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ABSTRACT
        A qualitative, interpretive case study utilized ethnographic
techniques to discover what happens, and what preservice teachers think about
what happens, within a credited community service learning component for a
multicultural education course. Subjects were 24 preservice teachers studied
as one case. Three roles and perspectives that emerged from fieldwork are
described and analyzed. Although preservice teachers tended to "play it too
safe" for multicultural education, the study concluded that community service
learning augments teacher preparation for culturally diverse contexts. Ways
in which community service learning can be intensified or redirected to
further undergird and augment multicultural education need to be considered.
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What Really Happens? Community Service Learning for Multicultural Teacher Education

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What Really Happens? Community Service Learning for Multicultural Teacher Education

This is a qualitative, interpretive, case study which utilizes ethnographic techniques to discover what happens, and what preservice teachers think about what happens, within a credited community service learning component for a multicultural education course. Three roles and perspectives that emerged from fieldwork are described and analyzed: playing it safe, teacher/helper, and companionship. Although preservice teachers tended to "play it too safe" for multicultural education, the study concludes that community service learning augments teacher preparation for culturally diverse contexts.

What really happens in community service learning, particularly when it is connected with teacher preparation for multicultural education? Why should educators care? In this paper, we propose that community service learning can provide the kinds of experiences preservice teachers need to become multicultural people and teachers. According to Nieto (1996), most prospective teachers, regardless of cultural or social backgrounds, were raised and educated in pervasively monocultural, Eurocentric, English-speaking environments. As a result, many preservice teachers lack personal life experiences that can undergird multicultural perspectives. Nieto argues that "becoming a multicultural teacher, means first becoming a multicultural person" (p. 353) and that this process depends upon self-reflection and re-education. Preservice teachers need to question their own racism and biases, learn more about cultural diversity and pluralism, and grapple with realities from multiple perspectives. Otherwise, their approach to multicultural education will be shallow and superficial.

Potentially, community-based learning, particularly in culturally diverse and/or low-income communities, can help preservice teachers develop personal connections across cultural borders, regard communities as educational resources, and view students as community members (e.g., Mahan, Fortney, & Garcia, 1983; Sleeter, 1995). It can bolster the learning needed to shift from monocultural to multicultural worldviews. Yet, such experiences are rarely part of teacher education programs (Zeichner & Melnick, 1996). Instead, preservice teachers usually are placed in schools with culturally

diverse populations. However, unless preservice teachers work with teachers who are sensitive to diverse or low-income communities, school experiences are unlikely to foster cultural awareness (e.g., Tellez et al., 1995; Zeichner, 1992).

Service learning pedagogy, with its real-world focus, emphasis on critical reflection, and impetus for reciprocity, can structure community-based learning. Good service learning balances service with learning; it deepens academic curriculum, responds to real community needs, and equally benefits all participants (Sigmon, 1994). This framework offers a viable, affirmative way to connect teacher educators and prospective teachers with the natural constituents for multicultural education: disenfranchised people in U.S. society (Sleeter, 1996).

As a combination, community-based learning and service learning (hereafter, community service learning) can provide experiences that inform preservice teachers about communities, their problems and resources, and that empower community people, as participants in educational programs. Particularly for parents and communities who feel distanced from schools, service learning can offer opportunities to help shape future teachers for their children. Further, it can complement abstract classroom-based inquiries about race, culture, and power (O'Grady & Chappell, 2000).

A small body of literature, most of which stems from instructor's descriptions of their own multicultural education or social foundation courses, indicates that community service learning assists preservice teachers' processes of self-reflection and re-education. Much of this research is anecdotal, based on self-reports (e.g., journals, reflective essays, interviews), and focused on the experiences of European American, female, preservice teachers. Investigations tend to be constrained to single semester sequences of community service learning, usually located in sites which serve ethnically diverse

and/or low-income youth (e.g., after-school recreational programs, big brother/big sister programs, or tutoring options). These studies indicate that community service learning increases awareness and acceptance of cultural diversity (e.g., Boyle-Baise, 1998; Hones, 1997; Sleeter, 1995; Tellez et al., 1995), challenges prejudicial, stereotypical beliefs (e.g., Fuller, 1998; O'Grady, 1997; Seigel, cited in Wade, 1998), develops more complex understandings of institutional racism (O'Grady & Chappell, 2000; Vadenboncoeur et al., 1996), and heightens commitment to teach diverse youth (e.g., Fuller, 1998; Tellez et al., 1995). However, although Sleeter (1995) claimed that service learning yielded data fruitful for a "structural analysis of oppression" (p. 425), other teacher educators found it difficult to spur structural critique or social activism based upon service learning (e.g., Boyle-Baise, 1998; O'Grady & Chappell, 2000; Vadenboncoeur et al., 1996). As a caveat, O'Grady and Chappell (2000) worried that service learning projects may reinforce "we-they" divisiveness between white college students and communities of color, especially when there is a "lack of true partnership between the college and the community of color" (p. 214).

There is a paucity of information about what really happens within community service learning experiences, particularly related to multicultural teacher education. What do preservice teachers do that supports or limits reconsideration of their monocultural, Eurocentric worldviews? Do certain experiences spur self-examination and realization? Are there constraints to the learning process? Are there ways in which experiences could be altered to motivate more critical cultural and social reflections? These questions are explored in relation to the study detailed here. This study describes what happened within community service learning and considers the meanings prospective teachers made of their experiences. Guiding questions were: what really happens within community service

learning for multicultural education, what do preservice teachers think about what happens, and what factors influence both? Following the consideration of these questions, implications for teacher education are discussed.

<div align="center">The Course and the Service</div>

A few definitions are in order. Multicultural education was viewed as critical (i.e., McLaren, 1995) or socially reconstructive (i.e., Sleeter & Grant, 1994). From this perspective, multicultural education includes the development of cultural knowledge and insights as well as the interrogation of social and cultural dynamics of power. Cultural sensitivity and relativity and critical reflection underpin this approach. Based upon this perspective, course goals included: understanding one's cultural identity and social location and their impact on teaching, learning about historically oppressed groups; examining educational inequality, and gaining strategies to promote educational excellence for all youth.

Stanton, Giles, and Cruz (1999) propose a "student-community development continuum" (p. 96) which differentiates emphases within service learning: on one end of the continuum are efforts to empower students through service to communities, on the other are efforts to empower communities through student service. Our work was located more toward the empowerment of students than communities, although there was direct, strong community presence in the development of the project and some community involvement in its implementation. Aims for community service learning included: interacting with culturally diverse and low-income groups, disrupting stereotypes, gaining awareness of community problems and resources, and learning to work positively with diverse youth.

Community service learning was a credited, twenty-hour course component. Prospective teachers were placed in community organizations that served culturally diverse and/or low-income

youth, and they selected their own placements. Service sites included a historically black church, a church mixed by race and social class, two community centers, two girl scout troops for "at-risk" girls, and Head Start. Sites were chosen because they fostered a self-help, rather than a compensatory ethic. Mixed race inquiry teams of three to five preservice teachers worked together at each community organization. Services responded to site-based needs and included tutoring, teaching small groups, and assisting recreational programs. Further, preservice teachers attended and/or helped organize site events, particularly parent or board meetings. They were encouraged to "get to know" youth, adults, and families at their sites.

In-class reflection about community experiences occurred biweekly. These sessions provided key opportunities to debrief, debunk stereotypes, and question social conditions. Preservice teachers wrote four reflective essays, and, often, discussion questions were drawn from them. Questions/topics were selected because of their general significance to multicultural education and their reiteration across essays. Topics included: problems parents face in selecting after-school care, assumptions underlying the "at-risk," label, the social construction of poverty, and discipline norms across race or ethnic groups. In cases where questions were linked intimately to particular sites, participants were asked to seek further information from their agency directors and then to reconsider their concerns. An African American parent, active in local community affairs and an ongoing partner in the service learning project, participated in two reflective sessions and contributed her unique points of view.

Community service learning was bolstered by class activities and assignments. For example, preservice teachers read *There Are No Children Here* (Kotlowitz, 1991), analyzed the book in terms of three themes pertinent to community life (i.e., realities of poverty, responses of the school, and

impact of society on neighborhood poverty and violence), and then considered implications for service learning. Also, preservice teachers completed mini-inquiry projects or "Why?" papers (Sleeter, 1995), related to emergent site-based questions, or curriculum development projects, relevant to youth with whom they worked.

Methodology

This study is a qualitative, interpretive case study that utilized ethnographic techniques. It took place at a large, Midwestern, research university with a predominately white student population. The city was fairly small and dominated by the university. Town and gown distinctions existed, especially between citizens who struggled economically and citizens who were highly educated and financially comfortable. Over a three year period, one author developed partnerships with community organizations that served youth and adults of color and/or from low-income backgrounds. Preservice teachers offered their service and time to these organizations. In return, adults and children in the community welcomed, befriended, and taught preservice teachers about themselves. The study was completed during the academic year of 1998 and 1999, however, most data collection took place during the fall semester of 1998.

Participants

Twenty four preservice teachers were studied as one case. Of the group, twenty preservice teachers were white: seven were male, thirteen were female. Four women were of color: two were Latinas, two were African American. According to a demographic survey, all but two preservice teachers were in-state students, most from small or middle-size towns. Most described their neighborhoods as middle income, but five were from high income and three were from low income

backgrounds. Most preservice teachers had minimal direct experience with cultural diversity or poverty, but several had traveled internationally with the armed forces, and a few others had worked in summer camps for low-income youth or for children with disabilities.

Data Collection

One author was a participant observer and collected the data. The other was a complete participant and taught the multicultural course (Gold, cited in LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). The participation of the instructor in the research was disclosed fully, but approached as secondary to the teaching role. We met weekly to monitor field placements, discuss field experiences, and consider the content of reflective essays. We shared what we "saw" as participant observers and developed questions for small group interviews.

Each site was observed from 4 to 12 times, depending upon the number of inquiry teams placed there. Overall, thirty-three site visits were made. Field notes were taken and an observation schedule was used. Observations lasted one to three hours, contingent upon the activities underway. The field observer stayed until a cycle of activities was completed and until he "got a feel" for the repetitive nature of what happened.

Preservice teachers were interviewed as site-based teams three times, at the beginning, middle, and end of community service learning. Also, a small group of preservice teachers, who differed by race, social class, gender, and regional background, were interviewed individually, in-depth, and over two semesters. Agency directors were interviewed after the service experience. In order to safeguard the privacy rights of youth, we did not interview children without explicit permission of their parent(s) or care givers.

Reflective sessions were audio-taped and field notes were taken as well. Also, completed, written assignments were included in our data.

Data Analysis

We studied multiple forms of data (e.g., interviews, observations, and reflective essays) from varied sources (i.e., preservice teachers, agency directors). Due to space limitations, only part of the data is reported here. However, reference to varied sources triangulated our interpretations. Interviews and reflective essays were read to determine recurrent ideographic themes (Spindler & Spindler, 1997). While we looked for the frequency in which ideas were mentioned, this was not entirely helpful. It was possible for respondents to answer questions or raise concerns in a myriad of ways. Thus, if an idea was reiterated by several preservice teachers, it was considered influential (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to search for diversity within reflective papers and discussions. Attention was paid to site-based differences and influences of race and gender. For observation data, we searched for repeated forms of and reasons behind behavior, then, we contrasted norms with "critical" incidents that stood apart as unusual.

We read the data separately, then, we cross-checked our interpretations. For the most part, we identified similar trends. Meanings and actions often were restated and repeated across sites, which served as an internal check for our interpretations. When we differed, we rechecked the data. Usually, from our alternate standpoints, one of us "saw" or "heard" something the other did not, and we were able to amplify our categorizations. Most puzzling were differences between preservice teacher's expressions of serious self-assessment and seemingly inconsequential field activities. This potential disjuncture or gap became a focal point for our deliberations.

This study builds on previous research by one author (author, 1998; author, in press; author & Sleeter, 1999). Some themes echoed previous studies, and comparisons yielded more complexity. Linkages between this study and previous research are delineated.

Limitations

As one of the researchers was the course instructor, issues of power might have influenced the investigation. Thus, care was taken to reduce potential feelings of coercion. The instructor did not interview or observe respondents. Also, preservice teachers could opt out of the study after the assignment of grades for the course, although none did. Names were used on reflective essays, and frankness could have been impacted. For this reason, essays were counted as completed assignments, but not graded.

When the paper was read by our community liaisons, several noted that their views were under-represented. Our intention was not to exclude, but rather to manage the limits of the paper. In the paper, we discuss site directors as an influential factor, but do not report interviews with this group. We intend the paper as part of ongoing effort to reveal meaning-making and interactions within community service learning.

Roles/Perspectives

The roles and perspectives of preservice teachers, related to community service learning, fell into several categories. These groupings are described separately. Actually, their borders were fuzzy and overlapping. These categories should be considered as interdependent.

Playing It Safe

To their credit, and perhaps because of orientation meetings with site directors, most pre-

service teachers did not hesitate to become involved. They did not sit back and observe, but jumped right in, eager for the experience. Yet, overwhelmingly, they were concerned with "fitting in." Early on, service was marked by accommodation to site routines. Preservice teachers played it "safe;" they did not stand out, they were timely, polite, and obliging. Involvement at the multiracial church exemplified safe interaction. Preservice teachers clapped and swayed during the service, but did not sing or call back to the pastor's remarks with the rest of the congregation. Preservice teachers participated just enough to fit in.

There seemed to be several "safe" options for interactions. One option was to stay focused on the task at hand. For example, when pre-service teachers tutored at the Boys and Girls Club, they kept the children focused on doing homework. The focusing was evident across gender, but was more pronounced with the male at the site. The females were more apt to talk casually with students before returning to the homework. "Task talk" extended to "mentoring" situations where preservice teachers played the role of big brother or sister. The conversation centered on the activity at hand: a discussion about plays in a touch-football game; a question about the design of an art project. Conversation about homes, families, and life outside the center occurred, but it was uncommon. Task talk curtailed opportunities for cross-cultural learning.

A second "safe" option was to keep comments to the students positive. As examples, during the reading program at the community center a preservice teacher coaxed a young man to read by saying, "You read better than I" (J.K., 11/11/98). At Head Start, praise was a common response for almost everything children did--sitting nicely at the lunch table or picking up toys. At Girl Scouts, the preservice teacher told scouts who worked on a badge, "You guys got your stuff done really fast, that's

great" (E.W., 10/19/98), although the scouts were done early because they had not done as much as expected. Negative comments were rare, except when physical safety was a concern. Then, pre-service teachers restrained children from unsafe actions.

A third safe option was to respond to youth, rather than to initiate interactions. Without fail, preservice teachers listened actively to children, rarely, however, did they probe for further information. Over time, preservice teachers took more initiative, especially among the females. While some preservice teachers initiated informal conversations with youth, and others attended parent meetings, most continued to describe their activities as "fitting into" the status quo.

Why did preservice teachers play it safe? For some, caution indicated uncertainty, especially about cross-cultural interactions. In a reflective essay, one white male wrote:

> When I first set foot in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, I was unsure of what to expect. I felt like an ambassador and an invader at the same time. I wanted to make a good impression and I was unsure how I would fit in. . . Before a word was spoken, I learned a valuable piece of information. It is intimidating to walk into a place where you are the minority. (C.S., 10/7/98)

While it is natural to be anxious about novel situations, for some white preservice teachers service learning was a powerful encounter with difference. For these preservice teachers, the outward appearance of compliant service work masked internal struggle and reassessment.

Another reason for playing it safe was that it was the easy thing to do. One white female described her feelings this way: "It was my long day. I thought kids will get off school and be obnoxious. Then, it was actually fun, you get to play with them, it doesn't take a lot of brain activity. You're just hanging out with them" (J.F., 9/29/98). Another white male preservice teacher expressed this view as participation in a "community service baby sitting service" (M.H., 9/29/98). For preservice

teachers like these, service learning was a "no-brainer" opportunity to interact with children.

Further, playing it safe was related to on-site guidance; preservice teachers needed explicit instructions about what to do. According to one white female preservice teacher, "I started playing with the kids because I didn't know what else to do. The teacher didn't say one word to me. I just didn't know what to do" (S.R., 9/29/98). Although, roles and tasks were discussed between the site directors and the instructor, in some cases these directions did not "trickle down" to agency personnel.

Playing it safe impacted preservice teachers of color in ways similar to their white counterparts. As an exception, these women did not characterize service as hanging out with youth. One preservice teacher seemed outwardly reserved at her placement, yet inwardly, she perceived herself as fully engaged and gaining self-assurance. In a reflective essay she wrote:

> I would never go anywhere without a way back from where I come from. At [church], I went three times without a way back and had no problem getting home. I am not saying I would ask any stranger for a way home, I am expressing how I improved my self confidence. (N.G., 12/10/98)

Another preservice teacher spent most of her time in a "safe" tutor role, yet she quietly connected with many youth of color at her site. Two other preservice teachers took some risks: one accompanied a family to a football game, another participated in an overnight lock-in. In both instances, multiple factors were at play. The first preservice teacher had been a drum major and shared an interest in marching band with her young friend from the community, and the second was prompted to stay overnight by her gregarious, white dorm buddy and classmate.

Most preservice teachers considered themselves increasingly comfortable in their placements. Yet, they continued to focus on prescribed service tasks, often in ways that missed opportunities to reinterpret them from a multicultural perspective. For example, at one community center, preservice

teachers had the freedom to develop a reading club. The instructor encouraged them to construct an

initiative around multicultural children's literature. However, the team played it safe and reinforced an

ongoing reading incentive program. They encouraged youth to read more of the books on site,

regardless of their multicultural potential.

Teacher/Helper

The teacher/helper role dominated service learning interactions. When asked to assist with a

task that was "school-related," such as assistance with homework or a scout badge, preservice

teachers immediately fell into a teacher role. They offered praise and encouragement, gave hints and

asked questions. As noted earlier, they kept youth on task. This seemed not only comfortable, but a

default position as well–preservice teachers taught when uncertain about what to do. For example,

when asked to help girls earn a scout badge, one pre-service teacher developed a worksheet of

questions to assist scouts in learning the necessary background information. All tasks were not school-

related, yet preservice teachers responded as teacher/helpers. The teacher role was easy to assume,

after all, this was a teacher education course. However, "teaching as helping" usually was confined to

the "correct" completion of worksheets or textbook assignments. Discussion of youths' personal

interests or home lives was carried on primarily outside the teaching/helping role.

"Helping kids" sometimes was coupled with a "feel good" rationale. One preservice teacher of

color explained it this way:

> The first day the kids asked us: 'Can you help me and be my mentor?' I was happy to see that
> the children were willing to receive all the help they can. Knowing that I was available to work
> with them made me feel well inside. (C.R., 10/7/98)

Further, a white, female, preservice teacher told us: "So far, all I thought about is what I'm going to get

out of this. Is this going to make me feel good? How can I help other people? Will I be doing good?" (S.J., 9/29/98).This coupling of "feeling good" "doing good" and "helping" was reiterated across race and gender lines. For many prospective teachers, helping kids was a major impetus for their service. Through helping, preservice teachers felt important to children's lives, often they spoke of "making a difference" through assistance as a tutor, mentor, or friend. While viewed as positive by preservice teachers, responses often had missionary tones. Preservice teachers offered something youth lacked–stability, attention, and strong male role models.

Additionally, service learning was viewed pragmatically, as beneficial to "becoming a better teacher." "Helping kids" sometimes had a pragmatic twist, for example, according to one white, female preservice teacher: "This is a total learning experience for me. I try different things to help kids, just to learn. So, I'll be more comfortable in my classroom" (L.W., 9/29/98). Alternatively, another preservice teacher eschewed the "feel good" rationale for a more practical approach: "I am not at Girl Scouts to feel good about myself or have fun. This experience will prepare me for problems that will arise in my classroom" (S.J., 11/2/98). Regardless, pragmatic reasons for service learning were strong. Moreover, this stance surfaced in two previous studies of community service learning (author, 1998; author in-press).

"Becoming a better teacher" had two meanings: understanding more about youth, especially culturally diverse or low-income youngsters; and gaining teaching, especially management, techniques. As an example of the first view:

> Their church life is more a main thing than mine. The people at my church didn't come to see me perform because I wasn't their child. It's a family atmosphere there. As a teacher, I need to keep in mind what things are going on different from what I went through. (C.M., 10/19/98)

As an example of the second view: "I'm learning that kids don't respond to bribery. If you do this, then I'll give you some candy, doesn't work. I need to be street smarter than the kids to get them to do things" (L.A., 10/19/98). Increased attention to cultural issues was reflected in the first view and indicated that teaching should stretch to encompass community life. Increased attention to disciplinary issues was reflected in the second view and indicated teaching must focus on control issues, particularly in regard to children of color or from low-income situations.

Most preservice teachers of color expressed the multicultural position; they were attentive to cultural and economic differences. One middle class prospective teacher struggled to accept youth from low-income backgrounds. In reflective essays, she denigrated youth from low-income homes as uninterested in educational experiences and expressed shock in a youth's street wisdom. Yet, in her final essay, she expressed willingness to learn more about and work with youth from low-income backgrounds. Two other women of color, from segregated backgrounds, described themselves as becoming more comfortable and prepared to work in mixed race situations. The fourth preservice teacher, biracial and comfortable with multicultural situations, utilized service learning to extend her knowledge about an ethnic group different from her own.

Of the seven white males in the course, four selected church placements (some because the Sunday schedule worked for them). Site placements seemed to impact perceptions of teaching. The males at the churches talked and wrote about helping youth through enthusiasm, compassion, and parent involvement. They described their experience as "eye-opening," particularly about ways in which racism and minority status affected children's lives. The other three males struggled with deficit notions about youth living in poverty. They challenged their most obvious stereotypes, yet two of the three

asserted that youth needed positive male role models, like themselves. This position was not taken by males at the churches who witnessed the presence of supportive families, including male role models.

Among the thirteen white women, becoming a better teacher had several, shared dimensions. Mostly, these preservice teachers disrupted stereotypes and accumulated realistic knowledge about diverse youth. As examples, preservice teachers recognized that the "perfect vision" of a future classroom was faulty (M.M., 10/7/98); discovered that deficit assumptions, especially about parents, were misleading and wrong (J.F., 11/4/98); learned not to misjudge the reality kids lived (M.M., 10/20/98); and realized that youth knew more about "sex, drugs, and violence" than expected (J.K., 10/21/98). Learning to "handle" problematic situations related to difference was repeatedly cited as a useful aspect of service learning.

Companionship

Service learning offered opportunities to "hang out" with children, something missed in other teacher education classes. According to one preservice teacher: "We learn about teaching everyday, but rarely get to just spend time with kids. Service learning gives us a reason to spend time with kids. That is why we are becoming teachers in the first place!" (S.J., 3/5/99). Yet, companionship took time to build and became evident later in the experience. During early visits, pre-service teachers actively engaged in activities, such as working at the play-dough table at Head Start. However, interactions were adult-child oriented, one had the power to question or direct the other. Also, conversations tended to turn into teaching/helping situations. As pre-service teachers became more comfortable with the situation, companionship evolved.

In the companion role, pre-service teachers did activities with students, conversation was more

equal, less forced by the adult, and more casual. Pre-service teachers still resorted to the teacher/helper

role, but generally, interactions exhibited that of two companions, rather than an adult and child.

Companionship was pronounced in settings with older youth, particularly at one community center,

where pre-service teachers spent a lot of time playing pool and video games, watching television, or

just talking with youth. Significantly, this rapport had a teacher oriented end, preservice teachers sought

to gain youth's respect in order to encourage them to participate in a reading club.

As a companion, preservice teachers avoided the assumption of authority. When they needed

to counter the wishes of youth, they placed blame on an outside force. For example, in order to quell

arguments about the reading quota for earning a free pizza, a pre-service teacher responded with, "I

don't make the rules" (J.K., 10/12/98). Further, "I don't make the rules" was an indicator of compliant

participation in service learning, often it was something that happened to preservice teachers, rather

than being enacted by them.

The time needed to become a companion often exceeded the service learning cycle. However,

increased knowledge of, trust for, and interest in youth and their families was mentioned across all

subgroups of preservice teachers. It was illustrated in comments made over time by one white male

preservice teacher:

> (Early in the experience) We need to be able to teach kids, not solve their family problems. If I
> were closer to James and knew his family maybe I could talk to his mother, but I think it is
> important for me to accept that he has family problems, understand it could affect his learning,
> and move on. (M.H., 10/7/98)

> (Later in the experience) The kids and I sat down on the steps in the front of the building. They
> began to question me, to learn who I was. They wanted to see my keys, wallet, and car. They
> counted my money and told me their dads let them do the same sometimes. At this moment I
> realized that not every child at the Club came from a broken home. I wish I could have had
> more time to get to know the family background and history of these kids. (M.H., 11/5/98)

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Without the constraints of a semester "clock," budding interest, such as this, could be cultivated.

To some extent, companionship was eased by preservice teacher's perception that "all kids are just kids." Once the novelty wore off, preservice teachers begin to see youth as "normal." To most, kids were similar, regardless of ethnic or economic differences. According to one white male: "The kids at Head Start are mature and independent. Other kids's moms stay home and do everything for them. Some kids tattle, here they work it out. For the most part, kids are kids" (G.P., 9/29/98). "Kids are kids" was expressed in a previous study (author & Sleeter, 1999). Here, as there, it tended to be articulated by white preservice teachers. This view indicated a shift from the perception of differences as deficits to the view of humanity as universal. While intended as a positive view, "kids are kids" sometimes glossed over real differences, such as opportunities related to income. Although similarities and differences, among and within groups of people, were stressed in the course, prospective teachers tended to see commonalities.

A few preservice teachers pricked at the edges of this idea—children were the same, but... As an example, "Just when I had decided that all kids were the same, something happened to change my mind (I think I will go back and forth with this for a long time)" (S.L., 10/21/98). This comment indicates a conceptual maturity that eluded many preservice teachers. Several preservice teachers of color, one white, nontraditional college student (and mother), another white preservice teacher from California, and one white male who had attended Montessori schools grappled with notions of similarity and difference. Prior life experience, especially with diversity, seemed to influence this realization.

As in other studies (author, 1998; author & Sleeter, 1999), there was little move toward activism among preservice teachers. In this study, the nontraditional preservice teacher (just mentioned)

expressed budding activism. Subsequent to the service learning experience, she applied for a job at Head Start.

Influential Factors

Several contextual factors impacted the service learning experience. These included: the nature of the site, the tasks common to each site, the personalities of agency directors, and the preservice teacher's biographies.

Site

The sites were located in a lower income neighborhood of a small, fairly affluent college town. Outside the university, the population of color was small. The church sites for this study included many African American members, and congregations were varied in educational and income levels. The lower income neighborhood was modest, and, acute conditions of poverty (as indicated by subsidized housing) were limited. As a result, preservice teachers interacted with a wide range of people of color, and with whites from lower income situations. For these preservice teachers, many from small or middle-size, in-state, homogeneous towns, interactions with these groups offered novel experiences with diversity. Likely, this influence would change given more heterogeneous contexts, or more experienced preservice teachers.

Sites responded to community needs differently, in ways that emphasized charitable, project based, or social change perspectives (Morton, 1995). As examples, one community center had a project orientation; it offered programs, like tutoring, directly responsive to community problems. One church had a charitable mission; individual worth, tolerance and compassion were fostered. Another church tilted toward social change; the advancement of youth of color was promoted. While outwardly

committed to support for cultural diversity and equality, inwardly, support for these aims was

interpreted differently. Moreover, within the course a social change oriented focus was fostered,

particularly in terms of teacher preparation for more equitable, culturally responsive teaching. Some

tension arose related to these varied orientations, for example the instructor tried to prompt social

critique, but preservice teachers practiced immediate problem solving through tutoring. Gaps between

what preservice did and said they learned probably stemmed from these differences.

Tasks

Tasks common to each site influenced interactions, often activities were structured as teaching

efforts. Then, roles and controls of the teacher-student relationship applied. As pre-service teachers

and youth participated in recreational activities, conversation was more wide-ranging and casual.

Furthermore, a task-based orientation often focused interactions on children and constrained

conversation with adults.

Alternatively, attendance at community events, such as evening reading circles and parent

meetings at Head Start, offered more contact with adults and motivated reconsideration of stereotypes,

particularly of "poor" parenting. The development of an event, such as a Hallelujah party (a church-

sponsored alternative to Halloween), also provided opportunities to become acquainted with a wide

range of community people. Further, the completion of mini-inquiry projects engaged preservice

teachers in conversations with site directors and other adults and youth within agencies.

In the churches, preservice teachers tended to interact with entire families. Preservice teachers

placed there expressed positive views of parents and families. Alternatively, in community centers,

preservice teachers tended to work one-to-one with youth. Preservice teachers placed there articulated

more information about children, especially about teaching techniques responsive to diversity.

Contact Person

Personalities of agency directors influenced service learning experiences. For example, the dynamic personality of the pastor at one church mesmerized pre-service teachers. Relationships with him, rather than with children or parents, dominated their experience. Also, in situations where pre-service teachers were paired closely with an adult, such as at Girl Scouts or Head Start, they took their cues from that adult. For example, pre-service teachers followed the example of Girl Scout leaders: they cleaned up while the scouts ate a snack; they sat separately while the scouts worked on a project. Both caused missed chances for interaction with the girls.

In situations where the contact person was an in-group member of the community, they served as cultural brokers to the community. For example, pastors of the churches and a community center director (who had grown up in the immediate neighborhood) assisted preservice teachers in understanding family and community concerns. Service agency directors with looser neighborhood ties tended to orient preservice teachers to their organizations, but not to their communities.

Further, first hand involvement of directors influenced the service learning experience. Preservice teachers tended to feel more connected to the people and activities at these sites. At several sites, however, preservice teachers were integrated into preset service roles and tasks. They obliged, but often learned less about the real lives of children or real concerns of families.

Biography

The perceptions of preservice teachers were influenced by race, social class, gender, and regional differences. For many preservice teachers, service learning was a novel cross-racial

experience, but it was new in different ways. For preservice teachers from majority groups, service

learning offered "first" engagements with people of color or in poverty. However, for preservice

teachers who grew up in segregated, minority communities, service learning provided novel experiences

in multiracial situations. Moreover, many preservice teachers struggled with new understandings of

poverty, especially those from middle class backgrounds. Also, gender mattered. For example, at Head

Start the actions of the lone male were less directive than his female classmates. However, due to the

attraction of Head Start children to males, he did not have to initiate interactions, as did his female

counterparts.

Regardless of other identity factors, gregarious preservice teachers asserted themselves more at

their sites. They participated in or lead more events. Also, they motivated their counterparts toward

more robust involvement. Possibly, selective placement of outgoing personalities across sites might

stimulate more risk-taking activity.

Implications for Teacher Education

In order to consider the findings from this case, we return to some of the questions raised at the

outset of the paper. What do preservice teachers do that supports or limits their movement toward a

multicultural worldview? What activities, if any, spur self-examination and reconsideration of prior

assumptions? Do there seem to be constraining factors in the learning process? Are there ways in which

community service learning might be altered to more fully support course and service goals?

This study offered a "snapshot" of community service learning. Enhanced though the image may

be, it left out quite a lot. Only glimpsed at the edges were reflective initiatives and course-based

support. Thus, these questions can not be answered definitively. Still, based on this study, certain

constraints and advantages are more visible.

Given the goals of the course, it was not enough to play it safe, to act within prescribed roles as a tutor or mentor. Instead, more connections with and in-depth knowledge of families and communities were needed. Perhaps, the practice of tutoring need not be discarded, but rethought as an opportunity to seek family guidance and assistance. This redefinition retains the project focus of some service sites, but strengthens the social change focus of the course. Further, since it is known that preservice teachers tend to play it safe, this role can be questioned in the course. Readings and discussions related to culturally responsive teaching (e.g., Delpit, 1995) and funds of knowledge (Moll et. al, 1992) can be utilized to probe relationships between schools and homes and alert preservice teachers to cultural mores and resources within communities. Also, more guidance from site directors might push preservice teachers beyond safe roles.

Additionally, connotations of "teacher as helper" and "service as benefaction" needed to be problematized. As preservice teachers "helped" they tested their assumptions and stereotypes against reality and cast many of them aside. Yet, helping defined teaching narrowly, as a mirror image of remedial assistance in schools. This view left intact power relationships that impact school "success" and "failure." It clouded reconsideration of teaching from a multicultural perspective. What kinds of course-based and community experiences might prompt rethinking about what it means to "help" as a multicultural education teacher? Home visits, family outings, and mini-investigations of children's lives seem pertinent to this aim.

Further, the perception of service as overcoming a "lack" was pervasive. Interrogation of "service" as altruism goes against the tide. However, to the extent that service learning offers a durable,

sound format for experiential learning, we need to keep swimming. One approach is to explicate

different orientations for service learning and to work within those most suitable for our aims (author,

1999; Kahne & Westheimer, 1996; Morton, 1995). Also, a balanced emphasis on service and

learning, equally beneficial to all participants, can confute altruistic views. Further, involvement of

community people as bonafide partners in the course and in service learning, could clearly demonstrate

working *with* others and strongly counter missionary views.

Alternatively, companionship was desirable for our intentions. However, it took time to

develop. Probably, twenty hours of service learning are inadequate to foster the kinds of cross-cultural

engagements that lead to deep reflection upon one's views. To some extent, enumeration of field hours

is deceptive, as in-class and personal reflection supplement service learning. Yet, if teacher education

programs are committed to the promotion of more community centric and socially critical perspectives

among prospective teachers, then semester confines of community service learning should be examined.

Finally, as noted, there were breaks between course aims and field realities. Yet, even though

some tasks hovered around volunteerism and contacts with parents and families were less than ideal,

preservice teachers spoke and wrote about appreciable emotional and conceptual gains. We surmised

that written comments were inflated, impacted by the power relationship between the instructor and the

preservice teachers. Probably, power issues did impact responses. Yet, preservice teacher's notations

of their personal growth were persistent and consistent. Further, we posited that preservice teachers

questioned biases and gained accurate information based on all sorts of cross-cultural interactions,

particularly if their work was examined within the framework of multicultural teacher development.

Also, we considered that outward appearances were deceptive. The extent to which one "learns" from

community service learning is an elusive, slippery phenomena. Here, transformation often occurred in moments, as when the preservice teacher sat on the steps with several children, counted pocket change, and reconsidered his views on "broken" homes. The potential of community service learning probably lies in moments like this one.

Conclusions: Playing It Too Safe

Fairly, what really happened and what preservice teachers thought about what happened "played it too safe" for multicultural education. Although preservice teachers reported a great deal of self-growth, in terms of grappling with biases and gaining teaching strategies, community service learning stopped short of course goals for understanding community and questioning inequality. Reasonably, some shortcomings can be resolved through reconfiguration of the service learning project. However, given the rigor of developing and doing community service learning for all involved, a legitimate question might be: is it enough? Goodman (1996) urges us to shy away from this question in relation to education reform efforts. He proposes that we concern ourselves with the means, not the ends of initiatives with educative intent. According to Goodman, "it is the struggle, rather than results at any one point in time, that is most important" (1996, p. 307). It is fair to wonder if this effort fomented struggle, opened minds, and prompted rethinking. The data indicate that community service learning has educative potential as part of the process of multicultural teacher education.

Certainly, there is a "long way to go" to create experiences that more strongly kindle community centric and socially critical orientations. Particularly as multicultural teacher educators, we need to consider ways in which community service learning can be intensified or redirected to further undergird and augment multicultural education. Knowledge about what really occurs should be a first step and wake-up call for all of us.

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