

Chapter 53

**“I Didn’t Believe Privilege  
Existed Before This”:  
Service–Learning in a Multicultural  
Education Course**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This chapter outlines the experiences of teacher candidates engaged in service-learning at a large Midwestern university. The authors set out to study this service partnership by asking, What benefits do teacher candidates identify from this service learning partnership? What do they see as challenges? What have they learned? In this chapter, the authors describe the answers to these questions. Obstacles to and opportunities for future development of this partnership are also discussed, and some implications for teacher educators are also outlined.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Preservice teachers grow up in increasingly segregated communities (Orfield & Frankenberg, 2014), yet often assume they understand groups that differ from them better than they actually do (Powell, Sobel, Hess, & Verdi, 2001). Moreover, teacher candidates often assume their perspectives represent what is normal (Valli, 1995). Assumptions of normalcy may give rise to a variety of issues: failure to differentiate learning behavior from off-task behavior (Sleeter, 2008), misattribution of students’ lack of progress to a lack of motivation (Schultz, 1996), or lowered expectations because of deficit views of children (Hess, Lanig, & Vaughan, 2007; Karayan & Gathercoal, 2003). Sleeter (2008) argued that teacher education must be powerful enough to counter the ways these discourses shape teacher candidates’ beliefs. Therefore, teacher educators must not only facilitate experiences that place teacher candidates in settings where they interact with individuals who are different from themselves but also provide opportunities to engage in supported reflection on those experiences.

Teacher education programs have typically relied upon clinical field experiences to provide teacher candidates with opportunities to work with a variety of students. Clinical practica, however, serve the purpose of socializing teacher candidates into a school setting rather than focusing on the individuals within the school. In other words, teacher candidates’ assumptions about “normal” students are reinforced, rather than challenged. In contrast, community-based service-learning involves sustained interaction between teacher educators, teacher candidates, and community partners (teachers, agency personnel, children, and parents). Baldwin, Buchanan, and Rudisill (2007) argued that this sustained engagement has the potential to develop teacher candidates’ ability to question their own assumptions as well as societal inequities and existing curricula. Additionally, research has found that service-learning can have positive impacts on teacher candidates’ beliefs or attitudes about diversity, beliefs about family and community contributions, and willingness to teach in schools that mirror demographic diversity of the service-learning site (Sleeter, 2008). For these reasons, many teacher educators are calling for a greater integration of service-learning into teacher education programs.

The authors of this chapter teach at a large Midwestern university that has taken these outcomes of service-learning seriously enough to integrate service across all sections of a multicultural education course. The authors set out to study this service partnership by asking: What benefits do teacher candidates identify from this service-learning partnership? What do they see as challenges? What have they learned? In this chapter, the authors describe the answers to these questions. Obstacles to and opportunities for future development of this partnership are also discussed, and some implications for teacher educators are also outlined.

## **BACKGROUND**

A review of the recent literature reveals a multitude of relevant studies that focus on the integration of service-learning within teacher education programs. The authors situated these studies into two different categories. One category the authors labeled “Service-learning as a Way to Raise Awareness of the Benefits of Teaching in Diverse Settings” and the other “Service-learning as a Way to Build Relationships and Enhance Empathy.” The authors argue this study adds to and extends these areas of research by not only confirming much of what was gleaned from the existing literature, but also adding more nuance to

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