

## Chapter 52

# Lessons Learned From 15 Years of Service–Learning: Implications for Practice for Teacher Education Programs

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter describes lessons learned from students involved in a service-learning program in an urban school district during the past 15 years. A total of 729 undergraduate students enrolled in an educational psychology course took part in the study. Students completed a survey at the beginning and end of the course. The findings indicate that academic-based service-learning and cultural-based service-learning contribute to different learning outcomes. Academic-based service-learners develop intercultural relationships with service recipients and community partners and acquire an understanding of social disparities in the community while cultural-based service-learners develop interpersonal and problem-solving skills. Students also appeared to make meaning out of their diverse service experiences and acquired a deeper understanding about how social responsibility is part of their role as preservice teachers in their school community. Implications for incorporating CBSL strategies in a teacher education program are discussed.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

Educators often grapple about whether service-learning courses should be required in teacher education programs to help preservice teachers understand the conditions that lead to racial, economic, and social disparities in communities and foster preservice teachers' sense of professional citizenship. Academic-based service-learning (ABSL) is a pedagogical approach in which students apply theoretical knowledge to "real world" situations, and, at the same time, they connect their service experiences to the course content (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Cultural-based service-learning (CBSL) is an extension of ABSL (Baldwin Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Sperling, 2007). Unlike ABSL, the diversity material is intentionally integrated in the course content and service context. Students are challenged to explore their world views through critical reflection. Scholars view CBSL as a viable means to teach undergraduate students about the complexities of race, culture, and class, because they are situated in a service context which forces them to confront their own beliefs and formulate new attitudes that lead to a deeper understanding of racial and economic disparities in the community (Eyler & Giles, 1999; Sterling, 2007). The purpose of this chapter is to evaluate service-learning impacts on student learning outcomes and to compare differences in these outcomes for students enrolled in educational psychology courses that utilize ABSL or CBSL as primary pedagogical methods.

## **SERVICE-LEARNING AS A CULTURALLY-RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY**

Service-learning initiatives are frequently integrated into teacher education programs to prepare preservice teachers for work with students from different racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups in early, elementary and secondary school settings (Glazier, Arble, Charpentier, 2014; Hampshire, Havercroft, Luy, and Call, 2015; Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015; Holt, 2017). In the United States, most preservice teachers are from White, middle-class backgrounds and work with a diverse student population (Glazier et al, 2014; Kilgo, 2015). The student population is expected to become more diverse with increases in students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds (Glazier et al, 2014; Kilgo, 2015; Tinkler, Hannah, & Tinkle, 2016; U.S. Department of Education, 2016). Preservice teachers are likely to bring their own assumptions into the classroom (Barnes, 2016; Tinker, Hannah, & Tinkler, 2016). Therefore, it is critical that preservice teachers learn culturally-responsive pedagogical practices. Teacher education programs integrate service-learning in undergraduate courses to challenge preservice teachers' assumptions by illuminating the racial and economic disparities in the community (Mitchell, 2010).

The idea behind service-learning as a culturally-responsive pedagogy is that student participation in community service challenges preconceived assumptions and teaches them to reformulate their attitudes (Cipolle, 2010). Students engage in service activities with diverse recipients, and for many of them, this is an eye-opening experience. On the other hand, students may leave the service experience with little understanding of the systematic nature of racial and economic disparities in the community unless they are required to address diversity and social justice issues in class (Boyle-Baise, 2002; Mitchell, 2010; Sperling, 2007). Failure to find service-learning effects on students' diversity attitudes reflects an ABSL program limitation (Moely, McFarland, Miron, Mercer, & Illustre, 2002a). ABSL courses that do not sufficiently encourage students to think about how race and class influence their interactions with service recipients will reinforce the "power dynamic" between White students and service recipients (Moely et al., 2002a, p. 24). Therefore, culturally-based service-learning (CBSL) may be a more optimal learning

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