Stories that Shape our Work: Service-Learning as a Conduit for Pre-Service Teacher Dispositional Development

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ABSTRACT

The growing diversity of U.S. schools has created a growing concern on how to meet the needs of the culturally and linguistically diverse students considering their academic achievement. Achievement scores show a racial and income gap with them performing below average, or lower than their white and higher income peers (Education Trust, 2010; Noguera & Antwi, 2000; Diller & Moule, 2005; Darder & Torres, 2004). Unfortunately, the current and incoming teaching force does not mirror the same linguistic, cultural, and ethnic diversity in classrooms. Service-learning opportunities in diverse, urban communities raises the interest amongst pre-service teachers in teaching communities that may be culturally and socioeconomically different that the ones they grew up in (Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Using photo narratives, pre-service teachers reflect on their growth as teachers and their cultural awareness. The process of creating this experience is explored as a triangular engagement model that includes a non-academic unit, a faculty member, and community/school based partner.

Purpose of the Study

Service-learning opportunities in diverse, urban communities increases interest amongst pre-service teachers to teaching communities that may be culturally and socioeconomically different that the ones they grew up in (Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Using photo narratives, pre-service teachers reflect on their growth as teachers and their cultural awareness. The purpose of this study was to examine how pre-service teachers viewed service-learning as part of their teacher development specifically as it relates to dispositional development.

Dispositions in Teacher Education: Multiple Definitions

It is the goal of teacher education programs to foster existing behaviors, introduce new behaviors, or change existing behaviors of pre-service teachers. Dispositions are of importance because many students in teacher education programs are encouraged to think of themselves as pre-professionals and behave as such. Dispositions are difficult to define because of their subjectivity. Dispositions vary from program to program. The variance is dependent upon how programs define dispositions. Programs may view dispositions as a specific set of attitudes or beliefs, while others may categorize them as personality traits (Welch et al., 2010). Although NCATE does not specifically identify a set of dispositions some institutions name specific dispositions that pre-service teachers should embody. Many teacher education programs have identified dispositions to include all or some of a list proposed by Armstine (1990) which includes: fairness, decency, service, pro-social behavior, honesty, humility, trust, empathy, healing, and a sense of community. Naming dispositions provide pre-service teachers with terminology regarding the expected attitudes and behaviors exemplary teachers exhibit.

In 2000, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) mandated that teacher candidates completing an NCATE accredited program must acquire the "professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn" (www.ncate.org). In teacher education programs, the term disposition is equally equated to beliefs, values, and attitudes needed to be an effective teacher (Demmon-Berger, 1986; Mino, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James, 2002).

NCATE (2002) defines dispositions as the beliefs that guide teachers' attitudes and behaviors that affect student learning. Katz (1993) defines disposition as " a tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed towards a broad goal" (p.1). In this study, dispositions are defined as observable patterns of behaviors of teachers driven by ones personal values and beliefs to benefit student learning and well-being (Carroll, 2012; Demmon-Berger, 1986; Mino, Onwuegbuzie et al., 2002; Welch, Pitts, Tenni, Kuenlen, & Wood, 2010). The term disposition lacks a definitive singular meaning (Welch et al., 2010).

> "Sometimes as a teacher you loose that perspective about all the other background stuff. So I think that [this experience] gives pre-service teachers a well rounded view and they see what needs to be done beyond the curriculum." (Participant 1 interview)

Risk-takers
We try new things with courage.

> "We talk about budget cuts and referendums. The reason why were are here is because of those things. So, we get the business aspect of teaching and then we get the behind the scenes stuff about being a teacher." (Participant Interview response)
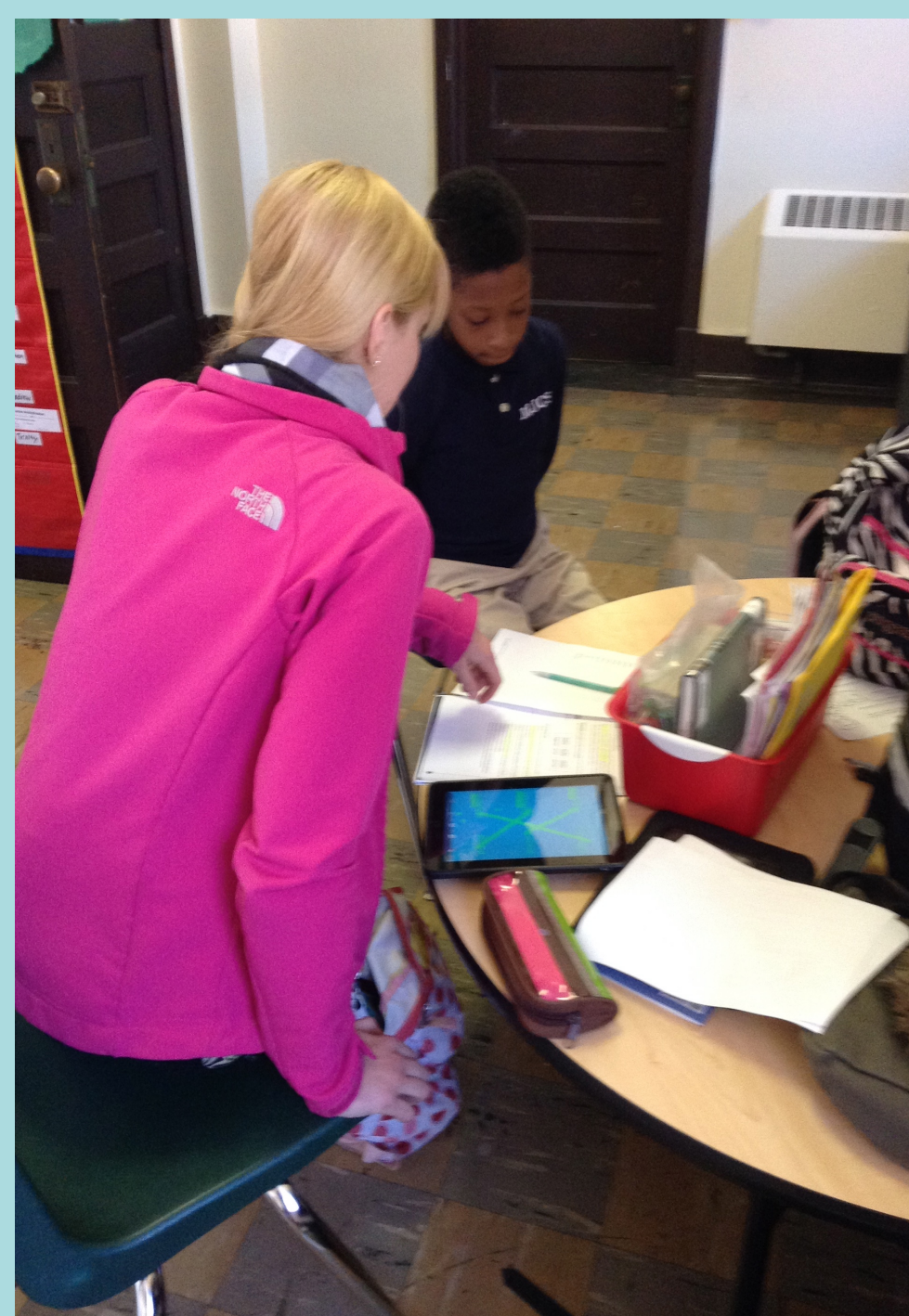
Reciprocity and Mutual Benefit: Faculty and Student Affairs/Student Development

courses using service-learning pedagogy

relationships with faculty

Increase the number of students engaged in service-learning and community engagement

ways to activate student learning in authentic environments

increased opportunities to synchronize teaching and scholarship
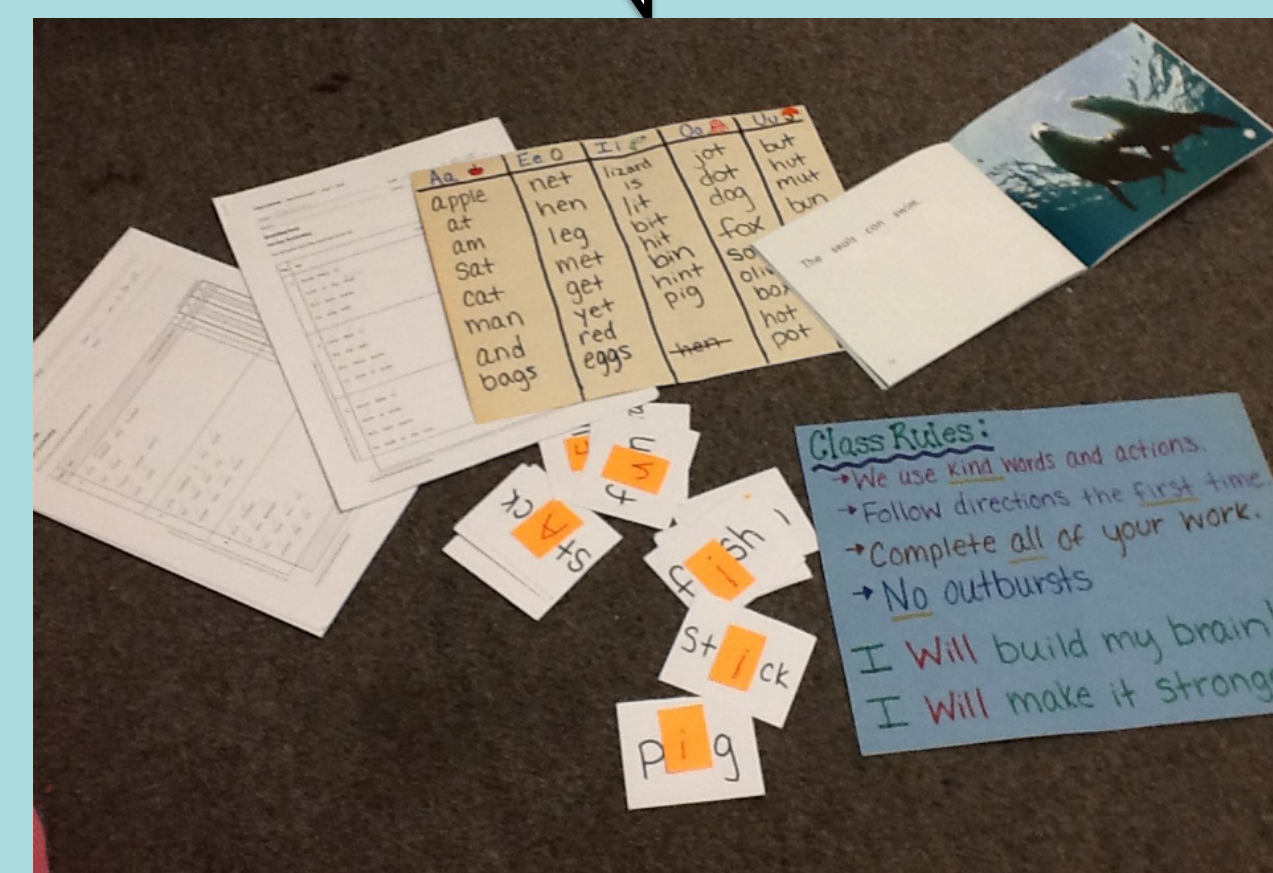
METHODS

Data for this case included:
(1) guided reflective interviews for each participant (Rossman & Rallis, 2012) and
(2) the researcher's reflective journal.

This data is a subset of a larger data set from research associated with the coursework and reflections of the teaching. The reflective questions, were designed based on the dispositions used within the program and were aimed at exploring the relationships between the pre-service teachers' personal notions of their own cultural competence, dispositions (beliefs and behaviors), the environment (urban, diverse, and low-income), and teaching skills. Yin (2003) described how inferences evolve from document analysis (p. 87).

In this study, the researcher collected and analyzed reflections lesson plans, and reviewed field notes. The purpose of engaging in document analysis was to corroborate the researcher's daily observations, making the findings trustworthy. Documents were coded using inductive open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, and then sorted into categories in order to create themes representing common insights (Stake, 1995).

The innovative aspect of this data set was the use of photo-reflections. Students had to choose a photo as a means to illustrate their reflection. The photo had to come from the day and represent their learning, thinking, challenges, and growth. Using the narratives from students allowed for a different insight by using evidence from the service site.

The interpretive nature of qualitative research often comes with limitations. As a result, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all contexts. Merriam (2002) pointed out, generalizations as traditionally defined are not the goal of qualitative research but to allow readers to "determine how closely their situations match the research situation and hence, whether findings can be transferred" (p. 211).

Data analysis, a systematic process to make sense out of what has been collected (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1998), was conducted by reading through reflections, interpretations of photos, and additional documents. Field notes were gathered by the researcher in the field and analyzed by developing a set of codes along with documents and photos (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The multiple data sources allowed the researchers to triangulate the data as well as categorize the data according to groupings that were alike or similar. After categories were identified, the data was manually coded to visually denote the patterns and the contradictions.

Reciprocity and Mutual Benefit: Faculty and Community Partner

Pairs teachers with college students

Determines the needs of the school and students

Offers orientation and co-teaches with the faculty member

Defines the learning outcomes for the course

Aligns the course content to the experience the students will have

Creates assessment measures

Communicates with both community partner and students

RESULTS

Findings suggest pre-service teachers realize the multiplicities of student needs in an authentic setting and the potential disconnect between what is learned during one's teacher education undergraduate program and the realities of being a teacher once employed as a classroom teacher. From the analysis of the data obtained three key themes were extracted concerning how pre-service teachers viewed community service in relation to disposition development. The following themes emerged:

- High levels of dedication
- Unconscious judgment
- Open mindedness vs. locus of control
- Bystander vs. agent of change

These results suggest that community service is a way for students to develop desired teaching dispositions, particularly those most difficult to measure because they are not often observable in a college classroom or a field experience. Intentional community engagement or service-learning may serve as an additional way to facilitate dispositional growth in pre-service teachers.

CONCLUSIONS

An individuals ability and willingness to learn is not only an incredibly complex and dynamic process, it is one that is in a cycle of contentious change and evolution. It is within this cycle that teachers are challenged to find ways to motivate and understand how students learn in order to truly become effective. Community engagement and academic service learning is common place in teacher education programs thus, continued research in pre-service teachers dispositions is necessary. Academic courses provide a variety of learning experiences however; it is imperative that the relationship is reciprocal.

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