

Community Conversations Shape Reciprocal Partnerships for Social Justice: A Case Study of a Comprehensive Service-Learning Initiative in a Teacher Education Program

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Abstract

Our teacher education program pursued a Learn and Serve grant with the goal of integrating service-learning experiences throughout the teacher education course sequence. We approached this work with social justice goals in mind, employing community conversations to ensure a participatory process when working with community partners, and we sought to design and implement experiences that prompted our preservice teachers to think beyond the confines of their own experiences as learners. This case study describes this comprehensive initiative, including the conceptual model we used to frame our work. In addition, we describe the results of research we employed to explore the impact of the initiative on the community and on our students.

Keywords: community; refugees; English learners; service-learning

Teacher education programs typically have strong ties to K-12 schools; however, as Mule (2010) notes, many programs have limited connections to the broader community in which schools are situated. In previous research, we have found that service-learning can bridge this disconnect (Tinkler, Tinkler, Gerstl-Pepin, & Mugisha, 2014) while providing valuable learning experiences for preservice teachers that can be different than traditional practica (Tinkler and Tinkler, 2013). Our teacher education program pursued a Learn and Serve grant with the goal of integrating service-learning experiences throughout the teacher education course sequence. Because our town is a refugee resettlement community, we decided to focus on service-learning experiences that provide our preservice teachers with the opportunity to work with English learners (ELs).

We approached this work with social justice goals in mind, working from a standpoint that aligns with the views of Grain and Lund (2016) who argue that

“social justice requires a strong sense of humility in facing the unknown and the uncertain as well as a willingness to listen to those with whom we collaborate toward common goals” (p. 47). To foster this sort of collaborative dialogue, we approached the work from a participatory standpoint drawing from the field of participatory research (Lewis, 2004) and the critical praxis of Freire (1970). In addition to being responsive to the community, we sought to design and implement experiences that prompted our preservice teachers to think beyond the confines of their own experiences as learners. This case study describes this comprehensive initiative, including the conceptual model we used to frame our work, a conceptual model that stresses the importance of community conversations and the complex understanding that stems from robust exchanges. We also describe the results of research we conducted to explore the impact of the initiative on the community and on our students.

Theoretical Framework

We developed this service-learning initiative using a conceptual framework based on Furco's (2000) notion of service-learning as a balance between service and learning. As Furco states the following:

Service-learning programs are distinguished from other approaches to experiential education by their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring. (p. 12)

The model introduced in Figure 1 gives equal weight to the community (the top half of the circle) and student learning (the bottom half). In addition, we structured the initiative around principles of reciprocity with the goal that our partnerships benefit the community as well as providing learning experiences for our students. As Donahue, Bowyer, and Rosenberg (2003) note, reciprocity can happen within the "planning and implementation of the project" (p. 17), but reciprocity can also happen within the relationships that are developed during the service interaction. The goal is for "both groups to view themselves as offering something valuable to the other group" (p. 17). Therefore, this initiative was intended to foster broader programmatic reciprocity as well as specific relational reciprocity.

In order to emphasize the significance of community voice and the importance of a process that is mindful of empowerment and advocacy, the domains at the top of the framework focus attention on the essential role of community to advance partnerships

for social justice. In fact, the initiative is predicated on the importance of community voice as an active and ongoing part of the service-learning initiative. As pointed out by Nduna (2007), "service-learning practice could improve, and its impact on communities could increase if the voice of the community is heard" (p. 69). To accomplish this, the first author met one-on-one with the leaders of nine different community agencies at the outset of this work. All of the agencies work with youth, and the agencies vary from community centers with programming specific to youth to other centers that offer robust services to all members of the community. Some agencies are small, serving only about twenty teens while others have programming that serves close to

one hundred teens. The smaller programs tend to focus on academic enrichment where the larger agencies have robust programming, generally social and athletic programming, though one site also manages a small business program to support youth with employment opportunities through the summer. In addition to community centers, some of the agencies have targeted programming, such as adolescent homelessness or substance recovery. The first author continues to meet regularly with the community agencies that we work with on a regular basis as well as other community organizations that have

knowledge of and insight into community issues.

To facilitate discourse with the community, we developed a Community Partner Advisory Committee (CPAC) comprised of various community agencies. This committee met to discuss the service-learning initiative and provide feedback on our work. We also

Figure 1: Conceptual Model: Reciprocal Partnerships for Social Justice



adopted a process that sought to support the empowerment of community participants and allowed for advocacy. As Stoecker and Tryon (2009) argue, service-learning partnerships are unlikely to empower community partners if university partners are not intentional in creating opportunities for authentic community participation in guiding the work. To create those opportunities, we cultivated time and space for open dialogue in the advisory committee meetings so that community partners could voice their needs and concerns. In addition to partners who advanced educational programming, we invited not only traditional service agencies, but also various advocacy organizations that work with refugees in our community, given that the leaders of most of these advocacy organizations are themselves refugees.

During these meetings, we first sought to collaboratively identify authentic community needs. As Adams (2015) notes, service-learning that is designed based on authentic community needs is more likely to be sustainable as well as impactful. From the ideas generated during the CPAC meetings, we then looked to see which aligned with education since some of the community needs, like improved transportation for families and students, were identified needs but fell outside of our domain. We then aligned course-based academic objectives with those needs, an important element of the bottom portion of our conceptual framework (see Figure 1). In other words, we adapted learning objectives to ensure alignment; when necessary, we adopted new learning objectives. As Lawrence and Butler (2010) found, designing service-learning experiences that support learning objectives is important for the growth and development of preservice teachers. Thinking broadly, we wanted to include service-learning experiences that created opportunities for our preservice teachers to work with ELs. However, we also sought to target experiences that worked for individual courses, so we integrated service experiences across three courses in the teacher education sequence for secondary education students that had not previously included a clinical component. Because community members raised opportunities that aligned with other faculty from across the university, we shared that information with colleagues when an opportunity aligned with their teaching and learning. As an example, a number of agencies framed a need around improved dissemination of their work, so we introduced those agen-

cies to faculty in our university's communications degree program which has a robust service-learning capstone project where seniors work to support the communication needs of local nonprofits.

In our education courses, in the first-year, introductory education course, we integrated an experience where preservice teachers conducted face-to-face surveys with parents in a school district with a high percentage of ELs. For this service-learning experience, the school district sought to gain parent feedback on a number of initiatives designed to increase student motivation and achievement. In turn, the instructors hoped to increase awareness of the social context of schools and how schools might engage parents. The second service-learning experience was embedded in the adolescent development course completed during the second or third year in the program. For this experience, preservice teachers tutored and mentored adolescents (primarily ELs) seeking support in an after-school program at one community center. The instructor hoped that the one-on-one interactions with learners would provide the preservice teachers with an authentic, real-life view of the theories they were studying in the course. The final experience was embedded in a content literacy course completed during the junior or senior year. For this experience, preservice teachers provided academic support for high school students at one of four placement sites that predominately serve ELs. The instructor sought to extend understanding of effective literacy practices for ELs. All of the instructors incorporated reflection activities to make connections between course content and the service experience. During the CPAC meetings, community partners reminded us of the importance of using a strengths-based approach when working with community members; therefore, we sought to embed a strengths-based approach into our reflection practices as an important component of our conceptual framework (see Figure 1). As found by Donaldson and Daughtery (2011), asset-based approaches to service-learning are more likely to foster social justice outcomes.

There are a range of studies that have examined the impact of service-learning on preservice teachers. Studies have found that service-learning can increase self-efficacy (Tice and Nelson, 2015; Brannon, 2013), connect theory to practice (Coffey, 2010), deepen understanding of diversity (Baldwin, Buchanan,

and Rudisill, 2007) as well as increase acceptance of diversity (Root, Callahan, and Sepanski, 2002), and strengthen understanding of social inequality (Chang, Anagnostopoulos, and Omae, 2011). There is limited research on the impact of service-learning on community partners (Stoecker and Tryon, 2009). Blouin and Perry (2009) conducted a study with community partners and found that service-learning had positive impacts but also created some challenges for community partners, particularly around issues of student professionalism. Miron and Moely (2006) carried out research with community partners and found that community agencies who had greater voice in the partnership perceived greater benefits.

There are relatively few studies that provide a comprehensive picture of a service-learning initiative that examines both the impact on the community as well as on service participants. Driscoll, Holland, Gelmon and Kerrigan (1996) used a comprehensive case study design to assess the impact of service-learning on faculty, students, the community, and the university. They found that service-learning had positive impacts on students and the community. Lund, Bragg, Kaipainen, and Lee (2014) conducted a study of a community-led service-learning program that led to beneficial outcomes for both students and the community. A study by Zhang et al. (2013) provides a holistic examination of a service-learning initiative that addressed multiple stakeholders. They found positive impacts for all participants. This study seeks to add to the body of literature assessing service-learning initiatives from a comprehensive standpoint. Two research questions guided this study: 1) What were the impacts of this service-learning initiative on the community and on students? 2) Did we achieve the goals articulated in our conceptual framework?

Methodology and Data Sources

To examine the impacts of this service-learning initiative, we used a qualitative case study design that “offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 50). We collected a range of data to address the perspective of community partners as well as preservice teachers. The data specific to our work with the community included the notes and reflections from the first author’s initial one-on-one

meetings with nine community organizations at the outset of the service-learning initiative. In addition, the data included minutes and participant observation notes (Creswell, 2002) from the initial two CPAC meetings. We also conducted four formal, semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002) with the four community partners that facilitated the service-learning placements for our courses. Finally, we had access to a range of documents that included email from community partners as well as other documents generated through our interactions with the community.

To examine the impact of the initiative on our preservice teachers, we administered a qualitative questionnaire (Johnson and Christensen, 2010) with open-ended questions to students in all three classes during the same semester. Because of the students were at different levels in the program, there was no overlap in the administration of the questionnaires. The questionnaire asked students to articulate their learning gains and to evaluate whether the experience extended course content. There were 120 students enrolled in the three courses. Of these, three students who were under 18 could not participate because of IRB requirements. In total, 99 students agreed to participate and completed questionnaires (57 of 73 in the first-year course; 18 of 19 in the adolescent development course; and 24 of 25). The response rate was 84%. In addition, we had access to a range of course-based documents such as course syllabi and assignment guidelines.

Data analysis proceeded along two pathways. We initially examined the data for the community and students separately. Using an open-coding process (Benaquisto, 2008), the first and second author each coded the community partner data including the initial meeting notes, minutes and observation notes from the CPAC meetings, the four community partner interviews, and email communication and other documents. We then compared codes and identified points of commonality and difference in our coding categories. Working together, we grouped codes into themes to develop findings specific to the community.

We then turned to the data from the student questionnaires. Given the amount of data (n=99), we used a process of descriptive coding and ascribed “labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative

data” (Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, 2014, p. 74). After assigning codes, the authors worked together using a process of interpretive convergence (Harry, Sturges, and Klingner, 2005) to identify themes that emerged from across the data set.

We disseminated the findings from the two data sets looking at the impact on community and the impact on the preservice teachers. We then examined the data from the full case from a deductive stance (Gilgun, 2005) to discern whether the data provided evidence that we met the aspirations of our conceptual framework. By coding the data first through an emergent process, we were able to register themes that may not have fit within our conceptual framework (Gilgun, 2005). This approach allowed us to be mindful of the themes that naturally developed through the process of data analysis. Through these separate iterations of analysis, we were able to examine the impact of the work on the community and on students. We were also able to determine whether the work to support robust community conversations led to advocacy and empowerment for community organizations while supporting meaningful service-learning opportunities for preservice teachers.

Findings

The findings examine impacts on the community and preservice teachers through the lens of our conceptual framework.

Community Voice, Empowerment, and Advocacy

From the outset, we sought to respect and value the voice of community members. To do this, we fostered a range of conversations, including meetings, interviews, and one-on-one conversations. By ensuring that we had time for meaningful conversations, we were able to listen carefully and hear the voice of community members in order to join with them to advance advocacy opportunities for community youth. Regardless of role, community allies were dynamic proponents for empowerment and advocacy. In other words, the community conversations allowed the engaged stakeholders to ensure that action was taken with respect for individuals and communities.

One local school district employee, the Direc-

tor of Diversity and Equity, articulated the role of allies for youth: “Our charge is to ensure access to and the uplifting of the educational experience of all students.” This goal, he recognized, is happening within the context of “significant demographic shifts” since, as a refugee relocation area, the community was becoming significantly more diverse, particularly for the youth demographic. In other words, educational goals are formed within a dynamic and complex community context. A certified English Learners (EL) teacher recognized this complexity as well, indicating that his first goal was to acclimatize students “to the culture as quickly as possible” to support “the transition from their home culture.” This teacher adeptly recognized the need to develop communication skills for use in both community and academic contexts with the recognition that such language development takes time.

Both the district employee and the teacher recognized the importance of listening to student stories. For the EL teacher, the teacher supported an assignment that was based on the “This I Believe” essays. A district employee conveyed during an interview that he was concerned about students being “used as subjects.” The employee was acutely aware of power and privilege which made him cautious to ensure that practices and policies promoted strengths-based approaches that valued student voice. The Director of Diversity and Equity recognized that there is “a charity perspective and a justice one,” and he was interested in conversations about programming to advance justice. He framed his thinking, in fact, in terms of becoming an “ally” to support and engage youth to meet the aforementioned goal of ensuring “access to and the uplifting of the educational experience of all students.” This lens, from his perspective, requires a focus on the importance of being part of and aware of the larger contexts, as this informs the work, and it is complex.

In an interview with two employees who shape youth programming at a community center, including the director of programming, the center’s employees struggled with the supports necessary for families to complete the childcare subsidy applications since their summer programming allowed for state assistance for qualifying families. While this story of process and frustration did not impact the subsequent service-learning programming, it did inform how we

thought about disseminating information to families. During the interview, the employees also shared how they wanted to continue to develop programming that would empower “the teens who attend to take more leadership . . . to have more of a sense of ownership of the teen center.” This advocacy, which was endemic to the goal of the teen center, is also a central learning objective across the teacher preparation program, but we may not have heard about this leadership goal had we not engaged in general conversations across the community.

Community Voice Shifts Program Focus

The data provide evidence that we created opportunities for the community to have a voice in the work of the initiative. One community partner stated that she “would like more partnerships like the one with the first author, where there is an ongoing commitment and a cycle of feedback.” As this community partner makes clear, we not only listened to the community, we also integrated that feedback into our work. The alterations not only impacted the delivery of service-learning within courses, the community dialogue advanced our theoretical lens as well, particularly as it related to our process of engaging community partners to advance opportunities for community members.

Community feedback heightened our focus on a strengths-based approach. Though we went into this initiative with a strengths-based mindset, during the first advisory committee meeting our community partners talked openly about the need for our students to work from a strengths-based approach when working with community members. They wanted to ensure that any partnerships we formed would work to empower community members. This increased awareness on our part led to incorporating a focus on a strengths-based approach into our guiding framework; it also allowed us to be more sensitive to concerns across the community which influenced, as mentioned earlier, our program development. Importantly, the program development was not limited to one course, as is often the case with service-learning; rather, we were able to scaffold experiences across the program to enhance engagement in line with increased voice, empowerment, and advocacy.

To reach these goals, the community members made clear the need for culturally responsive practice.

One community member stated in an interview: “I could see us teaming together . . . creating a project based on service-learning how we might prepare students to be more culturally aware and sensitive and ready to enter a diverse classroom.” We saw the potential for the development of these skills during the service-learning experience as an important skill for future teachers. As Coffey, Webster, and Heafner (2016) note, the goal is to “facilitate the development of teaching dispositions that inspire justice-oriented teaching” (p. 1).

Though supporting the development of cultural awareness in our preservice teachers was a goal we pursued from the outset, it forced us to think more about how we prepared students for the experience. As Rice and Pollack (2000) note, “Preparation takes on another meaning in critical service learning pedagogy as it introduces students to new ways of looking at social issues and of examining the root causes of social problems” (p. 133). We increased a focus on preparation so that our students entered the experience with awareness of social issues as well as culturally responsive practices rather than gaining cultural awareness through mistakes made with community members. In fact, we have also extended this in our subsequent practice, and we are now advancing thinking and research around cultural humility, “a stance where critically-minded individuals are persistently self-aware and self-reflective when interacting with others in order to be attentive to culture, power, and privilege” (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016, p. 193).

We recognize as well that this work aligns with the advocacy of the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) around meaningful undergraduate learning objectives through their *Leap Challenge: Education for a World of Unscripted Problems* (2015) which calls for personal and social responsibility “anchored through active involvement with diverse communities and real-world challenges” (p. 9). By recognizing that real-world challenges are unscripted, the community conversations allowed for a more robust understanding of community needs. Because real world challenges are unscripted, it is all the more vital to reach out to community members. This reaching out also allows for an unpacking of real and perceived barriers, as perceived barriers are genuine when they become an obstacle to participation. This was made clear by staff from a community center who shared that language barriers created challenges

for community youth to access the services of the center. By listening to voices, we move toward more meaningful engagement that advances social justice in the community.

This commitment to empowerment and advocacy had meaningful impacts to programming. For instance, at the outset of the initiative, we focused on developing service-learning experiences with ELs. We thought this focus would benefit community agencies while providing our preservice teachers with valuable learning experiences. However, during the first CPAC meeting, one community member raised the issue of tensions that existed within the community between families living in poverty and the growing refugee community. In order to mitigate this tension, we communicated to our community partners our willingness to work with any of the clients they served in the programs we partnered with. In response to our approach, one community partner stated, “I think the collaboration between [the university] and the community provides all of us with an opportunity to share experiences, make professional connections, and improve the services we offer our students.”

In addition to major structural adjustments, our conversations also informed elements of our programming. For instance, two community partners advocated for a weekly commitment from students (on the same day and time) to allow both a commitment but also programming continuity since community youth, they argued, would become accustomed to their schedules. Their position was persuasive, and the first author adjusted the course requirements to include the weekly commitment. Reflections and follow-up with the community partner demonstrated that the initial belief was realized which benefited the community partner and the preservice teachers, as some youth would return on particular evenings to work with them as they established relationships. One of the community partners later stated, “[the first author] has shown us that a partnership can be win-win.” This recognition of the importance of process in program development can lead to mutually beneficial partnerships that have the potential for greater impact for both sides of the partnership (Tinkler, Tinkler, Hausman, and Tufo-Strouse, 2014).

This encapsulates the importance of the top part of the diagram in Figure 1, as it showcases the importance of working to advance social justice. In

fact, in many ways the top of the diagram speaks to understanding and listening to community concerns in order to advance practice to support advocacy around justice. Not surprisingly, it is this commitment to justice that drives the work of community members. The bottom portion more closely aligns to ensuring that students engage in a meaningful learning experience in complement to the actions of community members, and their learning and work is made more impactful through understanding and recognizing the particular community context.

Expanding Preservice Teacher Learning Across the Community

In the invitation we sent out to community organizations for the first CPAC meeting, we wrote: “Through dialogue, we hope to develop a better understanding of organizational needs in order to align community needs with course-based service-learning opportunities.” Our goal was to ensure that we met needs identified by the community and that we also supported learning objectives in our courses. Given the commitment to empowerment and advocacy, it came as no surprise that community members recognized the importance of learning, as developing capabilities to advance opportunities is central to the work of the community members that joined the conversation. The Director of Equity and Diversity framed it by saying that “students will want to be prepared for the future and figure out how to work in a diverse community.” When framing this through the classroom context, a teacher at a local school who also coordinated an after-school academic support program reiterated the importance for preservice teachers to get “experience working with students,” particularly given that, from his perspective, “there is a decided lack of formalized cultural instruction in the curriculum.” Both of these speak to the need to support learning experiences across the community with attention to reflection activities that enhance awareness of strengths. Importantly, the learning and reflection is embedded within particular courses, so the course objectives need to be explicit, and they need to be framed within the context of the complex community.

As is clear from the conversations with the community, the learning and service outcomes should attend to voice, empowerment, and advocacy. By examining the student experience, we are able to discern the outcomes of a program framed through

robust conversation with the community. While the data point to outcomes from individual courses, across all three courses we found an increased awareness of diversity—which is a program goal in addition to being a course goal for the three courses examined in this piece. One student wrote, “Diversity was something I clearly learned through this experience, students had all levels of ability and came from diverse ethnic backgrounds.”

When analyzing the data, we found that the nature of the experiences mattered for preservice teachers, and the nature of the experience helped to shape student understanding of community needs. Though there is evidence across the data set that we met, and continue to meet, community identified needs, not all of the preservice teachers who participated in the research felt that they learned from the experience. Though all of the participants in the adolescent development course (n=18) and the content literacy course (n=24) described learning gains that aligned with the service-learning objectives, only 45 of the 57 participants from the first-year course described learning gains, and not all of these learning gains aligned with objectives for the service-learning experience; the learning was related to the experiences preservice teachers had with other course content.

The learning in the first-year course was impacted by the amount of interaction participants had with parents. Some participants did not have any parents available to survey during their allotted time slot, so they questioned the value of the service experience. Some participants, as well, wrote survey responses that indicated a deficit perspective of parents. In the next iteration of the course, the instructors spent considerable time and effort to develop service-learning experiences that had a greater impact on the preservice teachers while also meeting community needs. The instructors shared more thoroughly how many school structures inhibit parental participation, particularly for those parents whose work commitments do not allow flexible scheduling to attend school activities. Across the program, faculty are developing additional reflection activities to allow program participants opportunities to examine their privilege and positionality.

Complex understanding of learners. For the other two courses, a theme that resonated across those data was a more complex understanding of learners. With this theme, three sub-themes emerged:

1) understanding different types of learners, 2) the importance of relationships in keeping learners engaged, and 3) recognition of strengths.

For the two classes, an adolescent development class and a reading in the content area class, it was interesting to note how students recognized and framed understanding different types of learners. The community-based, service-learning experience shaped their thinking and personal development, particularly as it related to challenging assumptions, including one student who wrote that “no one person learns or develops the same as another. We as teachers cannot assume how one is thinking or adjusting.” Not only is this student positioning themselves as a teacher, they are recognizing the importance of individual difference. Another student shaped their thinking similarly, arguing that the “service-learning experience showed me that students really do learn in so many different ways, and what works for one student may not work for another.”

These learning gains allowed students to be mindful of the importance of engagement and the need to develop relationships. One student wrote about how they learned that “bringing energy and genuinely caring about students will help them open up and feel comfortable.” Another student related how the development of relationships will also impact future practice; the student shared that “I got to relate to individuals, who were comfortable enough to share their learning experiences . . . which will no doubt influence my future practice.” Echoing this sentiment, another student conveyed that they “learned that there is a common thread that binds all people in this world, and that if you can harness that thread then nothing can stand between communication.”

The service-learning also enhanced awareness of a strengths-based approach to relationships. Some of the comments revolved around the paths youth travelled to be in the community. For instance, one student wrote: “It was really inspiring to hear about the journeys of many of the refugee students.” Another student shared how they “seemed more motivated to learn; they keep coming back for tutoring.” Part of the motivation stems from the need to advance language skills which one student conveyed when they wrote: “I learned that for many EL students, if not all. English is the primary reason they struggle in school, and not because of their capabilities and

intelligence.” With the attention on strengths, the university students often framed their thinking within the context of their position as developing professionals. This attention to positionality also helped them to affirm, while recognizing strengths, their own personal and professional development. In one case, a student conveyed the relationship between youth strengths and their professional goals: “The kids that came to receive homework help were so motivated and eager to learn, and it was a great step towards my goal of teaching.” This comment echoes back to the Director of Diversity and Equity who recognized the shared learning that was happening, learning that is related to positionality.

Improved strategies for teaching English learners. A second theme that emerged through the analysis of data was improved strategies for communicating with and teaching English learners. There were three sub-themes for this category: 1) increased knowledge of language acquisition, 2) increased awareness of what a teacher needs to do to engage English learners, and 3) strategies for teaching English learners.

These sub-themes are all related to each other, and one student summed it up by recognizing that “[Y]ou can’t force comprehension.” While this student was specifically referring to reading comprehension, a number of students articulated a newfound understanding of language acquisition and an understanding of what teachers need to do to be successful. On the pedagogy side of the equation, one student wrote: “I learned how to approach assignments from their perspective and also how to break down the information appropriately.” Another student recognized that an English learner “may understand the material but have a hard time communicating it back.” This recognition of the relationship between learning and language acquisition is important, and it aligns nicely with the aforementioned strengths-based comments; it also shows that the preservice teachers are working to establish meaningful pedagogies that enhance engagement and learning. This often meant finding common ground to be able to establish opportunities for engagement. One student recognized this, and wrote: “Learning how to explain abstract concepts . . . by giving relate-able or concrete examples and synonyms they know.” In other

words, the issue is not the dissemination of abstract concepts; the issue is language, and students across the classes recognized the importance of language. One preservice teacher, for instance, recognized that a student “forms sentences that are understandable but grammatically incorrect.” This same student additionally conveyed that they saw “students struggle with homework because they do not understand the content or instructions due to a language barrier.”

The result was not frustration; rather, the result was discerning strategies to improve language acquisition and to shape learning that is mindful and respectful of diversity. One student, for instance, recognized that it was “really hard . . . to write a paper about a subject, like *Hamlet*” both because of the content as well as the required level of English proficiency. The student focused efforts on discerning the goal of the project, realizing that analysis does not require *Hamlet*, as other texts that are more accessible can be used to manage the same analytical task. The preservice teachers adopted a range of pedagogies to support learning. One student related how they developed a greater sense of patience because they needed to take “time when explaining a certain topic or subject.” In other words, the goal was to learn. Another student found that if they “prompt students verbally and allow them to talk through their ideas, it is easier for them to get them on paper afterwards.”

As preservice teachers learned more about aspects of practice, through reflection they also recognized that their development related to their experiences. One student summed it up nicely when they wrote: “I can honestly say I have learned so much and enjoy going every week. Education isn’t a one-way street.” This aligns with one of the community goals, as articulated by the Director of Diversity and Equity who rightly asserted the need for the recognition of the reciprocity of learning to advance understanding. This recognition is crucial for teachers since teachers who are responsive to feedback are able to advance their practice. One student, who was relatively self-assured, wrote: “I was able to put into practice many concepts introduced by the course as well as identify my own deficiencies in being an educator who wants to incorporate and stress literacy practices in my own teaching.” Another student put it this way: “Their opinions matter, and they really just want to know you’ll listen.” These two statements echo the interests of the community members who

participated in the advisory committee meetings, and these (and similar statements) reveal how reciprocal partnerships advance social justice. In addition to supporting opportunities for community voice to advance empowerment and advocacy, the learning objectives need to be in line. When considering the model for reciprocal partnerships for social justice, the initial community conversations in themselves do not ensure learning outcomes, which is why it is important to evaluate learning outcomes. This feedback cycle offers insights into programming within the context of dynamic community needs.

Significance of the Study

This study demonstrates that service-learning can advance important learning outcomes for students enrolled in service-learning courses. This study, because of the attention to input from community partners, also amplifies the importance of conversations across the community when developing service-learning initiatives. This is particularly important in the field of K-12 education when there can be a disconnect between schools and their communities. Awareness of community-wide conversations allows for the learning goals and objectives within a teacher's class to be framed and understood within the context of the broader, complex community rather than isolated within one class. The goal of teacher preparation should be to foster the aforementioned in order to avoid the latter.

If the goal of service-learning is to find an appropriate balance between service and learning (Furco, 2000), attention needs to be paid to finding a balance between meeting the needs of the community and the needs of students. This study provides evidence that a programmatic service-learning initiative that is structured around concepts of social justice can have benefits for both sides of the service-learning partnership (Donahue, Bowyer, & Rosenberg, 2003). In seeking to empower the community and give them a voice, we gained insight into how to improve the theoretical foundation and process structures of our initiative. This led to improved learning outcomes for the preservice teachers in our program, and those learning outcomes will help them become more effective teachers of all students (He, 2015). Their future teaching practice will be embedded within a community context, and if this context attends to social justice, such as is the case with the community

partners highlighted in this study, there is the potential for greater equity for all members of the community.

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