

Book Review

Margaret-Mary Sulentic Dowell & Tynisha D. Meidl

Expanding Elementary Teacher Education through Service-Learning: A Handbook on Extending Literacy Field Experience for 21st Century Urban Teacher Preparation. Rowman & Littlefield, 2016. 126 pp.

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Who in the teaching profession does not strive to meet the needs of all learners? Meeting learner needs, particularly in a culturally competent manner, is becoming increasingly difficult. The authors reference a staggering statistic: 84% of public school K-12 teachers are White, teaching predominantly non-White students (Maxwell, 2014 & National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). In the teacher preparation field, opportunities for preservice teachers to work within urban contexts in culturally sensitive and meaningful ways are scarce. Moreover, numerous preservice teachers lack familiarity with urban youth's life experiences and prior knowledge as well as their community needs. Enter the handbook, *Expanding Elementary Teacher Education through Service-Learning* (2016).

Preservice teachers are required to partake in various medial field experience opportunities. Medial experiences are defined as those between initial structured observations and the capstone student-teaching-experience, characteristically involving small group tutoring, lesson planning, and assessment. The authors consider traditional field experience models antiquated, as the experience format and placements have not adapted to a 21st century need: preparing teachers for increased cultural competence within urban environs. Sulentic Dowell and Meidl promote service-learning to address this problem. Although field experiences are integral components of teacher preparation, field experience placements are, typically, ones of convenience. Partnerships of convenience (i.e. an established relationship between a univer-

sity-based teacher educator and a principal whose elementary school site is mere minutes from the university) perpetuate the notion that field experiences are simply an addendum to teacher preparation. Convenience partnerships tend only to benefit the preservice teacher, not the community or placement site.

Sulentic Dowell and Meidl's short read, 108 pages in all, makes a strong argument for replacing traditional medial field experiences with those of the service-learning variety. In this book, service-learning in urban communities is encouraged. The authors take time to reflect on the history of the settlement of urban communities and subsequent community needs. They advocate the use of Furco's (1996) balanced and reciprocal service-learning model. This "reciprocal" partnership between preservice teacher and community is purposeful, deliberate, and beneficial to both parties. The preservice teacher benefits from learning within the rich community setting. This increases teacher awareness and ability to address challenges urban students face, including poverty. The community benefits from having their needs met by the preservice teacher. Community needs are identified first, not based on sheer perception but on actual data. Subsequently, teacher educators negotiate next steps in regards to preservice teachers within the community.

Delano Oriaran's Authentic and Culturally Engaging model (2012) is suggested as a basis for service-learning. Based on the authors' experiences, service-learning opportunities within urban environments prepare more fully soon-to-be teachers to meet urban student needs. Rich service-learning

field experiences not limited by convenience factors improve cultural responsiveness and sensitivity on behalf of the preservice teacher. Experiences with urban community partnerships truly prepare teachers to meet the needs of all learners.

In the initial chapters, the readership audience seems straightforward: teacher educators and coordinators of field experiences. Throughout the book, however, Sulentic Dowell and Meidl utilize literacy as the context to prepare teachers within and for urban environments. One example of a service-learning reciprocal partnership related to literacy is as follows: An urban community is in dire need of improved literacy, preservice teachers learn how to teach it, community literacy improves, and both parties benefit. Using literacy as the framework service-learning throughout the book may deter math, science, and social studies teacher educators from enjoying this publication; however, literacy is a foundational skill, and this guide to service-learning is significant for all teacher educators.

Expanding Elementary Teacher Education Through Service-Learning seeks to help others benefit from the authors' own service-learning experiences across the United States. For readers unfamiliar with service-learning or those hoping to implement a similar program at their institution, Sulentic Dowell and Meidl's later chapters read like a how-to manual. Topics include the following necessary infrastructure for service-learning from travel considerations to/from placement site to risk management concerns (Chapter Five), a comparison of service-learning field experiences to more traditional medial field experiences (Chapter Six), an overview of potential community partners and how to communicate with them (Chapter Seven), and assessment methods for service-learning field experiences with example rubrics provided (Chapter Eight).

Case studies and vignettes are interspersed throughout the handbook. The case studies illustrate two service-learning experiences, each coordinated by one of the authors. The vignettes provide insight into a redesign and implementation of a literacy course to include service-learning and an alternative preservice teacher placement within a library. These functioned as insightful glimpses into the concrete side of service-learning implementation rather than the theoretical. Both case studies and vignettes could have been given even more attention in this book.

The authors thoughtfully included information regarding preservice teachers' cultural competence and preconceived notion transformations within service-learning placements; however, first person testimonials written by the preservice teachers regarding their own experiences would have been welcomed.

Overall, Sulentic Dowell and Meidl's work is an excellent reference manual for service-learning scholars to keep on hand. The layout of this text includes plentiful subheadings for quick reference. A paragraph at the end of each chapter orients the reader by summarizing the chapter and discussing what comes next. The final chapter provides a literature review of publications related to service-learning concepts. The lack of superfluous chapters and text will be much appreciated by busy teacher educators. *Expanding Elementary Teacher Education Through Service-Learning* is a solid resource that anyone interested in preparing educators, service-learning, or meeting learner needs will want to add to their collection.

Jamie Allison Hipp
Louisiana State University

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