

Creating Meaningful Partnerships: Connecting Teaching Candidates with Professional Development Schools Through Service Learning

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ABSTRACT: Through the use of constructed narratives, this article shares the experiences of two preservice teachers and their university professor in implementing service learning projects that took place within their Professional Development School partnerships. Findings suggest that (1) service learning was a valuable instructional strategy to enhance the PDS model. (2) The embedded structures within the PDS partnership were beneficial in helping to create a successful service learning projects. (3) The service learning projects required the preservice teachers to engage in their PDS in new and meaningful ways that further supported preservice teacher learning. Recommendations for teacher educators who want to incorporate service learning include using the existing structures of their school university partnerships to support the implementation of service learning, create service learning projects that directly align with the partnership's School Improvement Plan, and establish clearly defined learning goals before preservice teachers engage in service learning to support their learning.

NAPDS Essentials Addressed: #1/A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community; #2/A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community

Service learning has gained momentum as a valuable component of teacher education preparation (Erickson & Anderson, 1997). This article reflects the experiences of trying to implement service learning within a middle childhood program that is connected with four Professional Development School (PDS) partnerships. According to the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (2001), “professional development schools are innovative institutions formed through partnerships between professional education programs and P-12 schools. Their mission is professional preparation of candidates, faculty development, inquiry directed at the improvement of practice, and enhanced student learning” (p. 1). Through the use of constructed narratives, this article shares the experiences of two preservice teachers, Robin and Cortney, and their university professor, Lisa, in implementing service learning projects that were embedded in a middle childhood method's course. The narratives explore the progression of the service learning project from conception to implementation and ending with individual reflections on their experiences. The article concludes with a discussion on the potential value that service learning offers in preparing preservice teachers while supporting K-12 students, schools and communities.

Service Learning

Service learning's intellectual foundation is based in John Dewey's notion of experiential education (Rocheleau, 2004). As

an educational method, it facilitates students' learning through active participation in a thoughtfully developed organized service for the community (Burr & Jensen, 2006). The two main goals of service learning include (1) promoting academic learning; and (2) promoting an authentic service project. Service learning expands students' pedagogical skills, learning of content knowledge, life skills, and civic responsibility (Berman, 2006; Lake, Winterbottom, Ethridge, & Kelly, 2015; Mitchell, 2015). When students participate in service learning they become highly motivated to learn which in return leads them to a better understanding of content and skills (Billig, 2011). An additional benefit is that students who complete service learning projects value themselves and feel more useful.

Experts associated with the progressive education movement argue that service learning helps students realize how classroom learning can solve community problems (Titlebaum, Williamson, Daprano, Baer, & Brahler, 2004). As a result service learning is now an accepted practice in many schools as a way of strengthening democratic practices (Ohn & Wade, 2009). Particularly, service learning has been used as a powerful form of pedagogy within middle level education. Newman, Dantzler, and Coleman (2015) found that a STEM related service learning project resulted in an increase of academic engagement and achievement for middle school students who were considered to demonstrate potential at-risk behavior.

Within the last two decades service learning has gained momentum as a valuable component of teacher education preparation. For example, in 1997 the Corporation for National Service funded two major grants to support service learning in teacher education, which resulted in the creation of the National Service-Learning in Teacher Education Partnership (NSLTEP). Subsequently, in 2003 this group of national partners created the International Center for Service-Learning in Teacher Education (ICSLTE). In teacher education, service learning connects civic interest to curriculum and pedagogy and thereby enhances the common good of society (Myers-Lipton, 1998). Lucas (2005) found that service learning serves as a tool in helping preservice teachers foster a commitment to social justice. Service learning therefore operates as a valuable pedagogy in helping preservice teachers move from solely having theoretical understandings to having both theoretical and practical understandings of social justice and democratic teaching practices.

Service Learning in a PDS Context

Support for the PDS partnership model as a better alternative to traditional field experiences has continued to grow within teacher education preparation since the term was first coined by the Holmes Group in 1990 (Breault & Breault, 2012). While there is literature that discusses the benefits of PDS partnerships (Darling-Hammond, 2005; Johnson, Nelson, & Barton, 2000; Ridley, Hurwitz, Davis-Hackett, and Miller; Zenkov, Corrigan, Beebe, Sells, & Sell, 2013) the value of service learning in K-12 settings (Billing, 2000; Newman, Dantzler & Coleman, 2015; Seitsinger, 2005) and the value of service learning for preservice teachers (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill 2007; Chang, Anagnostopoulos, & Omae, 2011; Erickson & Anderson, 1997), there is limited literature on service learning projects that are in connection with PDS partnerships. One exception is Middleton's (2003) study that examined the effectiveness of diversity based service learning within a PDS partnership. She found that the unique collaboration of multicultural education, service learning, and PDS partnerships "provides a counter for less effective experiences with 'best practice' methods" (p. 237).

Another example of service learning in a PDS context is seen in Gartland's (2010) account of the Towson-Waterloo-Illchester-Bellows Spring PDS, which was the recipient of the National Association for Professional Development Schools Award for Exemplary PDS Achievement. Within this PDS partnership, preservice teachers at Towson University completed a minimum of 20 hours of service learning within their PDS partnership schools. These preservice teachers engaged in service learning opportunities that were tied to their PDS partnerships' School Improvement Plan goals. In addition to completing their service learning hours, preservice teachers presented data from their service learning projects to school personnel, university members, and at a state PDS conference. Though these two examples illustrate the benefits of service learning, particularly

within PDS partnerships, there is little research that discusses the development of such projects and the impact of service learning on preservice teachers, schools, and communities.

Methods

Rice (2002) states that qualitative methods are often used in research on PDS because each PDS has unique and distinctive characteristics that do not lend themselves to using quantitative research. This paper uses narrative inquiry to explore the complexity of incorporating service learning within a middle childhood methods course. Influenced by a Deweyan view of experience, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) state "experience is the fundamental ontological category from which all inquiry—narrative or otherwise—proceeds" (p. 38). Therefore we centered our research on the experience of engaging in service learning.

In the context of education, Lyons and LaBoskey (2002) describe narrative research as more than storytelling but rather as a mode of inquiry and a way of knowing about teaching. They go on to state that "[a]s inquiry, narrative involved an intentional reflective process, the actions of a group of learners interrogating their learning, constructing and telling the story of its meaning, and predicting how this knowledge edge might be used in the future" (p. 3). From this point of view, narrative inquiry was taken up within this research because it served as a way to make meaning of our own roles and experiences engaging in service learning as a teacher educator and preservice teachers and how that might influence our future use of service learning in teacher education methods courses, in the case of Lisa, and in middle school classrooms, in the case of Robin and Cortney. In addition, we chose to use narrative inquiry because it served as a way for us to share our lived experiences as a learning tool for others who might consider engaging in service learning work (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000).

Besides simply reflecting on our experiences, assessments from the course that included individual reflection papers, a group paper, and a PowerPoint were used as data to aid our narratives. Once our narratives were constructed they were collectively shared and we used Leggo's (2008) heuristic method for interpreting narratives that included reading, interrogating, thematizing, expanding, and summarizing. Common themes that emerged from our narratives were that the service learning project required preservice teachers to reflect on structural inequalities in a more complex way, the service learning projects required the preservice teachers and the method course instructor to interact with the school community in an in-depth capacity which supported the PDS model, the PDS structure was an asset in helping to facilitate service learning, and the service learning project allowed teachers candidates to further see themselves as change agents in supporting schools and communities. Based on our analysis, narratives were then rewritten for data saturation, clarity, and coherency since "personal narratives depend on certain structures to hold them together" (Riessman, 1993, p.18). Using a linear narrative approach to our constructed narratives, our agreed upon

structure consisted of narrating about the conception of the service learning project, then discussing the implementation of the service learning project, and concluding with a personal reflection of the entire experience.

Context

The voices shared in this article are Cortney and Robin who were two juniors enrolled in a middle childhood methods course and Lisa who was the professor of the course. As middle childhood education majors, Cortney and Robin completed their field experience at a Professional Development School (PDS) for their entire junior academic school year. As part of the PDS model, middle childhood majors were required to complete a minimum of 40 hours in the field per 10-week length quarter. In total, they completed a minimum of 120 hours that academic year. Typically preservice teachers took most of their methods courses during their junior academic year. This coursework included two middle childhood general methods courses that were taught by Lisa during the fall and spring quarters. The course in which the service learning project was embedded was the spring quarter middle childhood curriculum course. This course was for middle childhood majors who would be licensed to teach two content areas out of science, math, social studies, and english in grades four to nine.

The service learning projects discussed in this article were based on an assignment embedded within the spring quarter course, and therefore Cortney and Robin had already previously spent over 80 hours working in their respective PDS partnerships. Based on the universities geographical location, the PDS were located in rural Appalachia within the Midwest region of the country. Cortney was placed in Madison Middle School and Robin was placed at Ford Elementary School.

As part of the PDS model, each school had a school liaison that served as a teacher leader within the PDS and a faculty coordinator who was a faculty member at the University. Collaboratively they worked to support PDS efforts and preservice teachers. In addition, there was a teaching fellow who is a fulltime graduate student and licensed teacher who was placed with a teacher liaison. The teaching fellow shared teaching responsibilities with the teaching liaison which frees up the time of the teacher liaison to engage in PDS related work. This allows the teacher liaison to facilitate PDS related initiatives such as teacher book studies or mentoring workshops, to regularly meet with mentor teachers and teaching candidates to ensure a supportive and rich clinical experience, and to attend important meetings in relation to supporting the PDS model.

Narratives

Lisa's Narrative

The conception of the service learning project. As a new faculty member in the middle childhood program, one of the first

things that was discussed with me were the four middle childhood PDS partnerships at my university. During my orientation week, the director of the Center for Professional Development School Partnerships within the College of Education invited me to a meeting to discuss the vision and mission of the Center and the role that PDS partnerships had in shaping a rich clinical experience for preservice teachers while supporting our local rural schools within the community. The director wanted me to be actively engaged and asked me to serve as the faculty coordinator for one of the partnership schools since I was teaching the two general middle childhood methods courses. As a faculty member new to working within a university that had PDS partnerships, I was eager to be involved. I felt that being a faculty coordinator would create the opportunity to develop an intimate relationship with a local middle school while also helping me to develop a deeper understanding of the PDS structure and its implications for my middle childhood courses.

As I developed a greater understanding of our PDS partnerships, I decided that service learning would be a great addition to my course. Service learning was a concept that I was first introduced to as a fulltime graduate student earning my doctoral degree in middle school education. It was presented as an instructional approach that made learning relevant and engaging for young adolescents. It promoted civic responsibility, emphasized democratic teaching practices, and it was a way to foster positive and mutually beneficial relationships between schools and communities. Like so many other pedagogical approaches newly introduced to me in my program, I thought it would have been great if I could have incorporated that best practice in my previous experience as a middle school teacher. Understanding that it was my intention to pursue teacher education and not return to my middle school teaching position, I reluctantly compartmentalized service learning as simply an instructional strategy that I would merely discuss with my future preservice teachers.

Fast forward to my first year as a teacher educator and more informed with the understanding that service learning was a strategy that was encouraged in K-12 classrooms and higher education alike; I decided to move from simply discussing service learning as an instructional approach to having preservice teachers engage in service learning as an authentic learning experience. During my first quarter of teaching a middle childhood methods course, I knew that I did not fully embrace the PDS model in the development of the course. While I knew that the PDS partnership provided a richer clinical experience for our preservice teachers based on how they compared their PDS experience to their previous year's tradition field experience, I did not feel like I took advantage of that experience. It takes some responsibility on the part of the faculty member to understand how the PDS structure is an asset to preservice teacher learning and development and to create a course that compliments that experience. As I became more informed of the PDS model and began to plan for my spring quarter course, I knew that the PDS partnership structure

provided a great opportunity for preservice teachers to engage in service learning work. By spring quarter preservice teachers within the middle childhood program already spent both fall and winter quarters within their partnership schools and had a better understanding of the school and community context. Furthermore, inherent within the structure of the PDS were key personnel like a school liaison who I knew would be supportive in assisting preservice teachers to identify needs within the school or community that could be the basis of their service learning projects. Finally, I knew that service learning aligned with the mission of our PDS partnership because it could potentially be another valuable tool in helping to support our partnership schools. Thus, I found that having my preservice teachers engage in service learning was a way to help them develop a greater understanding of a valuable pedagogical approach, a way for my university course to align and take advantage of the PDS model, and a way to support and strengthen our PDS partnership.

Though I was committed to having my preservice teachers engage in service learning, it was a daunting task to conceptualize how this service learning experience would take shape. As a new teacher educator in a new socio-cultural context, I was still in the process of learning about the surrounding communities and school cultures myself. In addition, from a curriculum standpoint I had to ask myself, how did service learning connect to my course curriculum? What did I really want my preservice teachers to gain from the experience? And, what would I actually have them to do to cultivate this learning experience? But overall, I was optimistic that the outcomes would outweigh the challenges in structuring the service learning project. In addition, I knew that service learning would align with the work and purpose of our PDS partnerships.

Implementation of the service learning. One of the components of our PDS model is a pre-quarter planning meeting where the center director, school liaisons, faculty coordinators, and methods instructors are all in attendance. During this meeting faculty members discuss their courses for the quarter. Faculty members share the field-based assignments they plan on including within their courses and solicit feedback from the school liaisons. This potentially allows school liaisons to be co-constructors of assignments that will be implemented at their respective schools. Since I knew I wanted to engage in service learning, this was a great opportunity to introduce the concept and to receive input from the school liaisons. It allowed the school liaisons to discuss some of the challenges that my preservice teachers might anticipate such as planning their projects around the statewide testing that happens during the spring quarter. It also allowed me to put the project on their radar since the school liaisons would naturally be the point of contact for our teacher candidates when trying to brainstorm various ideas for their service learning projects.

From a course standpoint, the first thing that I did was to give my preservice teachers a pre-assessment on their understanding of service learning. Based on my pre-assessment, there were only a few preservice teachers who had previous experience

with service learning. To get preservice teachers to start to conceptualize service learning, I devoted part of a 3-hour class session to service learning. We discussed the theoretical underpinnings, as well as the benefits and challenges of implementing service learning in classrooms. I also showed videos of how service learning projects in various middle school classrooms were facilitated in order to illustrate the effectiveness of implementing a service learning project. Preservice teachers were then given a needs assessment to fill out about their schools to guide their brainstorming of possible projects. Preservice teachers were also made aware that they had to write a group paper on their service learning experience, share their service learning project with the class via a PowerPoint presentation, and individually reflect on the learning that occurred in relation to their identity as future teachers. The reflection piece was important because I wanted to make sure that my preservice teachers didn't just see this as something fun to do, but to understand service learning as a meaningful and viable curriculum approach and also to use this experience to grow their identities as professional educators.

While preservice teachers were allowed to ask me any questions throughout the process, I personally did not provide much guidance during the implementation of their service learning projects. To maximize their learning experience, I wanted them to rely on each other, school personnel, and their middle school students to guide their process. Though one or two students completed individual service learning projects, most students completed one big service learning project with all of the preservice teachers at their PDS.

Personal reflection. Overall, the service learning projects proved to be a meaningful learning experience for my preservice teachers. The majority of students came away not only seeing the value of service learning as a powerful approach to curriculum, but were able to take on tasks and interact with students, school personnel, and in some cases the community in ways that they were not required to do during their two previous quarters in their PDS partnership experience. Service learning helped to enrich the PDS experience for the preservice teachers while at the same time serving as a way to give back to the PDS community that embraced them as members of their respective schools.

One of the most powerful take aways for preservice teachers was the importance of getting to know students holistically instead of just academically. Preservice teachers also had the opportunity to explore the amount of work and effort involved in planning and organizing enrichment activities within a school setting. For the most part, structures and processes were already in place when the preservice teachers entered their schools and classrooms. So while during the fall and winter quarters they engaged in activities such as chaperoning field trips or school dances, participated in professional development opportunities at their schools, assisted in parent teacher night, and helped facilitate penny wars or extra curricula activities, they were normally not involved in the entire process. This experience helped to expand their views about curriculum, the amount of

work it takes to organize non-traditional curricula activities, and the value of creating such experiences for their students.

Though service learning was a valuable learning experience, there were also some challenges. The major challenge for me consisted of figuring out how to navigate an underlining cultural deficit discourse that the needs assessment process reinforced. Most of my students in the course were not from rural Appalachia and many of them already had negative stereotypes about the community, children, and families from this region. Completing needs assessments that focused on what their schools lacked compounded their negative dispositions. As I moved forward, I discovered that in addition to including reflections on their professional growth as preservice teacher, I needed to facilitate conversations and reflections on structural causes of economic disparity. Without providing a space for these types of conversations, many preservice teachers relied on cultural/behavioral stereotypes to make meaning of the economic disparities that they saw in their schools and communities. Though challenging, I see this as an opening to help students to not only develop a more complex understanding about the professional responsibilities and identities as teachers, but also an opportunity to develop a stronger sense of cultural competency.

Robin's Experience

Conceiving the service learning experience. As a child of Appalachia my view of what was important to Ford Elementary differed from those of my peers who were predominately from suburbs near larger cities in our state. My peers' initial ideas surrounded raising money for the school. I believe this was a response to their observations of the differences in socioeconomic status between their home community and the community surrounding Ford Elementary. My initial reaction was also to raise money for an extracurricular activity available within the community. It's my personal experience from growing up within this socio-cultural context that too often communities in poverty lack the resources to create events that allow children to participate in exciting, engaging, and educational activities that allows kids to be exactly who they are, kids. Unfortunately, through intense debate and lack of leadership within our group, none of us could come to a consensus on a reasonable service learning project with an attainable goal. Therefore I took the initiative to reach out to Ms. Smith, who was the school liaison for the PDS and a veteran teacher who had 20 years of teaching experience at Ford Elementary. In addition, Ms. Smith was raised in and was active in the community, was a Ford High School graduate, and an alumna from our college. As a community advocate and school liaison, I was confident that she would have the students' best interest in mind and open to helping our group to brainstorm a meaningful service learning project.

Ms. Smith immediately had a suggestion on what we could do for a service learning project at Ford Elementary. She explained the school district couldn't afford to fill the position of the Physical Education teacher who recently retired before the

end of the school year. Therefore, Ford Elementary was without Physical Education and without their annual field day. Ms. Smith stated that every year Ford Elementary students look forward to field day and they would be devastated to know they wouldn't have one this year. She explained that at the end of the school year students and teachers are in high spirits due to their school year accomplishments and also because of school wide activities such as field day. Unfortunately, she anticipated that it wouldn't be the same without it and suggested for our group to plan and completely run field day. When the principal and staff members were informed that we were going to organize the field day they were immediately excited and praised us for giving the kids the opportunity to participate in Ford Elementary annual field day.

Implementing the service learning experience. The planning of the service learning project involved many people and particulars that none of my group members nor I could have been possibly prepared for just based on our normal field experience. Though we were placed at our partnership school since September and it was now April and we felt well integrated into the school community, we never had to take on these types of responsibilities. First, we had to communicate with the principal so he could provide us a date and the time slots for each participating grade. After finding out the date, we were solely responsible for planning the entire event. Different group members took on different roles. My role as a leader emerged in the beginning steps of the service learning planning process when I sought the advice of Ms. Smith. There was a fellow preservice teacher that I shared similar leadership responsibilities and both of us facilitated group discussions about goals, questions, concerns, deadlines, and the progress of our service learning project. In addition to being a group leader, I also was in charge of locating available physical education resources to use for each field day station. One preservice teacher took the initiative to correspond with the retired Physical Education teacher in order for us to learn how field day functions and what occurred during previous field days. Other preservice teachers emerged into roles that allowed them to use their creativity to decide which equipment would be used and what event could be created out of those resources. A few preservice teachers managed the schedule which involved deciding how long events would last, how many events would take place, and how and when groups would rotate to different events. In addition we determined what events were age appropriate for different grades since we planned field day for kindergarten to 8th grade. Each task presented our group with different obstacles, but none that interfered with our overall goal of creating what Ford Elementary's principal said to be "the most memorable field day experience at Ford Elementary to date".

Reflection. While the planning phase of our service learning project was chaotic, one of the strengths of my PDS experience was that preservice teachers within my partnership were able to form a tight bond. Not only did we all see each other at our partnership schools, but also we took several courses together during this timeframe. We were able to create a unique identity

that helped support our ability to implement the service learning project. The overall experience within Ford Elementary Field Day was heartfelt. Among the rotation of eight stations, I can recall the sheer excitement in every child's smile. There were instances where we found ourselves laughing and participating in the events, along with the teachers. The most empowering scene was observing students who struggle with behavior and lacked self-confidence within the academic setting, scream and shout words of encouragement to their fellow peers as they completed the different obstacles in each event. Students truly came together and supported one another, bridging the gaps of self-worth and teamwork that aren't always prevalent in the classroom.

There are a number of lessons that I took from this service learning project. One that has transformed my views the most is the connection between teacher and student when you engage in activities together that aren't solely academically driven. So much of what we learn in our teacher education courses is what happens in our field placements in regards to student academic learning. This experience has shifted my teaching philosophy to include more than simply connecting with limited and often superficial background knowledge, but rather digging deeper into my understanding of who my students are academically, socially, and culturally. Field Day required me to put myself in their community in a different way. I learned that in order for me to properly connect with my students I need to become a part of their community and embrace all of its characteristics. I don't believe it's until students view their educators connecting with their community that they can successfully connect with their teacher and trust them.

Although I was raised in rural Appalachia, in an adjacent county to the location of Ford County Elementary School, I was never required to practice connecting with any community outside of my own town. Stepping outside of my comfort zone, communicating with school personnel, and verbally and physically interacting with the students at Ford County Elementary has taught me that each community is different, even within rural Appalachia. This experience has expanded my understanding of rural Appalachia. Ford County Elementary is nestled among three small communities that financially survive because of coalmining. I previously viewed the coalmine, which is the only employment opportunity other than the Ford County School as a time of the past. After acknowledging that diversity exists among predominately all white, communities in poverty within rural Appalachia, I began to see each township within the local school district for what they were worth, rather than for what I preconceived. Their strengths and weaknesses as a community are individual stories and experiences that those who live there get to tell. It wasn't until this service learning project that I could see diversity through a clearer lens.

Cortney's Experience

Conceiving the service learning experience. I was placed in a fifth grade classroom at Madison Elementary School for my PDS partnership and I took on the role of leading the service learning

project for the group. Similarly to Robin, I felt I should take initiative since I grew up in Appalachia and I felt more connected to the area than other preservice teachers. In addition, I happened to be placed with the school liaison and teaching fellow for my PDS experience. Ashley was the teaching fellow who taught in the classroom during my PDS involvement. As a fellow, she was responsible for teaching the second period class. She was very supportive and I could relate to her as a recent graduate for the university and as a professional. I felt it was easy to communicate with her and she was very helpful in assisting us to plan the service-learning project.

I communicated with Kaye, who was the school liaison, and Ashley that based on my own previous experience with service learning, I felt the best way to complete our assignment was to actually engage my 5th grade students in service learning. When I was in fourth grade, a group of college students from our same university worked with my class to complete a school beautification service learning project that positively influenced me. It was an important life lesson for me, and I wanted to try to impact my students in the same way. In order to engage my students in service learning, I initially worked with another member of my group and Ashley by having the fifth grade students brainstorm service learning project ideas that would work best in our community. I had many projects in mind, but I thought it was important for it to be student lead. I wanted students to take ownership and cultivate a sense of human agency and community involvement. I introduced the idea to my students beforehand so they could generate ideas leading up to the lesson. As a class we created a web with service learning in the middle and had our students brainstorm possible ideas. Additionally, a student approached me and my partnership teachers with an idea that he had for the service learning project. He mentioned that his cousin has a communication disorder called Angelman Syndrome and attended a different school that could better support her academic needs. He explained she couldn't communicate verbally and used a soundboard at school. He thought it would be great if we could raise money to buy something for her to communicate with at home since her family could not afford to purchase one. He expressed that the project was a good idea because it addressed a need that would benefit her and could teach his classmates about compassion.

We decided to let him present the idea to the class and we then taught a lesson on the communication disorder to his class and the other fifth grade classes. My service learning group then discussed all of the options that the fifth graders came up with and ways that we could help them achieve their goals. We decided that since soundboards are very expensive devices, we could not afford to buy one. However, an iPad was suggested after learning of possible apps that would allow her to communicate since it was a much cheaper option. After doing some research we figured with the help of all of the teaching candidates and the middle school students we could raise enough money to buy an iPad, which would allow her to use an application to communicate. Collectively, the class decided to

include this project as an idea along with other ideas that were generated from the service learning web brainstorming activity.

Implementing the service learning experience. When deciding which service learning project we wanted to implement, we thought it was important for the students to vote for their favorite project. We narrowed it down to three options. One was working to raise money for the iPad, one was raising money for natural disasters in the United States and the last was raising money for the fifth grade class fund. The students voted and almost unanimously chose to raise money for the iPad.

Once the students decided on raising 500 dollars for an iPad, the preservice teachers in my group collaboratively met to decide how to organize the service learning project. This was the first stage where other members in my group actually took an active role within the service learning project. We brainstormed what we wanted students to learn from engaging them in the process and how we were going to facilitate the project to include other classes within the school.

As a group we decided that it would be necessary to teach the other students in the school about Angelman Syndrome and we also wanted to plan a lesson to help students empathize with someone who could not verbally communicate. With those goals in mind we created a PowerPoint presentation about Angelman Syndrome and had our students write about what life would be like if they couldn't speak. We also had our students brainstorm ways to raise money. Kaye was very helpful in providing a list of resources in the community we could seek out. She helped me get to know the community and work with people in the school to support the service learning project. In addition, my group discussed how we might raise money on campus. Lastly, we facilitated encouraging discussions throughout the process. We routinely discussed how difficult it would be to go without something that is incredibly needed and how economic hardships affect peoples' daily lives. Although, we could not provide her with the technology of a soundboard we could work to provide her with an iPad that would meet her communication needs at home.

Reflecting on the service learning. Our students showed great interest and motivation in raising money for the iPad. We had numerous fundraisers in the community and at the school during the course of the quarter. We were successful in part because so many people were working toward a common goal. There were many obstacles to overcome, such as getting permission from the principal, writing proposals to sell food during school hours, finding safe ways to ask for money, creating presentations and finding places on campus to fundraise. The fifth grade students sold popsicles and baked goods during school and had many donations. As a grade level we were able to raise enough money to buy the iPad and present it to her family.

Reflecting on the experience showed that as preservice teachers, we were able to connect students to their community in a way that everyone involved was able to feel accomplished. This area is known as a community that leans on each other in times of hardships and it was rewarding to foster this sense of civic responsibility within our students. As the project made the front

page of the local newspaper, students felt a sense of pride and accomplishment they had never felt.

Overall, I felt this was a great experience for the preservice teachers, in-service teachers, elementary students that were involved, and the community. We were able to reach our goal, which showed students that they could accomplish a significant task and showed them how to set and achieve goals. It also demonstrated to students that even though they might live in an economically impoverished area, which is often discussed from a deficit perspective, that human agency and community serve as strong assets. Through this process students learned that regardless of their own economic status that collectively their endeavors can serve to benefit their local community. It connected preservice candidates to their students and the school community. It taught us how to implement a service learning project that creates valued members of society at a young age. In my experience I felt the most important aspect of this project was instilling values in young students to promote good in their community for years to come.

Findings

Based on our shared experiences, three themes emerged. The first was that service learning aligned with the PDS model and was a valuable instructional strategy to enhance the PDS model. The second theme was that the embedded structures within our PDS were beneficial in helping to create and implement a successful service learning project. Lastly, the service learning projects required the preservice teachers to engage in their PDS in new and meaningful ways that supported preservice teacher learning.

As Middleton (2003) states, "the tenets of service learning fit well with the functions of professional development school (PDS) partnerships" (p. 232). Particularly in our experience, service learning became a vehicle to accomplish some of the nine essential characteristics of PDS. Both Robin's and Cortney's service learning projects benefited the students and community served in their PDS. It was clear that Cortney's project that engaged middle school students to fundraise for a special needs student within their community spoke to "[a] comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community" (Brindley, Filed, and Lessen, 2008, p. 2). Robin's service learning project helped to provide a solution for a need within their school spoke to "[a] school-university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community" (p. 2). In addition, the three of us had the opportunity to present this work at a national education conference "as a way of contributing to the educational dialogue" (p. 6) and promoting the value of the PDS model in supporting the implementation of service learning in teacher education.

The PDS structure was beneficial in allowing preservice teachers to implement successful service learning projects. Components like the pre-quarter planning meetings where Lisa

had the opportunity to introduce the service learning project and get the school's liaisons perspectives on challenges to engaging in this work were helpful in designing the service learning assignment. Likewise, the school liaison and in Cortney's case, the teaching fellow, served as resources that the preservice teachers relied on in helping to plan their service learning project. These are positions that are not customary in a traditional field placement. Additionally, a result of our PDS model is that preservice teachers have the opportunity to develop a collective identity as members within their respective schools. This collective identity is not often formed in tradition field experience but is necessary when engaging in group related service learning projects.

Finally, a valuable outcome of the service learning project for us, as preservice teachers, was that it required us to interact with our PDS in new and meaningful ways. Within our teacher education program we had to complete field based assignments that were beneficial and necessary in our development as educators such as teaching lessons, facilitating small group instruction, and assessing students. However, these assignments normally limited us to working with students in our classrooms in very specific ways. In Lisa's fall quarter course we were asked to reflect on the relationships between schools and communities, and even asked to reflect on and complete additional field hours outside of the classroom at community events such as football games and fall harvest festivals. However, the service-learning project required us to reflect in a more critical way on how school and community structures and social and financial inequalities influence student learning and access to opportunities. Furthermore, service learning required us to move from just reflecting on or development as teachers but focus on our development as change agents within schools and local communities.

The service learning project gave us a meaningful reason to sit down and talk to administration, people within the community, teachers, and students that were tied to tangible outcomes that we wouldn't have had the need to do otherwise. This gave us the opportunity to truly see the school as a system. It allowed us to identify the different roles that schools and communities play in supporting each other and it allowed us to see how curriculum could be used to enhance learning while cultivating social and civic responsibility within students. It showed how students, teachers, schools, universities and communities could work together towards one mission. More importantly, it required us to see how we as preservice teachers could be part of that mission at our current PDS partnerships and future schools as classroom teachers.

Recommendations

Reflecting on the experiences of implementing a service learning project has led us, as education majors and a teacher educator, to a specific conclusion: Service learning is a meaningful pedagogical strategy within teacher education preparation. Though service learning was beneficial to supporting preservice teachers' learning and school goals, it can come with challenges. Based on our experiences we offer three recommendations for implementing a

successful service learning project within a partnership school. The first recommendation is to use the existing structures of the partnership to support the service learning project. One of the strengths of the PDS model is that there are embedded structures that enhance effective communication between schools and universities. Most PDS models have similar components to our school liaison and pre-quarter planning meetings. Utilizing resources like a school liaison helps with the execution of the service learning project by providing a key contact person at the school that both preservice teachers and teacher educators can work with throughout the duration of the service learning project. The pre-quarter planning meetings are beneficial in creating the necessary space where both the university and school educators can have a voice in discussing the direction of the service learning projects so it meets the learning objectives of the course and meets the needs of the school.

The second recommendation is to choose a service learning project that directly aligns with the established goals of the partnership. Using the School Improvement Plan is a helpful starting point in assisting preservice teachers to identify a service learning project. For example, if improving literacy is an important goal of the partnership school, then a service-learning project where preservice teachers implement a remedial reading program could serve as a valuable learning experience for the preservice teachers while meeting the needs of the partnership school. From our experience, when the service learning project aligns directly with the needs of a school it creates greater cooperation from the school in supporting preservice teachers' service learning projects.

The third recommendation is to establish clearly defined learning goals before preservice teachers engage in service learning to support their learning. There are many ways in which service learning can occur and having clearly defined learning goals helps to shape the direction of the service learning project, allows for better articulated instructions to guide preservice teachers projects, creates greater transparency in assessment of projects, and allows for more structured and purposeful reflection opportunities for preservice teachers. While any service to a school or school's community can create a valuable learning experience for preservice teachers, one of the main tenets of service learning is to connect the service to the learning goals of the course. In order to achieve this goal, teacher educators must have clearly defined learning goals before preservice teachers engage in service learning.

Conclusion

Our experiences with service learning reflect research that states that service learning in teacher education helps preservice teachers assume professional identities that traditional field experiences haven't. Service learning helps increase preservice teachers sociocultural awareness, is an effective pedagogy for teaching and learning, and has created reciprocal benefits between preservice teachers, their cooperating teachers, and students (Author, xxxx; Hutchinson, 2011; and Wasserman,

2010). In addition, the concept of servicing learning completely aligned and enhanced the middle childhood PDS partnership and became another resource in helping to support preservice teachers' professional development while supporting the middle childhood PDS partnerships and their local communities. SUP

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