Linking Practice with Theory to Model Cultural Responsiveness

Lessons Learned from a Collaborative Service-Learning Project in an Urban Elementary Classroom

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Introduction

This case study reports on the outcomes of a collaborative service-learning project that connected a teacher educator of color (the author) and her 19 racially diverse university students with 26 urban elementary students and their teacher (also of color). The purpose is to explicate how the service-learning experience impacted the university students' awareness of, commitment to, and understanding of culturally responsive practice as a challenging aspiration with real-life implications for serving diverse children and youth.

The conceptual framework integrates theories from critical approaches to multicultural service-learning (e.g., Renner et al., 2004; Rosner-Salazar, 2003) and culturally responsive teaching (e.g., Gay, 2000; Milner, 2010) to problematize the social construction of "differences" in educational spaces by focusing on the complex interactions among and between language, literacy, and race in school-based settings.

The findings illustrate how this collaborative service-learning project, while mutually rewarding in many respects, came with several challenges. While the elementary school was selected because its mission explicitly promoted culturally relevant learning experiences as essential to each child's success, it, in practice, ultimately predicated academic readiness based on students' adherence to the dominant culture's language and literacy practices. Indeed, such dilemmas are common in K-12 urban schools across the U.S., particularly as classroom teachers negotiate the needs of diverse learners against the longer-term realities that children and youth of color will confront in a monolingual and racially stratified society.

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The final section will offer implications that further explicate the intersections between service-learning and teacher-preparation programs, particularly focusing on possible curricular, pedagogical, and programmatic solutions.

More than Celebrating Diversity

Intersections between Multicultural Service-Learning and Teacher Preparation

National statistics reveal that while U.S. children and youth of color account for over 40 percent of the total K-12 student population, only 17 percent of classroom teachers also hail from racially diverse backgrounds (Boser, 2011; Cross, 2005). Educational researchers have raised significant concerns that today's predominantly White teaching force has generally not received adequate preparation to effectively meet the needs of diverse learners because several U.S. teacher-preparation programs continue to promote ideologies that privilege Eurocentric experiences, norms, and values while people of color are continually relegated to the peripheries through surface-level attempts to promote multiculturalism such as by celebrating ethnic holidays or hosting one-time diversity events (Banks, 2009; Milner, 2010).

While most U.S. teacher-preparation programs have responded to the underpreparation concern by requiring that their pre-service teacher candidates complete mandatory field-based experiences in racially diverse settings (Cone, 2009; Wong, 2008), concerns persist that these requirements generally lack meaningful opportunities for teacher candidates to actively connect theories of culturally responsive teaching in actual classrooms that serve diverse children and youth (King, 2004).

Within the context of the university setting, King (2004) defines service-learning as a dynamic experience where course participants are "engage[d] in meaningful community service activities that are

integrally related to rigorous academic work" (p. 122). Service-learning involves ongoing critical reflection where university students are tasked to connect information learned in the field to the knowledge obtained through in-class activities, discussions, and readings. In concert, the in-class and out-of-class experiences are intended to promote applied, cohesive, and relevant learning experiences that will prepare university students to eventually navigate culturally diverse settings in their careers and personal lives with a heighted awareness of and sensitivity to cross-cultural differences (Lohfink & Curtis, 2012).

In the most basic sense then, service-learning is qualitatively distinct from community service because the former places a core emphasis on sustaining a type of ongoing self-reflection that is intended to facilitate a heightened sense of social responsibility long after a course and its required service hours end (Renner et al., 2004).

Rosner-Salazar (2003) has conceptualized a specific type of service-learning known as multicultural service-learning, which is defined as a process where specific "social issues and community needs" (p. 65) are met through collaborative academic-community partnerships. Beyond documenting contact hours in the field, university students who are said to best benefit from multicultural service-learning experiences must actively engage in meaningful dialogue and ongoing reflection about the multiple causes of social inequities including the very structures and systems that are meant to "help" underserved learners (Gay, 2000).

In the case of a K-12 and university partnership, university students might participate in an afterschool program tutoring English learners while also engaging in critical follow-up discussions in the classroom about why English-centric instruction is still the norm despite the reality that U.S. school-age students hail

from linguistically diverse backgrounds. While one service-learning experience cannot transform institutional or societal inequities, it has the ideological potential to influence how university students will identify and tackle a range of local-level disparities and social problems that they will encounter as future professionals serving diverse communities and individuals (King, 2004).

However, the explicit and implicit connections between multicultural service-learning experiences and teacher education are not necessarily problem-free or seamless. One major critique of U.S. teacher-preparation programs is that they tend to be structured with a heavily emphasis on building cross-cultural awareness and celebrating differences over addressing how social identities such as class, gender, language, and race are contested, constructed, and politicized in the K-12 schools and other social institutions (King, 2004).

Certainly, cursory-level foci on diversity integration such as celebrating ethnic holidays under the guise of multiculturalism (Richardson, 2011) are alluring for many teacher educators and their students to implement because such activities are relatively easy to plan, have a celebratory feel to them, and usually do not require higher levels of thinking including critical reflection about issues such as whether such endeavors are taught in affirming and authentic rather than stereotypical ways (Banks, 2009).

As a teacher educator of color who regularly teaches courses related to diversity and urban education, the researcher has specifically sought to structure service-learning experiences using Rosner-Salazar's (2003) multicultural framework to encourage university students to engage in a type of critical reflection where they will carefully consider how their everyday curricular and instructional decisions will impact both the classroom climate and learning environment.

The course referenced in this article was titled "Multicultural Literature for Children and Youth: Issues, Problems, and Trends," and was taught during the 2012-2013 academic year. This course was structured to promote a type of critical reflection that troubled the feel-good approach to studying diversity in education that Banks (2009) notes too often pervades teacher-preparation courses. At its core, the course addressed a variety of topics frequently taught in diversity and multicultural children's literature courses including evaluation and selection

criteria, overview of genres, and strategies for integrating authentic and high-quality multicultural children's literature in the elementary classroom that support culturally responsive instructional strategies (Harris, 1997). However, this course also focused on practical applications of multiculturalism in the classroom—that is, intentionally linking content, curriculum, and pedagogy to the constraints of content-area and grade-level standards (Gay, 2000).

Another unique aspect of this course related to how the collaborative partnership was structured. The classroom teacher and the researcher shared similar experiences and teaching philosophies as self-identified multicultural educators and women of color. The researcher is an Asian American educator who has taught both adults and young children for over 13 years, and the classroom teacher is an African American woman who has over 20 years of teaching experience.

Using Gay's (2000) definition of culturally responsive teaching, the classroom teacher and researcher collaboratively agreed that they wanted this service-learning project to, at the most basic level, "create learning atmospheres that radiate cultural and ethnic diversity, and facilitate high academic achievement for all students" and that "Opportunities must be provided for students from different ethnic backgrounds to have free personal and cultural expression so that their voices and experiences can be incorporated into teaching and learning processes on a regular basis" (p. 45).

Site Overview

Both the elementary school and university where this collaborative project took place are located in a large urban community in Minnesota. The university is situated in a midsize liberal-arts setting where, according to the mission statement, faculty and students are encouraged to demonstrate a commitment to community service, critical thinking, diversity, and social justice. The institution's 2012-2013 census report noted that approximately 24 percent of the university's undergraduate student population was of color. In this course, 11 of the 19 course participants, or over 57 percent, identified as people of color. Among the 11 students of color, seven individuals stated that they are from immigrant and refugee families.

Similarly, the site of the service-learning experience was situated in an urban

elementary school that is housed in the state's most racially diverse school district. According to demographic reports, over three-fourths of all K-12 students in the district are of color with Asian/Asian American students accounting for the largest racial group (31.2 percent) followed by African American/Black students (29.4 percent). Over three-fourths of the elementary children in this classroom were classified as speaking another language besides English at home.

Two of the largest single-group student populations at this school and in the district are children from Hmong and Somali refugee families, who, according to a district administrator, have

> . . . a lot of the typical problems that come with poverty and cultural differences. These are good, talented kids who need a lot of support at school to succeed.

Moreover, at the time of this study in 2012-2013, over 80 percent of the elementary students at this school qualified for free or reduce-priced meals.

Importantly, the context of place is significant when considering how this service-learning experience directly pertained to broader issues and trends in Minnesota and nationally as related to various opportunity "gaps" (Milner, 2010) that are shaped by factors such as language, poverty, and race. For one, Minnesota is often cited as one of the top states for educational quality, and also, designated as the U.S.'s exemplar of immigrant and refugee integration. According to The Minnesota Foundation's 2004 report titled *Immigration in Minnesota: Discovering Common Ground*, the state's actual and perceived quality-of-life standards as measured by educational and employment opportunities appear to confirm the beliefs that both racial diversity and school quality are mutually interdependent rather than exclusive realities.

However, according to another report titled *All Kids Learn: A Minnesota Meeting Series on K-12 Education* (2004), while Minnesota's schools are said to be among the best in the U.S. in terms of academic quality, there are significant "achievement gaps" between students of color and White students, even after controlling for poverty-related variables. For instance, among all third graders statewide, the report reveals that while 83 percent of White students are performing at or above grade level on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) in Reading, all students of color are faring worse. In descending order, 46

percent Latina/o, 48 percent Black, 58 percent Asian, and 62 percent of American Indian students are scoring at or above grade level on the MCAs in Reading.

The report further spotlights other disparities including the fact that while over 80 percent of Minnesota's K-12 teachers are White in some of the most racially diverse public districts, only 27 percent of the school-age population is also White, which roughly mirrors both national and state demographics showing that teachers of color are significantly underrepresented among the K-12 teaching force (Milner, 2010).

Thus, in terms of mirroring the operations and structures of urban public schools in Minnesota, this collaborative service-learning experience was both atypical and typical. It was atypical because the project involved a collaborative partnership between a classroom teacher of color and a teacher educator of color. Moreover, over half of the university students were also people of color, which from a proportional-representation standpoint, aligned with the diversity of the elementary classroom where over half of the children were of color.

On the contrary, this service-learning experience was typical because most of the classroom teachers at this school were White American women. Like in many urban public schools, this experience was typical because it allowed all involved to directly observe the consequences of race-based educational inequities when analyzing measures such as disparities in standardized-test scores between different groups of students, higher rates of discipline among students of color compared to White children, and the shortage of teachers of color in the building and throughout the district.

Methods

Data Sources

After institutional permissions were secured to enter into this collaborative partnership, the classroom teacher and researcher planned out a detailed blueprint for the service-learning experience. The experience itself lasted for 16 weeks, and included an additional 16 weeks of follow-up data collection for a total of 32 weeks from start to finish. A total of 19 university students were enrolled in the course, ranging in age from 17 to 23; 15 were female and four were males.

The researcher passed out flyers and sent e-mail invitations to each enrolled student before the first week of class. However,

by the end of the semester, two students asked to be excluded entirely from the datasets and subsequent analyses. The above requests were honored to ensure that informed-consent procedures were followed.

A diverse range of primary sources were collected including demographic surveys and transcripts from focus groups and semi-structured interviews, as well as work samples collected from both the elementary and university students including artwork, exit cards, journal entries, and reader-response quick-writes. At the beginning of the semester, a demographic survey was administered to the university students.

Thereafter, the researcher interviewed the university students twice with each interview lasting approximately 60 minutes. Moreover, a total of eight focus groups took place immediately before or following the service-learning experience with each lasting 45 minutes to 60 minutes. The interviews and focus groups took place at the university's library, in the regular classroom where the course was regularly scheduled, or the university's student center in a closed conference room.

Both the focus groups and interviews were recorded, transcribed, and assigned a unique case number that removed identifying information about each participant. In the field, the researcher maintained detailed fieldnotes using a standard triple-entry journal, which was also the instrument that the participants were asked to maintain throughout the semester (See Figure 1).

At the conclusion of the project, all documents were comparatively analyzed, content-analyzed, and coded based on common and intersecting themes. Hsieh and Shannon's (2005) directed approach to content analysis was employed in this study, which is where the researcher analyzes all documents to detect conceptual patterns and trends, and subsequently generates a set of codes that are rank-ordered based on thematic frequencies. The value of the directed approach is that it provides a standard process for analyzing abundant sources of textually mediated information (Harvey & Baumann, 2012).

The final categories were subsequently coded using the concept-mapping software Inspiration, and were labeled thematically as a, b, and c as follows: (a) connecting practice and theory (challenges and considerations); (b) culturally responsive teaching (critical incidents and examples); and (c) measuring impact (awareness of, commitment to, and understanding of

culturally responsive practice). To maintain confidentiality assurances, generic descriptors of each participant were used, and pseudonyms were used. Moreover, to protect the identities of all individuals involved, details about each participant such as ethnicity/nationality or high school attended were excluded.

Limitations

As has been documented in existing studies, there are benefits and limitations when educators conduct research in their own classrooms. Similar to other research findings on service-learning experiences (Rossi, 2010; Wong, 2008), this project occurred for a short duration (16 weeks in the field), and moreover, only involved one K-12-university partnership. The major benefit of this structure was that the study's narrow focus allowed for careful and in-depth study of one self-contained partnership. However, the primary limitation was that it included a relatively small sample size that may not be generalizable without further comparative studies.

The study's focus on the university students' self-reported responses also posed some limitations in that they may have overestimated their cross-cultural competencies while underestimating their own biases and limitations. Finally, Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007) note that research involving one's own classroom and/or students must be managed carefully with explicit accountability systems in place to where students do not feel obligated to participate in the study, many withdraw at any time for any reason without consequence, and should not feel belittled for sharing specific experiences or perspectives.

Several efforts were made to address the concerns and limitations mentioned above. First, to maintain trustworthiness, multiple perspectives ranging from the classroom teacher, elementary students, and university students were gathered and also comparatively cross-checked with analyses of site documents and direct classroom observations. While the main focus was on how the university students self-reported their cross-cultural competencies and their experiences in the field along with the researcher's direct observations, these data were cross-checked against other sources and perspectives.

Second, the researcher took careful measures to obtain informed consent from each participant. For example, the researcher never disclosed in class which students participated in this study, but

rather, collected responses anonymously to ensure that no student would be singled out for not participating in this study. While the researcher further explained that nobody's final grade in the class would suffer for non-participation in this study, she also provided the contact information for the university's anonymous grievance system should they feel that they were being treated unfairly by dropping out or not participating.

Third, explicit member-checking procedures were employed to ensure that each participant had the opportunity to correct or edit the researcher's analyses, which Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (2007) and Lincoln and Guba (1985) note is a critical procedure to maintain credibility throughout the scope and sequence of a given study. The researcher also hired two undergraduate students who were not enrolled in the course to assist her with data analysis to improve inter-rater reliability. Undergraduate students were chosen over other groups such as graduate assistants because of their proximity in age and general life experiences with the participants of this study.

Findings

Connecting Practice with Theory: Challenges and Considerations

Prior to entering the school, the researcher and the university students participated in a number of preparatory activities and discussions. First, the university students were asked to respond to a variety of prompts regarding their beliefs about the value of culturally responsive teaching in the K-12 schools. Results from preliminary quick-writes revealed that 12 students or 70.59 percent strongly agreed or agreed with the statement "Culturally responsive teaching is necessary to best meet the academic needs of diverse learners."

However, seven students or 41.18 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the above statement, which was mostly derived from the belief that K-12 teachers ought to be colorblind, or ultimately, should avoid conversations about race and racial identity in the classroom in fear that such topics are age-inappropriate for young children.
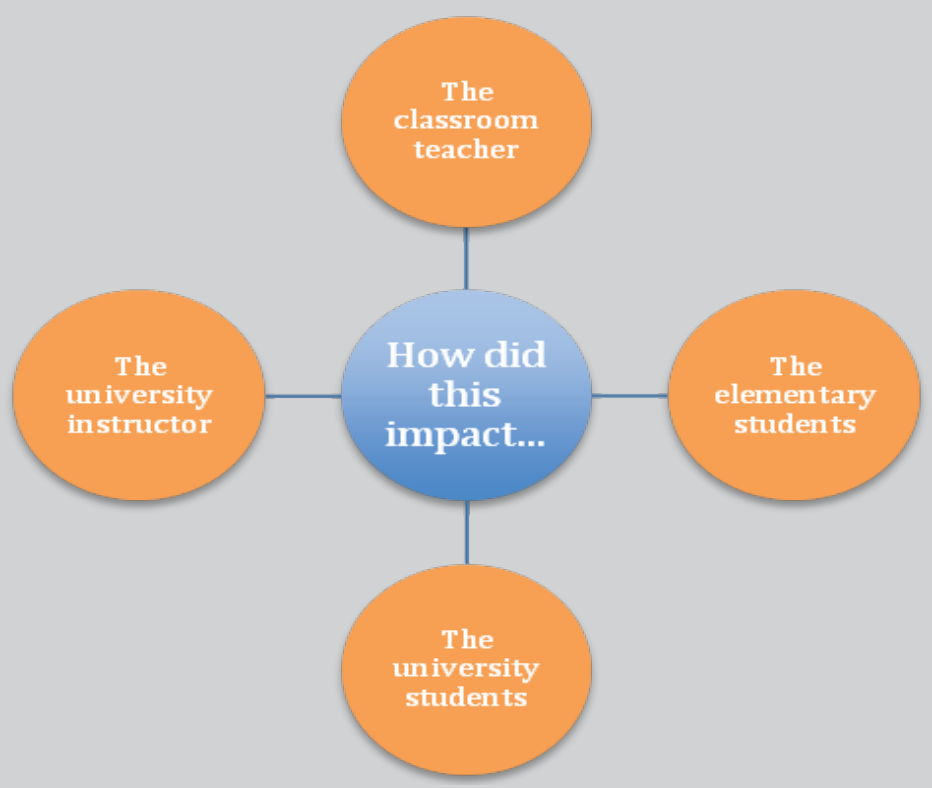
Such variable responses represented the tensions that were experienced during the course of the semester where conversations about class, language, and race at times erupted into debates about how to best teach children from non-dominant backgrounds. Such conversations, while at times lively, offered critical prior-knowledge information about each university student's assumptions, belief systems, and experiences with issues pertaining to cultural diversity in school-based settings.

Another challenge was that none of the university students had attended K-12 schools that comprehensively and consistently taught multicultural education. Only four students (23.53 percent or two students of color and two White students) learned about what Banks (2009) coins as contributions-level content such as heritage months or irregularly scheduled diversity events. With little knowledge about multicultural education, careful consideration was given regarding how to discuss, model, and teach these topics before entering the elementary classroom.

Such a complex task required the creation of intentionally scaffolded and

FIGURE 1
Triple-Entry Journal Format

1. Incident, interaction, or thought	2. What happened, who was involved, and how (if) it was resolved.	3. Reflection—what questions remain? How will this impact my practice and thinking?

sequenced activities, discussions, and readings. The first week of class involved discussing how multicultural materials could be used in the classroom to offer young children of color authentic and culturally relevant representations of their communities, cultures, and families (Harris, 1997). Course sessions also addressed topics such as how to effectively differentiate instruction, encourage active learning, manage a diverse classroom effectively (and equitably), and teach multiculturalism in accurate and affirming ways (Banks, 2009).

The final blueprint for the service-learning project included facilitating activities that focused on improving skills in active listening, critical literacy, and reading comprehension using multicultural children's literature as the primary inspiration to structure these experiences.

As over three-fourths of the elementary students came from households where English was not spoken as the primary language, the classroom teacher specifically asked that the planned lessons focus on building skills in basic and critical literacy. McLaughlin and DeVoogd (2004) define critical literacy as a dynamic process where teachers intentionally engage learners in critical reflection, examining multiple perspectives, problem-solving, and relating texts to prior knowledge, which was used as the working definition to structure activities that would draw on the cultural and linguistic assets that the elementary learners brought to the classroom.

Moreover, all of the planned activities for the service-learning project linked to the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts Reading Literature/Grade 3 (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010) to emphasize that culturally responsive teaching and multicultural education have interdisciplinary connections across all content areas and grade levels (Banks, 2009) (See Figure 2 for a sample curriculum map aligned to CCSC-ELA-3).

Culturally Responsive Teaching in Action

To encourage relationship-building and to maximize the learning environment, small groups were assigned that consisted of 4-5 elementary children and 3-4 university students. As a whole group prior to the onsite visits, the university students planned for literacy-rich activities using critically acclaimed multicultural children's literature including Yangsook Choi's *The Name Jar*, Rigoberto Gonzalez's *Antonio's Card / La Tarjeta de Antonio*, William Miller's *Richard Wright and the Library Card*, Chief Jake Swamp's *Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message*, and Natasha Tarpley's *I Love My Hair!* The books were selected by the university students and approved by the classroom teacher because the content could be repurposed into literacy-rich activities based on themes that most learners could relate to including anti-bullying, building positive friendships, diverse families, family dynamics, and learning about multiple forms of human diversity inclusive of but not limited to ability, class, gender, language, race, and sexual orientation (See Table 1).

As representative case examples, this section will spotlight how the university students incorporated Yangsook Choi's *The Name Jar* and Chief Jake Swamp's *Giving Thanks: A Native American Good Morning Message* to gain direct experience modeling culturally responsive strategies in the elementary classroom. The university students were specifically tasked to evaluate, integrate, and then synthesize a range of culturally responsive curricular and instructional strategies learned in class to the elementary setting.

This section will also highlight critical incidents and teachable moments that occurred in the field that generated critical reflections among the university students that suggested that their prior understanding about how culturally and linguistically diverse children learn (or not) shifted through the duration of the service-learning experience.

The Name Jar is about a newly arrived Korean immigrant girl named Unhei who struggles to fit in at her new American elementary school because of her actual or perceived cultural differences. One scene depicts Unhei being bullied on the bus ride to school because her White peers could not pronounce her Korean name correctly. Out of humiliation, Unhei refuses to introduce herself on her first day of school by name. Instead, she makes a "name jar," and invites her classmates to write down suggestions as she adopts a new "American" name. Significantly, most of her peers suggest European-origin names, which highlight a real dilemma that many immigrant children experience in terms of believing that they need to "Americanize" in order to fit in at school.

However, this story powerfully illustrates the ways by which an immigrant child's family mediates the negative effects of assimilation and race-based bullying. In this book, Unhei's grandmother and mother constantly encouraged Unhei to be proud of her Korean heritage and her given name (which means "grace" in Korean).

Most of the elementary students in this class, like Unhei, had non-European names, and thus, the plot and the protagonist of *The Name Jar* resonated with their lived experiences and own identity dilemmas. The university students asked the third graders to write their immediate responses to the book after reading it aloud in their assigned groups. One Hmong American girl wrote, "They [her classmates] make fun of my name like Unhei they cant [can't] say my name," a Somali American boy informed his group, "I wish I had an American name," and a Mexican American boy noted, "I want a different name too."

The university students then engaged in conversations in their assigned small groups about the importance of treating everyone with respect. During a focus group after this school visit, the university students expressed how difficult it was to respond to the children who stated that they wanted to change their names to "American" ones. Answers ranged from "I didn't know what to say, so I didn't say anything" [Black male student] to "I told Mima that her name was beautiful the way it was" [White male student].

Out of this discussion came an important teachable moment: names and naming are particularly vital issues for culturally responsive teachers to be aware of because a child's name directly relate to her or his cultural identity. The university students discussed the need to have developmentally appropriate, direct,

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TABLE 1
Multicultural Children's Literature Utilized in Study

Yangsook Choi. *The name jar.* New York: Dell Dragonfly Books, 2001.

Rigoberto Gonzalez. *Antonio's card / La tarjeta de Antonio.* New York: Lee & Low Books, 2005.

William Miller. *Richard Wright and the library card.* New York: Lee & Low Books, 1999.

Chief Jake Swamp. *Giving thanks: A Native American good morning message.* New York: Lee & Low Books, 1997.

Natasha Tarpley. *I love my hair!* Boston, MA: Little Brown Books for Young Readers (Hachette Book Group), 2001.

and frequent conversations with young children about anti-bullying and cross-cultural understandings. A Black female student shared her thoughts about what she learned from this experience:

> I really see now why teachers need to honor who each child is. Like, don't give a nickname, don't Americanize a name. What bothers me is I saw this happening at this school. Like, a teacher constantly calling a Hmong kid the wrong name by accident; mispronouncing it. Another teacher always mixes up the Somali and Kenyan kids' names. This got me thinking that names are really important. It seems basic…but a teacher must know their [sic] students and must make sure that everyone knows each other's name.

Another Asian female student reflected on the value of this experience:

> In school, I was also made fun of for my name; how it sounds. But I was honestly pretty shocked to hear the kids in my group say that they were being made fun of too on the playground, in class, you know, on the bus. I guess I thought kids today were more accepting of each other. In my group, we also gave suggestions on how kids can respond to race bullying.

In all, reading *The Name Jar* and planning culturally responsive activities to supplement the content enabled the university students to directly experience the benefits and challenges of implementing culturally responsive strategies in a diverse classroom setting. The challenges were less about content or teaching literacy, but more about the complexities of managing and responding to diverse responses to the planned activities.

This experience also inspired several of the university students to reflect on their own K-12 experiences in ways that had clear connections to what they were discussing and teaching in the classroom. Such critical reflection enabled them to listen carefully to what the third graders were saying while also finding ways to continuously build upon their prior knowledge to promote higher levels of thinking. Indeed, the university students noted that as K-12 students, their best teachers were those who made learning academically rigorous and relevant to their lives, and were also excellent listeners who took time to get to know every student. Importantly, the characteristics mentioned above are what define the beliefs and practices of culturally responsive teachers (Gay, 2000).

With the timing of Native American Heritage Month and the holiday of Thanks-

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FIGURE 2
Connections to Common Core Standards

All activities taught in this service-learning experience directly connected to the Common Core English Language Arts Standards for Reading Literature/Grade 3.

CCELA STANDARD	SAMPLE PROMPT
1. KEY IDEAS AND DETAILS	
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.1 Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.	Based on what we read in *The Name Jar*, what do you think the author is trying to teach us about treating everyone with kindness, even people who are different from us? Give 2 reasons.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.2 Recount stories, including fables, folktales, and myths from diverse cultures; determine the central message, lesson, or moral and explain how it is conveyed through key details in the text.	What is a Korean name master? What is the significance of the Korean name master based on what you read?
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.3 Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events. .	Each person should pick a main character to describe including Joey, Mr. Cocotos, Umhei's grandmother, and Unhei's mother. In 3 complete sentences, write about each character on your "character profile" in term of how they think about Unhei. Once you are done, share your answers with your group, and then arrange your characters in order of who helped Unhei come to the realization that she should not change her name.
2. CRAFT AND STRUCTURE	
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, distinguishing literal from nonliteral language.	Read this quote from *Giving Thanks* carefully: "We thank our oldest Grandmother, the Moon, as she continues to hold hands with the Earth and all the females of the world who are responsible for bringing forth new life." If you see a metaphor or simile, underline it, and write why you think it is a form of figurative language.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.6 Distinguish their own point of view from that of the narrator or those of the characters.	You get to write another page to the story *The Name Jar*. Take any scene in the book dealing with a specific dilemma or problem, and using the point of view of another character, write how this event would have happened from that person's viewpoint. Please write your answer in at least 5 complete sentences. Then, discuss how this change could have impacted the plot.
	Based on we just read in *Giving Thanks*, what lesson or message do you think the author is conveying about giving thanks? What phrases, pictures, or words give you clues? What are you thankful for?
3. INTEGRATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND IDEAS	
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.3.7 Explain how specific aspects of a text's illustrations contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a story (e.g., create mood, emphasize aspects of a character or setting).	By just looking at the back and front cover of *Giving Thanks*, what do you think the book is about? Describe the mood that the covers convey.

giving, the university students also taught contributions-level multicultural content during the last half of the service-learning experience. In addition to reviewing Native American contributions, cultures, and histories, they taught about Thanksgiving in a culturally inclusive way.

The classroom teacher specifically asked that the university students introduce figurative language in this unit, which enabled them to further pilot and refine culturally responsive strategies in the classroom. Before the planning phase, the university students and the researcher addressed the major critiques of celebrating heritage months such as that these events often gloss over intra-group cultural diversities, tend to promote lower-level thinking such as memorizing facts, and too often marginalize multicultural learning to designated months rather than addressing the need for large-scale reform efforts that would transform the school curriculum to be inclusive of diverse perspectives throughout the entire year (Banks, 2009).

However, this experience allowed the university students to teach Native American Studies in ways that counteracted some of the other activities occurring at the school that either romanticized the First Thanksgiving or objectified Native American cultures as evidenced by many teachers displaying cutouts of feathers and tipis in their classrooms. Moreover, the university students gained experience planning and teaching multicultural content at the most basic level, which proved to be a challenging and complex task.

Vividly illustrated with scenes from nature, *Giving Thanks* highlights how the Haudenosaunee, also known as the Iroquois or Six Nations, give daily good-morning thanks to Mother Nature and the environment. With short phrases and sentences, the bulk of the book's interpretations derive from its colorful illustrations. In addition to generating a range of reader-response questions on the imagery and symbolism represented in this book, the university students introduced figurative language by asking the third graders to answer structured prompts such as:

> Consider the following quote. 'We thank our oldest Grandmother, the Moon, as she continues to hold hands with the Earth and all the females of the world who are responsible for bringing forth new life.' If you see a metaphor or simile in this sentence, please act out, draw what you see, point, tell us, or write down your answer.

In this activity, the emphasis was placed on offering the elementary students different options to demonstrate their learning rather than just by speaking or writing, which is critical given that culturally responsive teachers must find ways to honor diverse learning styles (Gay, 2000). The university students found it necessary to explain certain words in context to ELLs such as female, grandmother, and moon, which required the use of creative strategies to describe what these meant such as drawing images or encouraging code-switching where the students would provide clues and cues to each other.

As another example, the university students asked the third graders to illustrate or write their own metaphors or similes for what they are thankful for to reinforce the universal message of giving thanks in Swamp's book. Answers ranged from, "I am thankful for daddy. He is as big as a bear," "My grandma is an angel," and "My teacher say [says] I'm sharp as a knife." The benefit of this approach was that Thanksgiving was framed around giving thanks, a task that all of the elementary students could participate in, regardless of their cultural backgrounds or religious beliefs.

However, one unintended outcome of this activity was that many of the elementary students ended up modifying this activity by drawing images or writing their responses in another language, which a few of the university students found frustrating. During a follow-up focus group, one university student, a White female, expressed frustration:

> I was expecting them to write [in] English. I feel [that] I was clear; I told them to be sure to write down the definition. I'm so frustrated! I mean, how can I help them if I can't read what they're writing?

A Latina female, responded:

> But you didn't tell them either way [to write in English or not]. You just assumed. The kids that [sic] wrote in another language were meeting the requirements of the assignment. Like, they drew the picture, described it correctly out loud.

Another White female student agreed with the above assessment, and added the following insights:

> I guess this means that you [other White female student] probably, at that time, needed to adjust your expectations. Like, if you want to be a teacher, you can't get off track when things don't go exactly as planned. If the kids weren't following directions, they may not have understood them. But seriously, I think most of them

obviously did understand you because they responded by coloring, writing, you know.

A rich conversation followed where the university students discussed how teachers might holistically assess each student's learning in ways that would honor diverse expressions and forms of communication. As the Latina student noted from one of the quotes above, classroom teachers must adjust their instruction in culturally diverse settings where students may have varying levels of proficiency in different languages including but not exclusive to English.

Such adjustments would require placing greater trust in children to express their knowledge in different ways rather than through the dominant language (English) or form (writing in English), as well as substantially revisiting how the classroom environment is structured. The university students were able to connect their ideas to the culturally responsive strategies offered by Gay's (2000) such as encouraging all students to help build, critique, and transform the curriculum by drawing from diverse perspectives and sources.

Measuring Impact

Applied multicultural service-learning experiences such as the case study described in this article could offer pre-service teachers insights into the everyday challenges that K-12 students and their teachers confront, even in settings such as at the partner elementary school that appeared to place a high value on culturally responsive teaching and multicultural integration. While all attempts were made to avoid teaching "an ahistorical, depoliticized "cookbook" approach to the study of culture" (Hassouneh, 2005, p. 255), the researcher and the university students directly encountered the challenges of teaching higher-order multicultural content in a school setting that generally focused on the lowest level of multicultural integration, particularly the three "H"s or heritage months, heroes, and holidays (Banks, 2009).

Nevertheless, some apparent gains were made in terms of the service-learning experience's outcomes as aligned to the course objectives. Compared to the beginning of the course, follow-up data analyses revealed what appeared to be both major and minor attitudinal changes. Foremost, 100 percent of the university students answered "Yes" to the statement, "For future classes, I would recommend this type of service-learning experience as a course

requirement" with frequent comments made about the benefit of applying what was learned in class to a real-life classroom setting. Moreover, out of the 17 university students, 13 or 76.47 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "This course and the service-learning experience effectively taught me how to become a culturally responsive teacher." For instance, a White female student shared her insights:

> Being a culturally responsive teacher is really hard work. It's more than just finding a [multi]cultural book to share with kids. You have to know your content AND how to teach everyone. I also learned how to adapt how I explain everything, even simple directions. There's definitely no one-size-fits-all approach to teaching.

A Latina student discussed how this experience helped her better understand the cultural assets that all learners bring to the classroom:

> This class helped me understand that each child brings many gifts to classroom. Teachers can easily draw on these assets when they prepare their lessons instead of seeing something like being bilingual as a problem. There's no shame, no problem, in being bilingual, different, or whatever. These are things that kids should be proud of, that their teachers should nurture.

A Black male student commented on how this experience made him aware of the benefits and significant limitations of a one-time service-learning experience:

> Yeah, I'm glad we did what we did, but when it comes down to it, the kids won't be learning much about different cultures after we leave. Is it really enough to learn about a different perspective of Thanksgiving once a year? It's like Black history month where you hear about Martin Luther King once a year and maybe read a book about him. I mean, it's good they [elementary students] know some of this stuff and were exposed to it at a young age. But when I think about what we learned in class, schools need to do more to teach about cultural diversity all year around.

In all, the aforementioned responses suggested that the university students who believed that the service-learning experience better prepared them to become culturally competent teachers were demonstrating high levels of critical self-reflection that were rooted in carefully connecting practice (direct experiences and observations in the field) with theory (what was learned in class). The comments reflected an understanding of culturally responsive practice as a complex and nuanced effort that requires careful planning, practice, and the willingness to constantly adapt one's instruction to meet the needs of all learners.

However, six students or 35.29 percent of the class, stated that they disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that the course helped them become culturally responsive teachers, which highlighted a significant challenge of structuring any service-learning experience in ways that will reach all learners who are at different places in terms of their exposure to and understanding of diversity.

For instance, a White female student commented, "I felt like the topic of race was harped on a bit too much." When asked how the course or instruction could change to better meet her needs, the student declined to offer further feedback. A Black male student responded to the prompt with the comment, "It [cultural responsiveness] is nice but maybe not necessary." When asked to clarify his response, the student noted that he did not find it "absolutely necessary" to use culturally responsive strategies, although he noted,

> It seems to help minorities make connections to what they're learning, but I just don't see how teachers can make the time to do what we did. It took a lot of work just to plan for a two-hour class session.

Thus, like other case studies that seek to ascertain the impact of service-learning experiences in education courses, the short length of the course was "hardly enough time to expect individuals to change philosophies, beliefs, traditions, and ideas that are grounded in values they have held for their entire lives" (Wong, 2008, p. 35). Despite the aforementioned limitations, the major and minor gains made through this specific service-learning experience suggested that it was well worth the effort, and to confirm this point, the classroom teacher shared her feedback about the benefits of the collaborative partnership and project:

> I know there aren't a lot of us [people of color] in education, but diversity is critical to help children see what their futures, their possibilities are. Another great thing was I saw real gains in my class academic-wise. Their [elementary students'] writing improved, they were talking more, they were more on task, and I had fewer discipline problems. And this is obvious, but the kids, their eyes lit up when the college kids came. Because they saw people who looked like them. They usually don't see a lot diversity here [at school] except among themselves. My hope is by the time they graduate high school, they see diversity everywhere, at all levels.

Implications

Simply discussing, reading, and writing about the value of culturally responsive teaching within the walls of university classrooms too often falls into the trap of disconnecting teacher educators and their students from the everyday complexities and realities of teaching, particularly in urban public schools (Cone, 2009). Applied multicultural service-learning experiences such as the one described in this article could offer teacher educators with glimpses into the operations and structures of urban public schools to contextualize the challenges that K-12 students and teachers confront on a daily basis.

All of the university students, regardless of their personal beliefs, found ways to promote different ways of learning, speaking, and writing during the on-site visits, although they each had different assumptions and expectations about the roles that classroom teachers have in facilitating culturally affirming experiences for diverse learners.

A major lesson learned from this collaborative project was that culturally responsive teaching is possible to model in an English-centric and standards-based classroom, although time constraints make it challenging to consistently integrate higher levels of multicultural integration throughout the school year (Banks, 2009).

Such barriers are directly relevant to the work of teacher educators who must engage in ongoing reflection about how to re/structure their courses to actively model and promote culturally responsive practice to ensure that their pre-service teachers are prepared to effectively work with diverse learners within such constraints. Teacher educators may also find it necessary to engage in ongoing conversations with classroom teachers, colleagues, and university students on topics such as the following:

> What elements of multicultural service-learning in K-12 classrooms would be most beneficial to prepare pre-service teachers to effectively work with diverse learners?

> What are examples of K-12-university partnerships that have gone well in preparing culturally responsive teachers?

> What are examples of partnerships that did not go so well?

What lessons have been learned from these experiences that will enable K-12 schools and universities to participate in future partnerships that are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and ultimately prepare culturally responsive teachers who are genuinely committed to promoting educational equity by preparing all of their students for success?

In all, multicultural service-learning experiences could be integrated into any educational foundations or methods course, but should be structured in ways where the university students have multiple opportunities to, under the direction, mentorship, and supervision of classroom teachers and university faculty, discuss, evaluate, and pilot a range of culturally responsive practices while also engaging in ongoing reflection about the benefits and limitations of various strategies to make future improvements to one's curricular and instructional practices.

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