-learning program.

For over ten years our goal has been to foster the development of service-leaders that have a desire to instill a service ethic in the students they teach. We have graduated over 2,000 preservice teachers since the inception of our program. We work to continuously improve our program based on feedback from our prospective teachers and faculty. What we have learned is the importance of purposeful program and curriculum design. Creating the right structures that help preservice teachers develop from service-learners into service-leaders is crucial. Our

prospective teachers are supported as they move through this continuum because we have intentionally designed a sequence of experiences and activities that build on one another. In the end, we hope that these prospective teachers not only will feel empowered to lead a service-learning project in their school but also will understand the profound influence they will have on creating the next generation of civic-minded members in their communities.

The Greek mathematician Archimedes is said to have remarked, “Give me a place to stand and I shall move the world.” It is the abiding hope of the Jacobson Service-Learning Program that by giving our prospective teachers the opportunities to serve, they may feel empowered and challenged to confront the issues of our times and, indeed, to make a difference. We will provide them a place to stand; the rest is in their hands.

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