

Service-Learning in Teacher Education: Accomplishments, Challenges, and Promising Developments



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ABSTRACT

This paper will present a brief history of the role of service in higher education, and demonstrate its effectiveness as a full partner to teacher education. We then focus on service-learning in teacher education and how it has enjoyed a strong resurgence in the last 15 years. Finally, we offer a rationale for and a model of service-learning in the northwest region of the US, supported and endorsed by the Northwest Center for Service Learning in Teacher Education.

INTRODUCTION

Academic service-learning is not a new idea in teacher education nor in higher education in general. It is research, theory, and practice that has stood the test of time. Today, across the country, service-learning has become a vital part of the public school curriculum and is becoming increasingly important in teacher education programs as well (Heide, Flottesmesch & Pedras, 2002). Rooted in Dewey's philosophy of engagement, and the original mission statements of land grant colleges, service-learning prevails despite industrialization, suburbanization, and the mavericks of politics. It can be said that service-learning is an idea whose time has come.

THE ROOTS OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Service and the notion of community have their roots in the very beginnings of American culture, from the Puritans' barn-raising, to the Calvinistic notion of the importance of giving back to the world more than you take out of it. Native American Tribal communities have service to one another inextricably woven throughout their schools, communities, and culture. The Morrill Act of 1862 granted federal lands to the states with the explicit purpose of the development of colleges of liberal arts and agriculture and technology. With this legislation, the traditions of American colleges and universities embraced in their missions, the notion not only of advancing intellectual and moral development,

but providing needed services to the communities that housed them. This is a drastic movement away from the 'ivory tower' ideal based on the English education system originally imported to this country by the earliest settlers. "Thus, American higher education, once devoted primarily to the intellectual and moral development of students, added *service* as a mission, and both private and public universities took up the challenge." (Boyer, 1990, p.5) Since 1862, there has been a reasonably steady stream of legislation that has service at its heart, and the embodiment of the ideals of democracy as its fulfillment. Examples of this type of legislation are seen in Roosevelt's 1933, Civilian Conservation Corps, and Kennedy's establishment of The Peace Corp in 1961. When Campus Outreach Opportunity League was established in 1984, and the Campus Compact in 1985, service and learning began to stream together as a logical partnership between communities and their universities.

These initiatives further established the presence of governmental and private entities in promoting service and civic engagement on campuses, communities, and in K-12 public schools. President George Bush established the Office of National Service in 1989, and in 1990, Congress enacted the National and Community Service Act that appropriated 73 million dollars to support service opportunities for all citizens. More than 25 percent of these funds went to K-12 educational programs. In 1993, President Clinton passed the National and Community Service Trust Act that established the AmeriCorps program. The AmeriCorps program gave thousands of college-age students support for service and college education benefits. In this way was service returned to its central role on American campuses and disciplinary links were forged. With the 1990 publication of Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*, the reconsideration of the role of service in faculty work was given strong impetus. To educators preparing pre-service and in-service teachers, the partnership between service-learning and education was a natural one. However, it has taken time and continuous support to see this partnership grow to become seamlessly threaded

throughout faculty teaching, research, and service responsibilities and in colleges of education.

Service-learning is the full integration of the democratic aspects of community service and the responsibilities of teaching and learning. "Community Service Learning is an educational process that involves students in service experiences with two firm anchors: First their service experience is directly related to academic subject matter; and second, it involves them in making positive contributions to individuals and community institutions. What makes Community Service Learning educationally distinctive, and pedagogically rich, is that CSL requires students to reflect on what they are doing, on what happens, on what that means, and on its importance" (Carol W. Kinsley, 1994).

ACCOMPLISHMENTS AND CHALLENGES

Recent studies indicate that many of the skills and dispositions needed for successful teaching are enhanced in preservice teachers who participate in service-learning activities. These include sensitivity to diversity issues (Boyle-Baise, 1998); development of an ethic of care; including increased compassion and concern, willingness to serve others, and increased complexity of thinking regarding problems of childhood (Pothoff, Dinsmore, Walsh, Ziebarth & Eifler, 2000); an increased belief in the ability of all children to learn, and enhanced awareness of individual differences (Root, Callahan, & Sepanski, 2002).

Teacher education programs across the nation are addressing the challenge of integrating service-learning into their curricula. Many teacher educators are becoming aware that successful service-learning activities in preservice teacher education can contribute to effective practice in K-12 schools when graduates enter the teaching profession with preparation in and commitment to implementing service-learning with their students (Wade, et al, 1999). They are also focusing on the benefits that K-20 partnerships can bring to teacher education programs, K-12 schools, and the wider community

(Anderson, Swick, & Iff, 2001). Numerous teacher educators and educational organizations, including the California Department of Education (1999), are recommending the inclusion of service-learning as a vital instructional strategy in teacher education programs (Swick, 1998; Erickson and Anderson, 1997; Council of Chief State School Officers, 1995).

The issues faced by teachers of today far exceed the demands of just a decade ago. Schools have become more closely aligned with social services such as breakfast and lunch programs for low-income children and after school care for children of working parents. Future teachers must be prepared to not only inspire and teach content and encourage motivation, but to link their instruction to the opportunities and demands of communities (Pedras, Olson & Flottemesch, 2001).

HISTORY OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN TEACHER EDUCATION

In 1995, the Corporation for National Service (CNS) funded the National Service-Learning in Teacher Education Partnership (NSLTEP). This organization worked with teacher educators to provide professional development and technical assistance to support preservice teacher educators with their use of service-learning. In 1999, NSLTEP joined with the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education (AACTE) to continue to facilitate service-learning integration, with an increased focus on research and policy issues. In 1995, service-learning was little known and, when known, poorly understood by most teacher educators. It was viewed at best, as an experimental concept, an emerging new idea that might have promise. Existing service-learning programs were almost all funded by private foundations or governmental money. Service-learning professional development consisted of clarifying the meaning of service-learning and helping faculty design and implement small projects. Most teacher educators who successfully used service-learning were "true believers"—early implementers who had a passionate, often intuitive commitment to, and understanding of, the power of service-learning.

That reality has changed dramatically in recent years.

CURRENT STATUS

In 2004 service-learning is a concept familiar to most teacher education faculty and has a growing body of research to support its use. Anderson and Erickson (2003) surveyed 528 teacher educators nationwide to determine the status of service-learning in teacher preparation programs. Fifty-nine percent of the respondents reported that their programs included service-learning, and 37% prepare their preservice teachers to use service-learning as a teaching method. However, less than one-third of the faculty had implemented service-learning and only 24% of programs provided all preservice teachers with a service-learning experience. The results of this study indicate a broad but shallow penetration of service-learning into the curricula of U.S. teacher education institutions. When used, service-learning appears to encourage the kinds of outcomes for which advocates hope, but the idiosyncratic nature of its implementation makes widespread impact questionable. The focus of professional development in service-learning in 2004 is on improving the quality of practice and developing strategies to institutionalize service-learning efforts. Service-learning faces difficult challenges in the current educational and political environment. Most K-12 and teacher educators face increasing stress from increasing demands and shrinking resources. Pressures of high stakes testing and educational standards pose barriers to reforms like service-learning which ask for new ways of thinking, and teaching. Lack of time to plan and implement service-learning is a constant challenge to teacher educators who engage in service-learning.

THE FUTURE

In order to overcome these challenges and continue to improve the quality and quantity of service-learning experiences offered to preservice teachers the International Center for Service-Learning in Teacher Education (ICSLTE) was founded at Clemson University

in South Carolina in June, 2003. The mission of the ICSLTE is to facilitate the integration of service-learning into teacher education through pedagogy, school improvement, and community engagement. The Center provides professional development support for K-12 and teacher educators by offering on-site technical assistance, regional and national conferences and workshops, and curriculum resources; maintaining a web site with links to numerous service-learning organizations, producing and supporting important publications; partnering with other professional organizations and service-learning clearinghouses; conducting, collecting, and disseminating research on service-learning; and advocating for educational policies supportive of service-learning. The ICSLTE currently has strong support from the Eugene T. Moore School of Education at Clemson University.

Teacher educators in the Northwest region of the United States, met recently to develop a Northwest Center for Service-Learning in Teacher Education (NWCSLTE). This Center has a mission and goals very similar to those of the ICSLTE and expects to collaborate with the ICSLTE on professional development, research, and policy initiatives in the near future. The NWCSLTE hopes to conduct service-learning sessions at the NWATE Conference on a regular basis, and provide other workshops and on-site technical assistance to teacher educators in Montana, Oregon, Idaho, Washington, and Alaska.

A MODEL OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN TEACHER EDUCATION

This spring, the Northwest Center for Service Learning in Teacher Education will support an in-service conducted by the Volunteer Center Service Learning Training Subcommittee. This organization and the in-service is the result of a partnership between the Spokane Public School District, United Way Volunteer Center, and other service learning professionals in the Inland Northwest. The workshop is being designed by local service learning practitioners, community partners, and teacher educators for high school teachers. It will take place on Saturday, April 17th.

The goal of the workshop is to provide teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to design and conduct a high quality service learning project. Teachers will be given an introduction to service-learning as an instructional method. Often, there is confusion between community service, experiential/hands-on education, and high quality service-learning. The workshop will be designed to develop a clear understanding of the concept, and the methods necessary to do it well. One way to do this is to present elements of high quality service learning. For our purposes, these will include integrated learning, high quality service, collaboration, student voice, civic responsibility, reflection, and evaluation. In addition to these elements, teachers will hear from both students and practitioners about current and past projects.

A fundamental principle of this workshop is the understanding that if teachers leave with resources and knowledge, but without a specific project that is designed with their situation in mind, they are much less likely to conduct the project. A major focus is to provide a framework that the teachers will use to design a project that is appropriate for their students, and meets their curricular needs. This will be done using a portfolio design that takes teachers through the design process step-by-step, while allowing for change and alterations as they get further along, especially as they begin to engage their students in the development of the project.

With the dual goals of increasing service learning in pre-service and in-service teacher education, the Northwest Center for Service-Learning in Teacher Education will be able to contribute to the efforts to build capacity for service-learning in the greater Spokane area. The upcoming workshop in partnership with Spokane Public Schools, the United Way, and the rest of the partners in the Volunteer Center Service-Learning Training Subcommittee will be an excellent step towards meeting these goals.

Several institutions of higher learning in the northwest have made strides in terms of integrating service-learning into various areas of study such as teacher education. Seattle University has coursework in service-learning at the graduate level, the University of Idaho, Wash-

ington State University, Central Washington University all have courses or course elements in teacher education. With assistance from FIPSE grant funds several of these universities have also trained faculty fellows in service-learning and further developed the concept of service-learning across the curriculum. This has provided teacher education programs with a rich source of cross-curricula contacts and development and integration.

Some of the above institutions have also projected future projects which include professional development activities for teachers, creation and dissemination of service-learning resources, conducting in-service service-learning assessment and evaluation in teacher education. Included in these projects will be grant proposals requesting funding to support some or all of the proposed activities. The Northwest Center will provide leadership and assistance to institutions developing funding proposals and specific service-learning activities.

CONCLUSION

The full integration and recognition of service-learning in teacher education still has a ways to go, particularly in this political era of ever constricting forces on educators at all levels. However, the development of regional centers such as the Northwest Center for Service-Learning in Teacher Education, and the International Center for Service-Learning in Teacher Education gives us much hope for the future. Service-learning in teacher education allows us to reenvision the balance of faculty work between teaching, research, and service (Ward, 2003, p.79). It also allows us the opportunity to rethink the goals of our courses, our relationships with our students and communities, and renew our commitment to the pursuit of education as a cornerstone in a participatory democracy. We urge our colleagues in the greater Northwest region of this country to join us in these efforts and opportunities. We also encourage students, especially those preparing for careers as professional educators to become fully engaged in service-learning activities and learn to use service-learning as a viable pedagogy.

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