"I Will Be a Better Teacher because of this CBL:" Learning to Teach through

Community-Based Learning

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Abstract

This study used interviews with eight teacher candidates to understand how they connect community-based learning projects to their process of learning to work with students different from the interviewees and teach for social justice. Findings indicate that community-based learning projects, integrated with other program components, supported candidates' development as teachers of students with diverse backgrounds and as teachers oriented toward social justice. However, candidates did not learn the same thing at the same time. Community-based learning can provide opportunities for candidates' knowledge and needs to be recognized and included in the process of learning to teach.

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New teachers must be prepared to function successfully in schools as they exist today and

also be educated to take a leadership role in the improvement and reculturing of K-12

education to more fully meet the needs of individual students and resolve societal

problems. One approach that can address both these tasks is the integration of service-

learning into teacher preparation programs. (Erickson & Anderson, 1997, p. 1)

Three claims used in this epigraph connect community-based learning to teacher

education. First, teacher education must prepare teachers who understand schools as they

currently exist yet are well-prepared to use approaches to address the needs of an increasingly

diverse student population. Second, improved K-12 education that adequately meets individual

students' needs is an issue of social justice. Third, the inclusion of community-based learning in

teacher education can support the development of teacher candidates who will be sensitive to the

complexity and traditions of school yet committed and prepared to ensure *all* students have

access to equitable educational opportunities.

This article presents findings from interviews with eight volunteers enrolled in a teacher

education program developed with goals similar to those outlined by Erickson and Anderson

(1997). The interviews were conducted in the first year of an on-going study designed to capture

teacher candidates' perspectives on the role of community-based learning experiences as part of

their process of learning to teach. The teacher education program implemented community-based

learning as early field placements with the goal of supporting candidates' development as

teachers prepared to reculture schools for the benefit of student learning. Community-based

learning was not intended as an add-on; instead it was adopted and integrated because it matched the goals and rationale of the program.

In the context of this study, *community-based learning* and *service-learning* are used as synonyms. Although service-learning is the more common term used in research literature, there is great variation in definitions and implementation strategies connected to either term. I use *community-based learning* to reflect accurately the context of the study but use Howard's (1998) description of "academic service learning" (p. 22) as the basis of the definition. Community-based learning is a pedagogical model intentionally structured to maximize a reciprocal relationship between the needs of a community, candidates' experiences in a community, and academic content. The expectation is that intentional community-based learning (CBL) experiences will support participants' understanding of academic content, and academic content will support participants' learning from their CBL experiences while the candidates also contribute to meeting the needs of a community (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001; Bringle & Hatcher, 2003; Coffey, 2009; Cone & Harris, 2003; Howard, 1998).

In the next sections, the theoretical framework, the program, and the study each situate the findings in a broad context of preparing candidates committed to and enabled to be change agents—individuals who will challenge beliefs, and practices that limit equitable educational opportunities. The final sections summarize initial findings and contend that community-based learning experiences can play an important role in candidates' processes of learning to teach, but they are only one component of a long-term process.

Theoretical and Empirical Background

Agents of Change: Imperatives in Teacher Education

Diversity and attempts to change teacher candidates' beliefs and attitudes have become common in research in teacher education; yet the socially—and politically—charged issues related to diversity and the complex, multi-faceted process of change are commonly treated as simplistic phenomena independent of contexts and individuals' previous experiences, beliefs, and attitudes. The imperatives behind the needed changes are clear, while the process of change remains murky (Cochran-Smith, 2004; Nieto, 2000; Zeichner, 1999; 2011).

U.S. teachers are most frequently white, monolingual in English and from middle to upper socio-economic groups while their students increasingly are students of color, English language learners, and students from lower socio-economic groups (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 1998; Coffey, 2009; Wade, 2000). Cochran-Smith (2004) and others name this reality the "demographic imperative" in teacher education (p. 4-7)—the need to include exposure to multiple forms of diversity and opportunities for candidates to develop expertise in support of all students' learning (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Coffey, 2009; Nieto, 2000; Theoharis & O'Toole; 2011). In addition to differences in experiences between teachers and students, the demographic imperative includes recognition of disparities in academic success connected to race, culture, language, and class (Hollins, 2011; Howard, 2010; Nieto, 2010; Nieto & McDonough, 2011).

I propose two additional imperatives in teacher education: a democratic imperative and an identity imperative. A "democratic imperative" requires candidates to recognize that institutional racism, deficit thinking, and the myth of a color-blind perspective as an idealized

utopia are inconsistent with democratic principles and practices (Duncan-Andrade, 2011; Gourd & Lightfoot, 2009; Myrdal, 1944; Nieto & McDonough, 2011; Tatum, 1997). Social and institutional culture that supports inequities in education needs to be challenged through curriculum and instructional strategies. An "identity imperative," emerges from socio-cultural theories of teaching and learning and demands acknowledgement that all learners interpret new information and new experiences through their cultural and educational lenses (Hollins, 2011; Nieto, 2010; Tatum, 1997).

Preparing candidates to work with people from diverse groups often requires individuals to shift their thinking 1) from historical, context-free positions to awareness of structured inequalities rooted in history and ideology (Freire, 1972/2000), 2) from a cultural deficit view to a cultural abundance view (Sibbitt, 2010), and 3) from a colorblind perspective to a deep understanding that individuals' identities are embedded in their cultural, racial, economic, gendered, and other experiences (Hollins, 2011; Tatum, 1997). The demographic, democratic, and identity imperatives of teacher education are aligned with a social justice orientation, keeping equity and the value of diverse communities and people at the center of curriculum and instruction (Borrero, 2009; Christensen, 2009; Nieto, 2000).

For some candidates, necessary shifts to develop a social justice orientation may require significant repositioning while developing teacher identities (Hollins, 2011). Other candidates may develop further a critical consciousness, while some may recall discriminatory practices from their previous experiences as students. Teacher candidates do not share uniformly the same beliefs, attitudes, or experiences; however, in this way, candidates are no different from any other group of students in formal education. Teacher candidates also deserve to be treated with respect

and supported as they grow and learn. Building on and valuing the knowledge and experiences candidates bring to teacher education may serve as strong preparation for acting as change agents as teachers (Hollins, 2011). Perhaps, then, preparing candidates for teaching in diverse classrooms means supporting candidates' development rather than expecting immediate transformation of beliefs, attitudes, and practices (Hollins, 2011)

Connecting Community-Based Learning and Empowerment Pedagogies

Zeichner (2010) convincingly makes the case that "the disconnect between the campus and school-based components of [teacher education] programs" (p. 89) is common and in need of thoughtful attention. Traditional field placements expose candidates to the reality of classrooms and present valuable opportunities to work in public schools but may not offer opportunities to challenge traditional practices or gain experience using empowering curriculum, instruction, or assessment (Butin, 2007). Making community-based learning projects components of sequenced, required courses can challenge candidates' knowledge bases, require them to question what they know, and integrate democratic principles with pedagogical knowledge and skills (Baldwin, Buchanan, Rudisill, 2007; Butin, 2007; Zeichner, 2010). Additionally, increased awareness of social, political, and educational issues developed by direct work with diverse groups can provide a space for candidates to develop, rather than adopt, a social justice orientation (Andrews, 2009, Baldwin, Buchanan, Rudisill, 2007; Nieto, 2000).

Howard (1998) posits community-based learning as a *synergistic model* counter normative to traditional models. Similar to other empowerment approaches to teaching and learning (e.g., Butin, 2007; Christensen, 2009; Freire, 1969/1994; 1998; Onore & Gildin, 2010), Howard's synergistic model views students as active, capable participants in a reciprocal

relationship of teaching and learning. Rather than defining teachers as experts and teaching as transmitting knowledge, a counter normative pedagogy builds on students' knowledge gained in their homes and communities, makes content relevant and engaging to students, challenges stereotypical thinking, and seeks to ensure social and educational opportunities (Butin, 2007; Freire, 1970/1992; 1998; Howard, 1998). The teacher learns from and with students while students learn from and with each other and the teacher.

The synergistic, reciprocal focus of community-based learning provides opportunities for individuals to learn experientially in an authentic setting while contributing positively to the community (Bringle & Hatch, 2003). Ongoing critical reflection as a key component of community-based learning (Borrero, 2009; Cone & Harris, 2003) can provide opportunities for teacher educators to see candidates' individual identities, making room for individualized suggestions as interventions. Potentially, the disconnect between traditional field experiences and academic preparation can be minimized when community-based learning experiences and academic course content are strongly connected.

The potential of community-based learning (CBL) experiences in teacher education appears to be strong, but how do candidates describe and interpret their CBL experiences? The specific research question used in this study was "In what ways have community-based learning (CBL) experiences as initial field placements supported secondary- and middle-level candidates' development to (a) connect theory and practice, (b) teach students who have backgrounds and experiences different from their own, and (c) teach for social justice?

Mode of Inquiry

"Perspective-seeking" as the primary purpose of this study, places it in the qualitative tradition (Langenbach, Vaughn, & Aagaard, 1994). The research questions emerged from practitioner inquiry, or research based in practice, which is specific to the needs of a particular program with the explicit intent to improve practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009; Cochran-Smith & Donnell, 2006). Practitioner inquiry also supports the convergence of complementary areas of qualitative research: action research, critical reflection, and phenomenology which also share key features with community-based learning and work together to provide a platform to understand the abstract concepts identified in the research question.

Both participatory action research and critical reflection acknowledge social inequities and recognize that change happens through the efforts of individuals prepared to facilitate change. Participatory action research emphasizes the critical aspect in a social context (e.g., a community-based organization) and relies on a reciprocal process of teaching and learning (Freire, 1969/1994; Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998), while critical reflection emphasizes investigating individuals' values, beliefs, and actions that maintain or work against educational and social inequities (Freire, 1972/2000). In this particular study, candidates were asked to 1) note changes in their values, beliefs, and actions and 2) explain ways community-based experiences contributed to or obstructed their development as teachers (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998).

Phenomenology uses an inductive process of analysis that relies on participants interpreting their own experiences (Adams & van Manen, 2008; van Manen, 1990). As does participatory action research and critical reflection, phenomenological design 1) values concrete

experiences, 2) trusts that the experts are the individuals who share and interpret their own

experiences, and 3) asks questions that lead to greater understanding of abstract phenomena.

Prior to this study, multiple types of data suggested that CBL projects were worthwhile.

Instructors' observations of candidates during classes, assessment of course assignments, and

community-partners' written evaluations of candidates all indicated that CBL projects were

positively received. However, the data sources did not give specific evidence that linked

candidates' development as teachers to the CBL projects. Phenomenology guided the choice to

use semi-structured interviews to hear perspectives from candidates who had the same education

courses but had CBL experiences in different communities. The interviews were not part of

program requirements nor were they connected to graded coursework. Participants had the

option of interviewing with a staff member they did not know from the Office of Community-

Based Learning and Research or with a faculty member. All volunteers were interviewed after

both quarters of CBL projects were completed.

Phenomenology governed data analysis by focusing on the phenomena rather than using

data to evaluate candidates' learning along preconceived norms. Rather than comparing

candidates thinking to an ideal outcome, throughout the analysis the primary question was, "How

can these candidates' descriptions and analyses of their community-based learning experiences

inform our understanding of the following constructs: 1) connecting theory and practice, *2)*

teaching students with backgrounds and experiences different from themselves, and 3) learning

to teach for social justice.

The Setting

Candidates interviewed were in a secondary- and middle-level teacher education program at a research university located in a suburban area. Candidates simultaneously work toward a master's degree in education and certification in one or more disciplines (e.g., biology, English, math, or social studies/history). The program is cohort-based, and candidates proceed sequentially through courses for six quarters. The suburban campus serves a large geographical area that historically has had little racial or linguistic diversity; however the demographic imperative has surfaced recently.

The program maintains that all teachers need to be prepared to teach all students in any context. Therefore, content often reserved for a single course on diversity or included in separate courses for teaching English learners or students with special needs is integrated throughout the program. Candidates are introduced to empowerment models of education, and CBL projects are integrated in academic courses during the second and third quarters, prior to student teaching. Coursework and CBL projects are designed to provide opportunities for candidates to develop skills and knowledge to enable them to develop a social justice orientation and to work with people different from themselves. Candidates' critical reflection on their learning is an essential component of the program.

The Participants

Candidates generally select the program due to location, scheduling considerations, and the reputation of the university rather than because of expectations related to the curriculum. Consequently, some, but not all, candidates are surprised by the emphasis on equity and educating students traditionally marginalized in schools. Candidates in the program are typically

white and monolingual of middle to upper middle class economic status. Generally, candidates have been successful academically as students, and they have few experiences working with students whose backgrounds are different from their own. However, there are individual exceptions. Three of the eight interviewees of the study are able to converse in a language other than English, and one interviewee is African American. Three interviewees reported being "not strong" or "average" academically in high school, and three reported being from homes with economically limited resources during high school. Four of the eight interviewees are women and four are men. Two were seeking endorsement in biology, two in social studies, two in English, and two in social studies and English.

The Community-Based Learning Projects

Community-based learning as initial field placements is intended to be a scaffolding strategy and a means to strengthen guided critical inquiry connected to practice. Candidates typically work in after school programs, teen centers, non-profit organizations, and programs that serve specific populations (e.g., English learners, students identified as needing academic support). When candidates choose to complete their CBL projects in classrooms, they generally focus on informal tutoring or mentoring in small groups rather than assisting teachers.

All candidates were provided information to support their CBL projects: 1) the theoretical roots of community-based learning grounded in experiential learning (Cone & Harris, 2003); 2) different ways to record data in field notebooks (e.g., using reflective journals, critical incident reports, and double entry journal); and how to use critical reflection for analysis (Bringle and Hatcher, 2003; Cone & Harris, 2003; Cooper, 2003). Candidates' learning was emphasized, and

all candidates were cautioned against identifying selves as the expert or hero in their field

notebooks or CBL papers. CBL projects contributed to calculated grades in academic courses.

Data Collection and Analysis

Eight interviewees were asked to discuss examples of their learning to 1) connect theory

and practice, 2) work with individuals different from themselves, and 3) teach for social justice.

Interviews were transcribed and checked by participants for accuracy. In alignment with

principles of phenomenology, no attempt was made to assess whether the interviewees' responses

are "typical" of their cohort or can be verified by other sources (e.g., instructors, community

partners, or participants' written work). Interviews were coded for emerging themes with

intentionality to hear the perspectives of the interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; van Manen,

1990) on the use of CBL projects as initial field placements.

After multiple readings of the interviews, interpretations evolved, as described in the next

sections. As stated, the construct of connecting theory to practice was a focus of the research

question and thus guided our interviews. The candidates' responses showed that the construct of

connecting theory to practice was subsumed by all of the categories that emerged. Also, the

candidates' responses focused analysis more specifically on the process of learning to teach.

Evidence that interviewees were learning to teach emerged when interviewees shared examples

of (a) developing his or her own theory, (b) taking ownership of a learned theory by articulating

it in his or her own words (Bakhtin, 1981) (c) providing an example from his or her experience,

or (d) noting or implying increasing confidence. Comments of the candidates also revealed

challenges they faced, and these also provided the opportunity to connect theory and practice.

Along with the category of learning to teach, other categories provided for sorting of themes

(Saldaña, 2009): working with students who have experiences different from the candidate, teaching for social justice, and challenges.

Findings

Learning to Teach: "I will Be a Better Teacher"

Callie succinctly described the sentiments of the interviewees when she stated, "I will be a better teacher because of doing this CBL." Most interviewees recalled nervousness as they approached adolescents to initiate interactions but gained confidence when intentionally connecting to course content. They reported that analyzing their experiences and thinking about multiple interpretations of events and interactions facilitated their critical reflection (Falk & Darling-Hammond, 2010). Interviewees also agreed that the challenges provided the greatest learning opportunities and commented that they thought about incidents for days after they occurred, continuing to make meaning of interactions and considering alternative responses to specific incidents.

Candidates shared multiple strategies in the interviews, such as listening, understanding the students' language, getting to know what young people were interested in, and seeing the kids —seeing how they are with their friends. Candidates also mentioned stepping back rather than trying to control. Candidates shared their using tools that maximize individuals' intelligences, focusing on bringing out the students' brilliance, and making content more assessable and relevant to students. Candidates' comments showed understanding the complexity connected to learning in a different language and culture along with challenging and "retooling" to get away from the "deficit model of looking at people." Interviewees focused on different strategies depending on their previous experiences and the communities in which the worked.

Learning to Teach Individuals Different from Selves

Not all candidates completed CBL projects in racially or linguistically diverse settings; however, interviewees who did work in racially and linguistically diverse settings recommended future candidates in the program be required or strongly encouraged to complete at least one CBL project in an environment where they would be minorities. Interviewees were convinced that working directly with students different from themselves, especially working with students with diverse academic needs and English language learners provided the greatest learning opportunities. Participants gave examples of successes (e.g., students, who had been failing courses, earned C's after mentoring), and they gave examples of frustration (e.g., students who did not "perform" despite several one-on-one sessions).

Interviewees also noted that the CBL projects helped them become more aware that students often had backgrounds very different from their own. They worked to "get past" their initial interpretations of body language and appearances (rather than relying on assumptions), practiced listening and working to get to know youth, and connected to literature on identity development. For example, Jeff noted his initial anxiety about working at a teen center with students, who were similar to him racially, but different from him regarding economic history and family expectations toward education. However, the initial anxiety disappeared when Jeff realized "they wanted to be acknowledged, respected and heard"—all things he could do. Interviewees gave specific examples each time they attributed their learning to their CBL projects, but not all learning was attributed solely to the CBL projects.

Challenging identities. Interviewees expressed the need to find effective instructional strategies rather than labeling students as unreachable. Elizabeth explained,

I think it was . . . in Christensen [2009], she said something about the talent of the kid

who . . . did not think that he had much to offer, but he knew how to get around on the

bus system . . . . I look at the kid and think "yeah, they might not be able to write a paper,

but what else do they know? What else can they teach me?" [It's] more than just what am

I teaching them about history or English.

Elizabeth's statement reflects Freire's (1998) notion of teachers as learners and learners

as teachers and recognizes that her students come to the classroom with skills that she needs to

value. In another section of the interview, Elizabeth acknowledges that her tendency is to "take

charge," and she had to remind herself that was not her role; she needed to learn from the teens

in order to effectively teach them.

Tom, who had thought of teaching in terms of biology content with little thought of

students prior to his first CBL project, worked with students identified with behavioral needs.

Although he was still excited about teaching biology to students who would love science as

much as he did, he made a big shift by realizing he would be the primary teacher of science to

students with special needs:

There is not a lot of help in the special education rooms because teachers themselves are

not, for the majority of cases, strong in sciences or math. So just having that awareness—

if they are not getting it [science] in my class—that could be the last line of defense

especially in science . . . . Those students are really going to need us.

Tom was expressing his new understanding that the high school biology teacher, not the

special education teacher, is the primary science teacher for students with special needs. Tom

also described his developing theory of "navigating all these other issues that I didn't initially

foresee when I thought about being a teacher." Teaching was becoming much more than sharing enthusiasm and knowledge about biology.

Similarly, Peter explained how he challenged himself "to keep thinking 'how am I going to make this relevant to this person. . . who does not share the same experiences as me, and the same language? How am I going to do that?'" Peter may not know how he will effectively teach English language learners; however, he has accepted that his role is to create avenues for English language learners to connect to the content (Falk & Darling-Hammond, 2010).

"You don't know how you'll respond until you have to." Alice had not sought out a setting in which she would be a racial minority but found only a teen center matched her schedule, and she was often the only white person on site. Indeed, Alice was a minority in many ways at the teen center—by race, gender, age, and education. Initially, she questioned whether the young people, mostly boys there to play basketball, would want to talk with her. Alice learned, however, that when she missed a week, they asked about her, and when she visited the nearby high school, some of the youth from the teen center called out to say "hello" to her. Alice felt good about the relationships she had developed and continued to go to the teen center for several weeks after she completed the CBL project. The teen center experience did not make Alice decide she wanted to teach in a highly diverse school, but she was confident she would be better prepared to work with students from diverse backgrounds in a range of settings:

> I don't really want to teach in a high-need, diverse school. That has never necessarily
>
> been something that I wanted to do, so I guess it did not really change my mind one way
>
> or another. But I think I am more open-minded now, like after the adolescent

development class and that [CBL] experience. It also made me a lot more confident that it

would not be such a huge change. I am not intimidated.

Alice's second CBL project was in a middle school where she observed two teachers

team-teaching and using poetry to teach writing. She explained that she loved literature but was

not strong in teaching writing or poetry. However, she was inspired by the two teachers she

observed and learned she could do things that she had not imagined she could do. Neither CBL

project was in an environment familiar to Alice or similar to her imagined future classrooms. In

the classroom, she helped a student use his first language to learn content, and at the teen center,

she remained calm and respectful when a young man initially responded to her with anger. Alice

concluded, "You don't know how you'll respond until you have to."

Alice's professional identity was not challenged nor did her vision of the ideal school

change. Alice had, however, realized that she could do more than she had previously thought.

Alice also became more confident about working effectively with students who have

backgrounds different from her own.

Safe steppingstones to teaching. Alice and many other interviewees became more

comfortable trying out strategies, and they recognized they were laying a foundation from which

to keep learning. The CBL projects were "safe steppingstones." As Cory explained, the stakes

were not as high as they would be during student teaching or beyond:

We are not in charge of the classroom. We can work one-on-one . . . . In particular, there

is one student who, I am not sure what sort of disability or special need he has, but he has

a para-educator . . . . I have made an effort to go and speak with him . . . and try to help

him, and that way I get practice working, so when I do have my classroom I am not

totally afraid of those students.

Cory's choice of words, "totally afraid," imply that he is aware that he has become more

comfortable through practice but he has not finished learning.

Callie was the only interviewee who discussed actually planning and teaching a lesson.

She selected a section from a book assigned for her curriculum, instruction, and assessment

course, *Hotel on the Corner of Bitter and Sweet* by Ford (2009). After showing a PowerPoint she

had created about the Japanese American internment during WWII, she planned to read an

excerpt from the text. The middle-school teacher suggested she read the text first to get the

students interested and then let them ask her questions. Callie explained her excitement:

It worked beautifully. It was amazing . . . . There were some really great questions . . . .

They were very engaged, and they were able to link what we were previously talking

about and what they knew about WWII. It was just a really great learning experience for

me.

Callie's original plan started with transmitting content. However, when Callie adjusted

the plan with the help of the middle school teacher, she witnessed middle-school students asking

great questions, connecting the text to what they already knew about WW II, and being engaged

in learning. Callie also realized (without embarrassment) that her original plan probably would

not have had the same effect on student learning. By teaching that one lesson the way the

middle- school teacher had suggested, she increased her confidence and understanding of the

concept "engaged learning."

Agents of change in the making. During the first quarter of the program, Heather had planned her classroom-based inquiry project around identifying strategies to ensure English language learners are included when they are in classes with English-dominant peers. The following quarter, Heather was excited to do her CBL project, working with English language learners in high-school and middle-school settings; however, the situation was not ideal:

I was sitting with this Korean boy doing homework on something that would be difficult even for me if I could not understand the language. But it was more important to fill in the blanks and get that done than it was for him to understand what he was doing . . . . I have spent many nights lying in bed thinking how this could change. What can be done? How am I going to effect the change—not effect the change, but how can I be someone who can help?

Although Heather knew that completing homework was not the best goal for the English language learner if he did not understand it, she also realized the complexity of the teacher's responsibility. Rather than criticizing teachers, she asked questions that focused on how she might improve educational opportunities for English language learners.

Elizabeth was in a classroom with a progressive teacher. She was amazed by the teacher's relationships with students and his counter normative approach to teaching social studies through questioning rather than telling. She was thrilled to have someone model for her how to use empowering strategies similar to the ones Christensen (2009) described. However, Elizabeth also started to raise her own questions about the curriculum:

I thought a lot about what other way could this curriculum be presented and from what other perspectives this curriculum could be presented. We were looking at the sixties

through the lens of well—hippies really. What about from a woman's perspective? What about from a black man's perspective? What about from a black woman's perspective? What about from American Indian's perspective? . . . Being in that classroom got me thinking a lot about all the different ways you can approach it.

Heather and Elizabeth recognized the opportunities and responsibilities they would have as teachers to make choices that affect student learning.

As we might expect, study participants were in the process of learning to teach students who have experiences and challenges different from their own. Preconceived notions of students and the conception of teaching as the transmission of knowledge and skills were challenged by their community-based learning projects. Participants were changing perspectives, thinking differently about students, and reconceptualizing what it means to learn.

Connecting Community-Based Learning and Teaching for Social Justice

Each interviewee was asked to define "teaching for social justice." Together, their responses appear like a checklist from literature connecting social justice to empowerment models of education and community-based learning. However, looking closely at the individual connections made by candidates reveals that these connections, not just the outcomes, emerge as significant in learning to teach for social justice.

Multiple dimensions of teaching for social justice. Alice connected social justice to teachers' instructional and curricular choices to be more inclusive by considering multiple perspectives and prompting students to "appreciate viewpoints" and offering "a little bit of reshaping." Cory also focused on instruction and curriculum but added a focus on changing the way things are:

Teaching for social justice is, especially in my areas in social studies and English . . . really to teach children how to think on their own, and if they see an injustice happening either personally or school wide scale or even state or country, that they can really do something about that."

Cory also noted that "teaching for social justice is to teach them how to question and how to have their voice heard and really have a say in how their life develops." Callie echoed Cory's idea about students' voices and adamantly defined teaching for social justice as "teaching kids that they have a voice. . . and teaching them the skills to be confident in communicating their voice and their perspective."

Three interviewees focused on access. Jeff defined teaching for social justice as providing "equal access for students of color, but not only about color but language, [and] money." Similarly, Peter connected social justice to "equitable educational opportunities. . . giving kids opportunities to be engaged within content," and "looking at power differentials within our classrooms, just bringing that lens of difference and issues of powers." Tom also mentioned access but focused on awareness of human characteristics such as "ability, gender, sexual orientation, religious affiliation" and being "culturally and socio-economically aware" in order to "level the playing field for everybody." Similar to Cory, Tom added an emphasis on changing the way things are: "maybe undo some of the previous work that has been done that created the stratification."

Perhaps in contrast to some of their peers' focus on issues of power or perhaps because of general tendencies to be positive, Elizabeth and Heather defined teaching for social justice as

helpful to everyone. Elizabeth commented, "I don't see it [teaching for social justice] as bringing people down; I see it as you are lifting people up." Heather emphasized,

> every child deserves a chance. . . a teacher, who will look for the multiple intelligences, who will look beyond their backgrounds, and everything they bring with them to see that. . . child within, a unique person within. I would want that for everybody . . . . Everybody deserves to be treated with respect, and treated as though they are smart.

"Interweaving with what we are learning." Interviewees often made connections between their community-based work and their university coursework suggesting they recognized Howard's (1998) synergistic model. Indeed, interviewees connected content from several of their university courses and instructors, not merely the courses that integrated the CBL projects. Heather saw CBL projects as "interweaving with what we are learning." Heather elaborated, "We are able to see so it is not just theory . . . . It is theory and action." Heather also made connections as she worked with students who are not viewed as academically strong:

> Being able to work with students who have different academic levels, or knowledge, I feel like I have been given some tools to at least slide in there and think 'let's find a way that maximizes this person's intelligence . . . . I love that from Christensen [2009]. And bringing out the brilliance in kids that is something that I don't think I will ever forget.

Jeff, who had worked in three different contexts, noted that some strategies, such as listening, were helpful with all the students. During his second CBL project, Jeff worked with students who were in jeopardy of not graduating because they had not completed one of the district requirements, the completion of a biology project. Jeff explained:

For whatever reasons they are having trouble, and they need to get it finished . . . . Some

of the strategies she [the university biology instructor] has talked about are basically

getting them to understand and relate in terms of what their own framework is, I'd guess.

So what that meant to me was . . . . I'd try to break it down and talk about it . . . . "What

is it that got you interested? What question did you have about that? What did you

observe? What did you want to know?" Once we nailed that down, [we discussed] "How

do you think we could measure that?" What I learned is to break it down to its basic—

almost separate it from the actual science. So I kind of tried to use those techniques, and

they actually seemed to work.

As he described his experience, Jeff connected ideas and strategies to the curriculum,

instruction, and assessment course he was taking at the same time. His choice of words suggests

that he was attempting to apply his interpretation of the instructor's meaning. Rather than

lecturing about the science necessary to complete the project, Jeff began with a series of

questions that focused on the students' interests and broke down the task, making the science

project a process rather than a product.

Interestingly, most participants appeared hesitant when they were first asked to define

teaching for social justice. Indeed, Jeff initially responded to the question by stating, "I don't

think there is a direct correlation between science and teaching for social justice." However, he

continued, "I recognize that is probably a fallacy on my part; I am sure it is." He then shared an

example that his instructor for curriculum, instruction, and assessment in biology had shared in

class and explained that he intended to share that kind of information in his biology courses.

Similar to Jeff, other participants expressed initial reluctance to respond, yet spoke with clarity

and insight when giving examples from their experiences in community-based learning. Participants' comments in regard to diverse experiences underscored a dynamic understanding of teaching for social justice.

Challenges of Community-Based Learning

Candidates also discussed challenges related to the CBL projects. Perhaps the greatest testimony to the candidates' developing theories of practice is their honest discussion of challenges. For some, the challenges related to encountering new situations that posed problems to be solved. For others, scheduling time for the CBL posed a challenge. Another challenge related to the learning opportunities afforded by a site where the candidate could participate.

Challenge of new situation. Candidates encountered problematic situations while also recognizing that the challenges were circumstances that needed to be dealt with rather than situations that should have been avoided. Peter captures the essence of this position:

Looking at challenges, looking at literature that we have been reading in class and making sense of it and kind of breaking down our first assumptions, like "This kid is just crazy and he can't control himself, and I don't know how to get through to him." And thinking about their context and where they are living. So I appreciate the challenges so much more because we have to reflect on those experiences.

Peter's challenges came from difficult situations he had been in while assisting in a special education class. He had not been prepared to work with adolescents out of control. In his case, he would have liked some direct instruction. However, Peter found the requirement to reflect useful as he thought more about situations and considered different ways he might respond next time useful.

Challenge of time. Nearly all interviewees, some speaking more for peers than for themselves, noted that the time commitment for the CBL projects was significant. This was especially true for those who worked full time and/or had young children, such as Elizabeth. However, even interviewees who worked part time or did not work outside the home found the time commitment exceptional. Callie and Heather both completed many more hours of CBL work with youth than was required because they loved it and learned much from the experience, but they acknowledged they could fit CBL projects into their schedules more easily since their own children were in high school. Nevertheless, Callie and Heather also had much less time for other commitments.

Elizabeth had difficulty matching her work schedule with an appropriate site for the second CBL project, and she felt the time required for both CBL projects infringed on all her other roles such as mother, wife, daughter, sister, and friend. Nevertheless, Elizabeth remained an advocate for CBL projects. Elizabeth noted that in the end she realized she was her own biggest challenge when doing the CBL project:

> I have not probably mentioned what probably the biggest challenge was because it was not the CBL or what happened in the classroom, it was the project itself . . . . It was having to leave my job . . . to take time away from my family . . . . It was like one more thing . . . . The benefits showed me about relationships, showed me about teaching from different perspectives, showed me about a classroom management style that . . . I had never seen before . . . . But at the same time, the things that I have learned from the challenges, as difficult as it was, also did show me that.

As disheartened as Elizabeth sounded when describing the challenges she quickly explained how she overcame her feelings of drowning and ended up seeing that she developed some strategies for handling the intense workload that would be inevitable during student teaching and a career of teaching:

My personal change project [an assignment in another class she was taking while completing the second CBL project] was to try to get everything done so I can have Sundays off, and I was not super successful. But just the idea that my whole outlook on getting my stuff done . . . felt like a burden was lifted by working towards it in a different approach . . . . At the end of this quarter, I felt like I was in such a much better place. So I cannot give the CBL total credit for it, but thinking about it I guess helps me in a preparation way . . . going forward to student teaching and beyond in how to handle . . . and how to schedule everything.

Elizabeth may never be a person who is satisfied with less than one hundred ten percent; therefore, her schedule, made even more intense by the CBL project, triggered questions about how she would handle the responsibilities of teaching fulltime. By making her schedule her personal change project, she was able to gain some control and lift part of the burden.

Challenge of matching schedules and needs. Some candidates had a difficult time finding a site in which to complete their CBL projects since their schedules did not match the schedules of prearranged sites. CBL staff worked with individuals to find appropriate sites; however, the extra time meant starting later than ideal for the quarter system. In addition, interviewees who worked at a teen center during the first CBL project generally needed to find a

different site for the second CBL project because the teen centers did not offer opportunities to practice using instructional strategies in content areas.

One reason the program had decided to use CBL projects as initial field placements, rather than requiring more traditional experiences in schools, was to match candidates' schedules. However, the CBL staff has little information about candidates' diverse work schedules and has little control over types of learning opportunities candidates might encounter. For example, Peter found a site that matched his schedule, but the expectations of his mentors at the site were not aligned always with his needs:

> The community-based link with the class teaching in the second quarter was not well aligned. . . .I was still just an observer . . . . Looking at the bright side of things I could watch how teachers were instructing and how kids reacted to it and how they reacted to assessment in that sense. But at the same time, you kind of want an opportunity as a trial run. She did not really understand my role . . . . [On the other hand] In the social skills class [working with students identified with special needs], I was often left with students —about seven or eight students at a time—while the other teacher would go out to the greenhouse. I guess I was just not prepared to take on kids, especially with behavioral issues all at once. Maybe that was not a complete detraction from my learning, but I'd guess I was not quite prepared for it—which is a good thing and a bad. I am trying to see the good in all of it.

Peter's experience underscores how difficult it can be to arrange an ideal community-based learning environment. While taking a curriculum, instruction, and assessment course, Peter *was* in a classroom in his content area and was anxious to try some strategies; however, he did

not get an opportunity to work directly with students. That same quarter, another teacher gave him opportunities to teach students identified with behavioral needs before he felt sufficiently prepared. The strategy Peter found most useful in most situations was to focus on learning rather than alignment.

Challenge of learning opportunities offered at a site. Some sites provided more opportunities to encounter diversity and, therefore, to practice skills necessary for teaching students with backgrounds different from their own. While other sites provided exceptional opportunities for interacting with diverse groups, they sometimes provided fewer opportunities to think about teaching and learning in their disciplines. For example, Tom's CBL project allowed him to work with students with special needs at the middle school for one quarter and at the high school for one quarter, but he had few opportunities to practices strategies in teaching biology to students with identified special needs. Although Tom identified this as a challenge, he also noted that he had greater confidence in being able to teach biology to students with special needs now that he has gained experience working with them. Tom appeared confident that he could "interweave" his biology skills with his learning to teach students with behavioral needs.

On the other hand, Alice easily gave examples of how being able to see how two middle-school English teachers taught content helped prepare her to teach in her discipline and showed her strategies to engage a wide range of voices:

> They [two middle-school teachers] have so many good ideas—the way they moved their students through the different types of an essay, taught them how to write and all the different examples like the poetry they have compiled. . . of all these different types of poems, and I think the students were really into it.

Alice mostly observed while in the classroom, but she was satisfied with her role as observer because she had no experience with middle-school students, and she was a keen observer. She felt better prepared for student teaching the following quarter.

Many of the challenges discussed should be alleviated when possible as the program continues. However, different candidates had different experiences and different needs. While some were dissatisfied with being only observers, others learned a lot by observing. In addition, different contexts for the same candidate affected his response to the same activity. Peter would have liked more opportunity to observe in the special education classroom and would have liked to do more in the social studies classroom. The candidates' discussion of challenges highlights the diversity present in teacher education. One size does not fit all.

Learning from the Interviewees

Zeichner (1999) described "learning to teach scholarship" as research "attempt[ing] to illuminate the nature of the process of learning to teach in different settings" (p. 11). In this study, eight candidates shared their perspectives on learning to teach through their community-based (CBL) experiences. Candidates' remarks substantiated claims made by much of the research on community-based learning in teacher education. Notably, candidates confirmed that CBL projects that are well integrated into a teacher education program have the potential to provide candidates with opportunities to develop theories of practice, skills, and confidence that reflect commitments to 1) progressive ways of thinking about teaching and learning, 2) working equitably with students with backgrounds different from the candidates, and 3) a social justice orientation (Butin, 2007; Erickson & Anderson, 1997; Howard, 1998).

Although interviewees could not attribute easily their development *only* to the CBL projects, they easily identified ways the CBL projects supported their preparation as teachers. Sometimes the indicators were examples of interactions in the community, and sometimes they were observations. Sometimes the indicators were questions that squarely placed responsibility on themselves as teachers to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students. At other times, the indicators were explicit statements of awareness of changes in their thinking, beliefs, or assumptions. In all cases, the interviewees built on their previous experiences, knowledge-base, and commitments to process the new information and experiences to create, not necessarily a transformed teacher, but a more empowered teacher who is aware of his or her responsibility to use the authority of the teacher role to empower students to learn (Freire, 1998; Freire & Macedo, 1995).

Individuals entered teacher preparation with different experiences and different learning needs, and CBL projects provided different opportunities for individuals to learn. Some candidates enter a program excited to learn how to teach diverse populations, while others may not have considered the possibility of teaching diverse populations. Why would we expect that candidates would leave a six-quarter program with the same type or level of knowledge and skills commitment relative to complex teaching and learning and working well with people different from themselves? Elizabeth, for example, entered the teacher education program eager to learn content and skills that would prepare her to make social studies and English language arts exciting and meaningful to all students. Seeing someone teach through a relational style and learning to manage her time were powerful learning experiences for Elizabeth. On the other hand, Tom entered the program without much thought about who his biology students would be.

His powerful learning was realizing he would be teaching youth biology rather than merely teaching biology. Candidates enter teacher education programs from a wide-range of experiences and with diverse perspectives, beliefs, and commitments.

Perhaps, preparation for the teachers in the twenty-first century will value and use the experiences and strengths candidates bring to teacher education as well as provide them with multiple opportunities to develop and practice new knowledge and skills that empowers them as teachers and learners. Two university course quarters of community-based learning will not make candidates different people. However, community-based learning can support candidates as they 1) integrate what they previously knew with new information, 2) challenge previously held beliefs and assumptions, and 3) connect theory and practice in concrete ways (Hollins, 2011).

Connections participants made between coursework and CBL experiences indicate that CBL projects can scaffold candidates' learning. It is crucial, however, to use the same counter normative pedagogy with teacher candidates that we want them to use with their students. As stated previously, community-based learning experiences can play an important role in candidates' processes of learning to teach, but they are only one component of a long-term process. CBL projects do have the potential to contribute to the complex processes of learning to teach students from diverse backgrounds and developing a social justice orientation, but CBL experiences on their own may not be a magic bullet.

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