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Implementing Service Learning in Pre-service Teacher Coursework

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Implementing Service Learning in Pre-service Teacher Coursework

Abstract

Service learning remains a topic of interest in higher education. It has become more prevalent in teacher preparation programs with the intent of providing the opportunity for pre-service teachers to become engaged with individuals who have different life experiences than their own. Lessons can be learned through a review of the literature and the examination of existing models of service learning, including an honest discussion of the advantages and potential barriers for all stakeholders.

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Implementing Service Learning in Pre-service Teacher Coursework

Service learning remains a topic of interest in higher education (Butin, 2006; Cone, 2012; Desrochers, 2006; Harrison, 2013; Molee, Henry, Sessa, & McKinney-Prupis, 2010). It has become more prevalent in teacher preparation programs with the intent of providing the opportunity for pre-service teachers to become engaged with individuals who have different life experiences than their own (Galvan & Parker, 2011). Lessons can be learned through a review of the literature and the examination of existing models of service learning, including an honest discussion of the advantages and potential barriers for all stakeholders.

Definition of Service Learning

Service learning can be defined as a reciprocal relationship that merges both field experience and sustainable community service, to offer learning opportunities that link academics to the service, so both the college students and the community partner benefits (Ryan & Callahan, 2002). It is also explained as the integration of community service activities with academic skills, content, and reflection on these experiences (Karayan & Gathercoal, 2005). Essential service learning principles include: (a) high quality service to the community; (b) integrated learning between the service activity and the classroom; (c) reflection by the college student to assist in incorporating service experiences with academics; (d) student voice to enhance students' role in planning and implementing the learning activities; (e) collaboration to ensure benefits for all (i.e. students, community, and university); and (f) evaluation to effectively assess progress toward both the learning and service goals (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001). Service learning differs from the concept of service in that it includes reflection and extends naturally from predetermined curriculum, benefits all partners, and is sustainable (Karayan & Gathercoal, 2005). According to Bamber and Hankin (2011), "Service learning models are

increasingly, if not universally, recognized as important in developing skills that might enable graduates to become active citizens both locally and globally” (p. 192).

Service Learning in Higher Education

The service learning initiative has become a major presence within higher education with research focusing in on the impact of service learning on the development of the college participants as contributing citizens of their community. Giles and Eyster (1994) opened the door to examining the perceptions of college students about their service learning experiences, questioning if these experiences predicted a more socially just way of thinking and sustained community participation and service. Findings from the study indicated that the participants were optimistic about the impact of service learning programs, and that the programs might be effective in increasing citizenship, commitment, and participation.

More specifically, when integrated effectively into teacher preparation coursework, service learning can provide experiences for pre-service teachers to become engaged with individuals who have different life experiences from their own and potentially shift principles of multicultural education from abstraction to reality (Desrochers, 2006; Galvan & Parker, 2011, Harrison, 2013). These shifts that are occurring in higher education pedagogy are being explored to expand the social, cultural, and human capital of universities and their local communities through experiential learning and active partnership illustrated through service learning partnerships (Bamber & Hankin, 2011).

A powerful way to gain knowledge into the impact of service learning activities on the higher education participants is through participant reflection, but a critical reflection process that “generates, deepens, and documents learning does not occur automatically – rather, it must be carefully and intentionally designed” (Ash & Clayton, 2009, p. 28). The DEAL Model for

Critical Reflection offers students the opportunity to use reflective writing or speaking as vehicles for learning rather than as expressions of learning after it has already occurred. The DEAL Model consists of the description of the experience, examination of the experience, and articulation of learning, which includes goals for future action (Ash & Clayton, 2009). A close analysis of carefully-crafted reflections can provide information about the impact of the service learning experience for the stakeholders.

In a study conducted by Meaney, Bohler, Kopf, Hernandez and Scott (2008), future elementary school teachers were enrolled in a course promoting physical activity within the school day. The service learning component of the course provided the opportunity for the pre-service teachers to teach daily physical education in the school's gymnasium to African American and Hispanic children from low socio-economic backgrounds, in a summer school program for kindergarten through second grade. Findings from the pre-service teachers daily logs, reflective narratives, and focus group interviews reveal these learning experiences "positively altered the pre-service educators' knowledge and beliefs about the students' different cultures and enhanced the pre-service educators' teaching skills" (p. 198).

Similarly, Hallman and Burdick (2011) found in their study centering on service learning and the preparation of secondary English teachers that the participating pre-service teachers were able, through reflection, to begin to value the different experiences their students brought to school. The participants in this study were able to make sense of questions they had about what cultural experiences students are coming to school with that might be different from what they, as pre-service teachers, bring to the classroom. Through the partnership and collaborative nature of the service learning project, teacher candidates were afforded the opportunity to reflect and freely discuss their authentic experiences. Cone (2012) conducted a study with 74 pre-

service teachers who self-enrolled in four sections of an elementary science methods course. The researcher also found through participant reflection that pre-service teachers that participated in a community based service learning section of a science methods course expanded their simplistic descriptions of diversity, seeing it as a resource to be utilized for teaching science.

Bamber and Hankin (2011) also found that the pre-service participants in their study experienced a shifting of their world-view through a local service learning project that teaches citizenship in local high schools in Europe. LaMaster (2001) reported the similar gaining of a different perspective from the secondary physical education pre-service teachers who completed their service learning project at a multicultural high school.

Benefits to Community Partners

Nevertheless, service learning is not considered successful if there are not also discernible benefits to the community partners as well. Flower (2008) discusses the need for reciprocity in service learning, and defines this as the interchange in roles between teacher and students as well as the interchange between university and community partnerships, in order to reverse the longstanding practice of the university using the community for their own research agendas. Still, service learning can be a complex approach to teaching and learning, and it requires approaches to assessment, evaluation, and reporting, capable of obtaining consistent results for all of the stakeholders (Karayan & Gathercoal, 2005). Unfortunately, the majority of assessment is geared towards gauging the impact on the college or university, and tends to neglect the impact on the community partners, or reports only minor benefits to community stakeholders (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Galvan & Parker, 2011). For example, in a study that investigated the reciprocal nature of a service learning project that involved physical education

pre-service teachers and urban underserved youth, the reflections of the pre-service teachers indicated that the deepest self-awareness and areas of noted growth were mostly focused on the pre-service teachers' own needs as novice teachers and not on their impact on the students in the physical education classrooms (Galvan & Parker, 2011).

Prompted by the small amount of research on the impact of service learning on the community, Blouin and Perry (2009) conducted in-depth interviews with representatives of local community-based organizations that have worked with service learners. They concluded that "the benefits to students are well documented, but the value to the community is less clear" (p. 132). These researchers strongly recommend a continuing emphasis on the community perspective in all assessment measures to ensure true reciprocity remains evident in service learning partnerships (Blouin & Perry, 2009). Karayan & Gathercoal (2005) highlight an innovative technology assessment program, the ProfPort Webfolio System that enhances assessment, evaluation, and reporting of the impact of service learning partnerships for all stakeholders. This assessment system emerged over traditional impact measures because "it produces better and more reliable results as it integrates both formative and summative assessment practices and provides students with multiple opportunities to master content and process" (Karayan & Gathercoal, 2005, pp. 89-90). However, criticism of this assessment method includes the time commitment involved with the formative and summative assessments required throughout the projects.

Service Learning at One Higher Education Institution

Research occurred at an independent, liberal arts college that provides undergraduate, graduate and doctoral programs in traditional academic liberal arts disciplines, as well as career-oriented fields. The college supports an Office of Service Learning utilized throughout the

college, as diversity and service to others are both encompassed in the mission as well as in the strategic plan of the college. Real community needs are addressed through service learning projects that include client support or capacity building projects while enhancing college student learning. Client support includes working directly with clients or agencies. Capacity building projects entail creating a tangible project that remains with the community partner, such as learning center kits, or a product distributed throughout the community, such as health care awareness brochures.

Placing Service Learning in the Context of A School of Education Mission

The mission of the School of Education (SoE) includes preparing teacher candidates (pre-service teachers) with a strong sense of social justice, creating educators who can engage each and every child. The faculty of the SoE discovered through class discussions that undergraduate teacher candidates often had preconceived assumptions about cultural, economic and social differences. It was important to the SoE faculty that teacher candidates be exposed to diverse student populations with diverse needs throughout various settings, including understanding and supporting students with special needs and their families in community contexts. As Stringfellow and Edmonds-Behrend (2013) posit, integrating service learning into teacher certification programs provides opportunities for understanding social inequities. Given that the mission of the school of education focuses on social justice, the researchers focused on sustainable projects, to make a long term difference in the community. Again, this helped teacher candidates move from volunteer status to social change agents. Faculty guided class discussions about interactions in community partner settings, critiquing practices that create a sense of privilege by dominant cultures over marginalized populations.

According to one of the essential principles of service learning outlined by Anderson, Swick, and Yff (2001), service learning experiences should provide high quality services to the community. For this to occur, preliminary steps needed to take place prior to the onset of actual community service participation by teacher candidates.

Conceptual framework.

Constructivism provided a theoretical basis for activities in the researchers' classes. Both instructors believe knowledge is socially constructed by interactions with others and their environment (www.learning-theories.com). Dixon-Krauss (1996) states "the teacher's role is mediating the child's learning activity as they share knowledge and meaning through social interaction" (p. 18). Subsequently, the researchers purposefully designed classroom activities and assignments with the intention of developing knowledge through authentic experiences by way of social interaction and shared activities. This allowed the teacher candidates to view real world problems through multiple perspectives as they collaborated with community partners as well as each other as they developed learning experiences and activities to meet the goals of students and their community partners.

The researchers found the theories of Constructivism and Problem Based Learning (PBL) interacted well. PBL is an approach where small groups of students acquire new knowledge in an environment where they take responsibility for their own learning, with the teacher acting as a facilitator or guide. Problems are often designed to simulate those the student would find in his or her profession (Woods, 2014, 1985). PBL engaged students working in teams in the solving of real community based problems, preparing them to solve similar issues in the future (Barell, 2007). Tarhan and Acar-Sesen assert "PBL provides a meaningful and concrete way to apply the essential principles of the constructivist theory, which states that learning is essentially an act of

active knowledge construction on the part of a learner" (p. 565). Both Constructivism and PBL were congruent with our SoE mission of preparing critical thinkers and problem solvers who can support and nurture *every* child.

Methodology

The researchers utilized action research as this model focuses on systematic inquiry, reflection and problem solving to study and improve practices (Hendricks, 2006). Holly, Arhar and Kasten (2005) state action research "involves an ethical commitment to improving society (to make it more just), improving ourselves (that we may become more conscious of our responsibility as members of a democratic society), and ultimately improving our lives together (building community) (p. 31). The researchers specifically focused on Critical Action Research (Hendricks, 2006), as the features, collaboration, evaluation of social issues, and social change, matched our social justice mission, theoretical underpinnings of our projects, and course goals.

Participants

Participants were teacher candidates attending a private university with strong ties to an urban community. The teacher candidates were enrolled in a dual certification elementary childhood/ special education program, in the second semester of their sophomore or junior year.

Data collection

Each teacher candidate participated in the service learning project over the course of one semester. Data was collected over multiple semesters (Language Acquisition and Literacy Development- Three semesters, Collaboration for Inclusion, Three semesters).

There were 140 teacher candidates who completed pre and post questionnaires and reflection assignments to capture their perceptions about service learning (81 participants from the Language Acquisition Course, and 59 participants from Collaboration for Inclusion). Data

was analyzed descriptively, and themes were developed. Additionally, each student completed a survey at the end of the semester which was comprised of a 5-point Likert scale, as well as providing the participants the opportunity to comment on each question (Appendix A).

Community partners also completed surveys at the end of the semester.

Preliminary Arrangements

Course Development.

As instructors, careful examination of the course content allowed us to determine specific connections between course outcomes and the general needs expressed by community partners, acknowledging that partners had knowledge and skills to share. This provided us with opportunities to not only deliver class content, but to also make specific associations to the authentic experiences teacher candidates were observing in their community service learning settings. These authentic experiences allowed for solidifying theory to practice connections, well beyond what previously occurred in courses when using textbook case studies and classroom scenarios. Community partner representatives presented an orientation about their organization during class sessions, informing the teacher candidates about their facilities, the needs of the families participating at each site, and the general needs of the community. The teacher candidates also visited the community partner sites prior to beginning the service learning project. Rather than providing teacher candidates with a simulated problem to be solved, the teacher candidates identified 'real' problems affecting 'real' children in 'real' settings, which they soon discovered were never as neat and tidy as the simulated textbook case studies that they were used to working with! The fluidity of issues and on-going nature of concerns experienced by each partner allowed teacher candidates to make theory to practice settings, while challenging their abilities to be flexible, critical thinkers.

Paperwork.

Before officially beginning, there was a hefty amount of paperwork to complete. Completing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is helpful when organizing a service learning project. Community partners and instructors collaborated to determine preferred methods for communication, desired outcomes, needs and goals of their organizations, opportunities for student support, and clear timeline for project implementation, all of which helped to create well-coordinated projects. The MOU outlines the roles and responsibilities for each party; community organization, teacher candidates and faculty. The Office of Service Learning required college students to complete a form indicating whether they allowed their photographs and work to be displayed as samples on the college website and in community presentations. The instructors also developed supplementary confidentiality forms and discussed the ethical nature of each candidate keeping confidentiality, as well as presenting themselves in a professional manner. In addition, each agency had their own forms, including "volunteer agreement forms."

Prior to service learning experiences.

In one of the first discussions with pre-service teachers, the differences between service learning and other mandated educational experiences such as field placements and observation hours are explained. Field experience placements are designed to provide teacher candidates with opportunities to explore and relate their pedagogical knowledge to a variety of classroom settings while working with students from diverse backgrounds. Teacher candidates learn to use technology to support learning. Field placements are graded with a Satisfactory (S) or an Unsatisfactory (U). Unlike graded field placements, service learning hours are not graded independently, but are connected to integrated content, classroom activities and assignments

developed to enrich learning. In the SoE program, service learning hours can be optional or required, with the average number of hours being 20 hours of activity. Both authors have incorporated required hours into undergraduate courses.

The instructors also found it necessary to delineate the difference between service learning and volunteering/community service for teacher candidates, particularly since some facilities required the signing of ‘volunteer’ agreements. There are similarities, however, volunteering, while meeting the needs of a community or organization does not include *purposeful* integration of academic goals into the process. In service learning activities, teacher candidates engage as partners with their community organizations, and reflect upon activities along the way. In addition, service learning is not a one-time only event, but is also based on relationship-building and parity in the service learning projects that can be sustained when appropriate.

Service Learning Courses

In both courses, teacher candidates were able to frame the problem as well as the solutions in context of their community partners’ language and culture. In the Language Acquisition and Literacy Development course, teacher candidates developed a partnership with local public school first grade and fifth grade classrooms, as well as a special education self-contained private school. Teacher candidates in a subsequent semester have developed partnerships with an after school library program designed to meet the needs of English Language Learners (ELL).

Service learning did not always take place in an educational setting. In the course Collaboration for Inclusion, the instructor facilitated a partnership with a local advocacy center. Teacher candidates developed working relationships with families of students with disabilities

that have previously used the services offered by the center and who had some training in presenting their personal stories about living with a child with a disability. The teacher candidates explored how to collaborate with parents and families, and increased their awareness about the struggles many of these families deal with on a daily basis. Each family identified a problem that needed to be solved, and small groups of teacher candidates investigated the root cause of the issue and creatively worked with families to resolve or better their situations.

Designing Reflection Activities

One of the activities required in service learning is reflection by the college student to assist in incorporating service experiences with academics (Anderson et al., 2001). Each instructor tailored reflection activities to course outcomes, individualizing them to teacher candidates' progress and skills and nature of course projects. In Language Acquisition and Literacy Development, teacher candidates initially responded to weekly reflection questions in writing. However, after reading the responses, the instructor facilitated in class small and whole group guided discussions in lieu of the writing activities, which was found to be a more valuable learning activity.

Reflection fell into three categories: 1) content questions (e.g. "What evidence of formal and informal vocabulary development did you observe during service learning activities this week?") 2) theory questions (e.g. "Explain the importance of environmental factors on language development. What evidence of environmental influences observe during your service learning activities this week?"), and 3) application questions (e.g. "How could you apply Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal development to assisting an English Language Learner in the classroom?").

In the course that paired teacher candidates with families with a child with a disability, four reflections were completed at intervals throughout the semester, asking the candidates to

reflect on their perceived skills of communicating with families and students, the roles of families in educational decisions, and the collaborative process. For example, the final reflection inquired about each candidate's personal knowledge about home-school collaboration to allow for a point of comparison and possible attitudinal shifts throughout the service learning process: Has your knowledge of how to effectively collaborate with families changed since the beginning of the semester? In what ways has your knowledge changed? What course activities and/or experiences were most beneficial for this change to occur? Do you feel more prepared to collaborate with families and colleagues since the beginning of the semester? Why or why not? Reflection questions were used to help the teacher candidates clarify their thinking and anticipate decisions about future action in the service learning projects (Spencer, Cos-Peterson, & Crawford, 2005).

Discussion of Findings

Teacher Candidate Impact

Surveys.

Overall, the teacher candidates were very positive about their service learning experiences. Feedback from service learning evaluations conducted by the college wide Office of Service Learning indicated that 96% of the college students agreed or strongly agreed that service learning experiences enhanced classroom studies. Specific to teacher candidates, written comments indicated satisfaction with the integration of service learning into course work. One teacher candidate indicated, "Actually *doing* what we were learning was very beneficial." The teacher candidates overwhelmingly commented that they learned the importance of developing relationships with students, parents, and within the community. Students expanded on this question by commenting "I have learned not to only use written resources, but to use people as

resources," and another stated, "I learned the importance of building relationships with the parents and/or families of students."

Further, 91% of the teacher candidates indicated that they learned to work within a group. Teacher candidates indicated that service learning helped to strengthen their collaboration skills, work as a team member, and work with community partners. An example of learning the group process was described by one as "not as easy as I thought it would be." Learning time management skills was another positive outcome, with one indicating she learned "to give parents ample time to respond back to you by contacting them far enough in advance to allow time for their input."

The teacher candidates (93%) also asserted that the service learning experiences added value to their courses by helping them to gain and reinforce knowledge and skills, and help them understand concepts as they could relate them to authentic experiences, and "apply them to everyday learning." A teacher candidate reported that it helped her to understand readings and class sessions better, and that "it added another dimension to the course."

Service learning experiences also improved civic awareness (89%) by alerting them to the needs of the community, and helped the teacher candidates learn to develop cross-cultural awareness and understanding of others who were different in some way from themselves. One teacher candidate stated, "It helped me to better understand the economical, cultural, and language diversity present in schools." Another participant commented "I really felt that I was making a difference, while learning!"

Reflections.

Teacher candidates noted in their course evaluations and reflections that they became more aware of the need for all stakeholders to be included and that "working as a team member with other teachers helps the students learn in different ways that helps different learners." The teacher candidates who worked with English Language Learners (ELLs) were honest about the challenges they faced. One stated "I view working with students with ELL a big challenge, but one that I am willing to face." Teacher candidates were critical thinkers, one stating "I feel as though teachers should always use strategies that allow students to actually sit down and think about what they are asked as opposed to having the answers handed to them." The teacher candidates' preconceived notions regarding ELLs were challenged. One participant stated "I was never aware of the amount of English as a Second Language (ESL) there were that were not Hispanic." Their perspectives were broadened; teacher candidates indicated they had a better understanding of the struggles of ELLS. A participant asserted "I never realized how large the immigrant population is in (our community), and how hard it is to immigrate to a new country." They gained an appreciation for the struggles and challenges ELLs faced on a daily basis.

When responding to content, theory and application reflection questions, teacher candidates were able to draw on their service learning experiences to explain content, or to support their statements. They had the opportunity to use newly learned vocabulary, and the authentic experiences helped and reinforced their understanding. When speaking of the benefits of service learning in as it related to course content, comments such as "in our course content we talked a lot about developmental milestones and this was something that I was able to observe at (my service learning site)," and "service learning has served as a very strong reinforcement to my understanding of course content." One teacher candidate stated "Being a very visual and kinetic learner I have also learned best through watching and actually doing." Other comments include

"The opportunity to put the course content/ learning into activities has really allowed me to learn the most I can," and "I personally feel that experiencing something first hand is the most effective way to learn. Being able to interact with the children and apply the concepts from class therefore really solidified my understanding of course concepts." Additionally, three teacher candidates also commented that they gained a new knowledge of career options and "how much more I can do with an education degree besides teaching."

Although the service learning experience was perceived as a success by faculty, community partners, and almost all participants, two teacher candidates had negative experiences. One stated that at the time her schedule allowed her to participate (Saturday mornings), the library was "unorganized and they didn't know what to do with us or where to assign us." Another shared that she thought the experience was a good idea but "it was almost too much of a hassle between finding rides, gas money and finding time in schedules." She stated she thought that transportation should be provided.

Partner Impact

Surveys.

Impact surveys completed by community partners overwhelmingly indicated satisfaction with the service learning program. All partners indicated that the needs of their organizations were met, and the teacher candidates provided services that the organization could not otherwise provide.

A school partner indicated "the literacy program gave our children much needed additional support with development and refinement of their skills." She stated that teacher candidates left quality products that would continue to be used in the near future. All partners indicated the teacher candidates presented themselves professionally, were organized and

prepared, collaborated with professionals and each other, and applied knowledge that they learned throughout their programs. Feedback from the advocacy center indicated their mission is to "spread acceptance and inclusion" of students with disabilities and that the experience "helps plant the seeds for developing partnerships that have made a positive difference in the future of children with disabilities...assisting to build inclusive communities." The partnering organizations noticed benefits for their organizations, families, children, and teacher candidates alike.

Obstacles and Resolutions

Developing the service learning courses were not without problems, but the instructors were able to effectively and creatively resolve them. One of the most significant obstacles to overcome revolved around scheduling. Most of the teacher candidates had very full schedules and it was often difficult to find free time that was congruent with the community partners' needs. For example, a small group of teacher candidates were available from 9:00 to 10:00 each Tuesday, the same time that their community partner, the private special education program, went to swimming lessons. Although the group planned in advance for a common instructional time, the swimming schedule changed part way through the semester and the candidates were not able to come up with another congruent time. Additionally, teacher candidates were also not allowed in the pool. This resulted in some candidates changing community partners and others attending the swimming program, assisting and interacting with students before or after swimming instruction in more informal ways such as helping students to identify the correct locker room, assist with dressing skills, and infusing and reinforcing targeted vocabulary words, trying to make the best of an opportunity with many limitations. Although many teacher

candidates indicated scheduling was problematic, several indicated "the benefits gained are extremely worth the little bit of effort required."

Other difficulties encountered were fluctuating enrollment at the elementary school, bilingual families working with monolingual teacher candidates, transportation issues, and financial support. Fluctuating enrollment was a reality when working in a transient community. Teacher candidates learned to adapt, although they were always disappointed when the student they were working with suddenly 'disappeared.' When working with students and families who did not speak English, they learned to work with an interpreter, and the entire class discussed the protocols and ideas for working with students when English is not their first language, or in some cases not known at all as with recent immigrants. Teacher candidates also found community volunteers to translate materials. Transportation issues were resolved by carpooling when possible, and picking service sites that were on a bus route.

Another obstacle was the cost of materials and supplies. The institution's Office of Service Learning provided mini-grants, which both instructors encouraged teacher candidates to apply for, to give them grant writing experience. Materials covered by the grant for the Language Acquisition class included craft supplies to create take home activity bags (crayons, markers, scissors, and crafting materials) and classroom learning centers. For the Collaboration for Inclusion course, materials from grants included a stipend for printing costs for a fundraiser to support the partner, and advocacy center, and supplies to support one student's dream to become a teacher. Additionally, instructors applied for community grants, one of which provided hard cover books for each first and fifth grade classroom student to take home. In some cases, this book was the first and only book the student personally owned. Take home bags and learning centers were developed around the theme of respective book.

Summary

The college wide Office of Service Learning provided 'Brown Bag Lunch' seminars provided the opportunity to discuss breakdowns in service learning and brainstorming to solve obstacles, as well as discuss what was going well. This office also sponsored the above mentioned 'Mini Grants' of \$150 a course, which, when awarded, often helped students provide sustainable materials left with community partners. Such support provided by the Office of Service Learning to help create partnerships, help problem solve, and financially supplement projects has helped the program grow across the college, with 21 courses having a service learning component during the spring 2014 semester, representing the arts and sciences, education, management, nursing and pharmacy departments (Appendix B).

The enthusiasm for and success of the service learning program has grown across the teacher education programs with infusion into childhood, adolescence and special education courses (Appendix C). This has required clear and frequent communication across departments. Using data from reflections, student and faculty impact surveys, and student focus groups helped to gain valuable feedback, to be sure expectations for teacher candidates regarding hours and assignments were realistic.

Teacher candidates and faculty alike have become more knowledgeable about and engaged with our community, benefiting all stakeholders involved. Teacher candidates stated their service learning experiences were powerful in helping them to understand course content. Given the success of the service learning projects, interaction in the community, and student learning, it appears implementing service learning within coursework can hold great promise for contextualizing instruction in authentic settings, and preparing teacher candidates to effectively solve real world problems as change agents who focus on helping to create a socially just world.

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