Chapter 3
Social Foundations of Education and Service-Based Field Experiences:
Critical Foundations for Socially Just Educators

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ABSTRACT

This chapter highlights one social foundations of education program's initiative to develop specialized service-based projects on which each course's field experience, readings, and assignments would center. Utilizing both a justice-oriented and intersectional foundation, professors developed projects meant to engage the program's mostly white and female students in more critical and meaningful experiences that would help pre-service educators reflect on power, privilege, and oppression and their roles in this process. The authors focus on two example projects for this chapter with a goal of examining successes and difficulties experienced in developing such projects, including the challenge of maintaining strong community partnerships. These two case studies are not meant to provide generalized experiences, but the authors hope that sharing the development, implementation, and outcomes can help other programs create field experiences for pre-service educators that will teach pre-service educators the importance of safe yet critical classroom spaces.

INTRODUCTION

In fall 2013, a group of Social Foundations of Education (SFE) professors re-envisioned their field experiences in a set of required SFE courses at a southern, mid-sized, urban-fringe institution. These included a socio-cultural educational diversity course and an educational psychology course, and previously, the accompanying field experiences consisted of observation in local schools, during which time the undergraduates tended to be passive participants. The SFE professors found this to be problematic, in that students' early experiences in the classroom were less impactful than they could be, particularly in regard to connecting meaningful experiences to course content. Specifically, with the socio-cultural diversity course, students were placed in a "diverse" setting, but their passive field experiences often served only to reify their stereotypes (Ellsworth, 1989). Like many programs across the nation, these professors struggled to find ways to have meaningful and critical experiences with their mostly white and female education majors, who tended to enter these classes with monocultural viewpoints and demonstrated resistance to discussions of diversity (Beilke, 2005; Butin, 2005; Jones, 2008; Nieto & Bode, 2012; Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012).

To better prepare these future educators to move toward conscientization, this group of SFE professors revised these field experiences around a service-based and social justice model (Beilke, 2005; Butin, 2007), which this chapter's authors have written about elsewhere (Hardee & McFaden, 2014). Each course participated in a different service-learning experience with a local school or educational organization facilitated by the professor, who molded the course readings and discussions around this same placement for truly high-impact service-learning projects with the potential to demonstrate socially just practices (Butin, 2007). For the purposes of this chapter, the authors highlight the development of two specific service-learning projects, the first of which was based upon a Near Peer Service-Learning Grant, a federally funded program meant to increase the number of minoritized students successfully completing secondary and postsecondary education (Educational Access, 2014). The term minoritized is used deliberately to reflect the active marginalization of minority groups in the US context (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). This program combined education majors in a socio-cultural diversity course with underrepresented ninth-grade students at a local high school for weekly mentoring sessions. The second project was a collaboration with the YES Institute out of Miami, FL, to develop curricula for elementary schools seeking to address bullying based upon gender and orientation (Our Mission, 2017). This project paired education majors in a socio-cultural diversity course with staff at the YES Institute to learn about gender and orientation and then develop elementary-level curriculum in small groups that might help schools reduce related bullying. The goal with this chapter is twofold—The authors hope that reflection on and analysis of the development and outcomes of these two projects shed light onto promising pedagogical and research practices by addressing strengths and areas for improvement for the development and facilitation of social justice oriented service-learning projects in colleges of education. The authors anticipate that such an analysis can serve as a guide in developing long-lasting community collaborations with an emphasis on socially just service-learning.

BACKGROUND

In thinking through their approach to redeveloping both the courses and creating stronger field-based components, the authors utilized both Beilke (2005) and Butin (2007; 2015) in defining service-based

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