

# Building Social Capital Through Community-Based Service-Learning in Teacher Education

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## Abstract

In order to build connections with the community, the authors of this study undertook a participatory process for developing a comprehensive service-learning initiative within a teacher education program. This case study examines the impact of the service-learning initiative on building social capital for the community and preservice teachers. The results show that using participatory processes that seek to provide reciprocal benefits for the university and community can build bridging social capital.

*Keywords:* preservice teachers, community partnerships, participatory process, reciprocal learning, pedagogical practices

## INTRODUCTION

### **Purpose of the Study**

When teacher educators talk about community connections, they are typically referring to their relationships with K-12 schools. This is understandable given the need to build partnerships to support field placements and student teaching. By focusing on relationships with K-12 schools, however, teacher education programs sometimes neglect the broader community in which schools are located, which has led some researchers to conclude that there is a disconnect between the local public schools and the community (Noel, 2010). This disconnect can adversely impact the potential for schools and families to work together to support K-12 youth. Furthermore, this disconnect can exacerbate inequality since, as Duncan and Murnane (2011) note, “social contexts may in turn affect children’s skill acquisition and educational attainments” (p. 7). By nurturing placements across the community, teacher education programs can augment an understanding of the complex community in which teachers work to advance

learning experiences for students that develop their capabilities in a manner that magnifies post-secondary opportunities.

Some teacher education programs have used community-based service-learning as a means to connect preservice teachers to communities. Research on community-based service-learning has shown that expanding sites of practice into the community can increase teacher candidates’ awareness of community needs (Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015), support collaborative engagement with community stakeholders (Simpson & Patterson, 2018), expand field experiences beyond traditional K-12 classrooms to target experiences that can enhance teaching skills (Barnes, 2016), support improved cultural understanding and practice (Lund & Lee, 2015), and prepare future teachers to work with families (Hampshire, Havercroft, Luy, & Call, 2015).

To establish bridges with the community, the teacher education program in this study launched a comprehensive service-learning initiative through a participatory process. The goal of the community-based

initiative was to integrate service-learning across the teacher education program course sequence in a way that allowed the program to target experiences with specific populations of learners while at the same time maintaining a commitment to a full complement of school-based practica. To examine the impact of this work, the authors developed a comprehensive qualitative case study. When examining the outcomes, the results demonstrated that the collaborative experience helped build social capital for all the parties involved. This study explores these outcomes through the lens of social capital.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

According to Putnam (2000), the first known use of the term “social capital” was by a West Virginia educator, L. J. Hanifan, in 1916. Hanifan used the term when describing an effective parent engagement strategy. He wrote, “The more the people do for themselves the larger will community social capital become, and the greater will be the dividends upon the social investment” (Hanifan, 1916, p. 138). Though this is the first noted use of the term, as Farr (2004) points out, John Dewey’s philosophy on civic education “was the seedbed for the concept of social capital in this era” (p. 14). Dewey’s work emphasized the social interactions inherent in shared experiences that undergird democracy. Since then, others have contributed to defining the construct, including Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988). According to Bourdieu (1986), social capital is the “aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (p. 251). Bourdieu notes that membership in one of these networks creates “collectively-owned capital” (p. 251) and that the amount of social capital an individual has depends on the “size

of networks of connections” (p. 251) that the individual can draw from.

Some authors writing about social capital define the term through comparison. As noted by Coleman (1988), “Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between actors and among actors” (p. 98). In describing social capital, Kahne, Chi, and Middaugh (2006) made a similar comparison:

Unlike physical capital such as plant and equipment or human capital such as an individual’s knowledge and skills, social capital is embedded in the structure of relations between actors in a given setting. It exists neither within a given individual nor apart from a set of social relations. (p. 389)

Some forms of capital (e.g. economic capital) have a fixed amount. The interesting thing about social capital is that everyone can increase their amount of social capital through strengthening their social networks; it does not require one group to give over social capital in order for the other to gain (Ferlazzo, 2011). In fact, as noted by Pedler and Attwood (2011), “unlike financial capital, social capital is depleted not by use but by nonuse – the more it is used, the more is generated” (p. 315).

Putnam (2000) popularized the notion of social capital in his book *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, where he described declining social capital because of decreased civic engagement. Putnam (2000) made an important distinction between bonding and bridging social capital. As stated by Coleman and Danks (2016): “Bonding social capital refers to that which forms between members of a group. Bridging social capital refers to that which develops between individuals inside a group with individuals outside that group” (p. 471). Putnam (2000) identifies bonding social capital as exclusive while bridging social capital is inclusive. Bridging

social capital has the potential to support social change; however, as Putnam (2000) notes, “for our biggest collective problems we need precisely the sort of bridging social capital that is the toughest to create” (p. 363). With this in mind, researchers like Randy Stoecker (2005) remind us that “a lack of social networks [may be] a consequence, not a cause” (p. 74) of social inequality, so careful attention needs to be paid to the context and desired outcomes.

### **Service-learning and Social Capital**

There is a small body of research that explores the connection between service-learning and social capital in education. Some studies focused on the development of social capital for participants. A study by Koliba (2003) found that service-learning increased social capital for students in rural schools by expanding and deepening social networks. In fact, he argued that expanding social capital should be an intentional outcome of service-learning programs. Howard (2006) found a similar impact for urban middle school students. His study found that service-learning increased social capital that in turn had a positive impact on academic achievement. D’Agostino (2010) conducted a quantitative study examining the impact of service-learning on college students. She found that service-learning increased social capital, which was reflected in an increase in civic engagement. Hoffman (2011) found similar impacts for nontraditional college students who participated in interethnic community service activities, specifically that social capital “can be significantly enhanced through the development of community service work opportunities” (p. 6). Finally, Yeh (2010) conducted research on the impact of service-learning on low-income, first generation college students. Yeh’s findings demonstrated that the service-learning experience helped build knowledge and skills for the participants

that Yeh equated with social capital. Other research has focused on the impact of service-learning for community partners in regard to social capital. Vernon and Foster (2002) conducted research with community partners and found that “higher education service-learning and volunteer programs are conduits for building social capital in a community” (p. 170).

When examining the research on teacher education and social capital, most studies focused on bonding social capital between preservice teachers, such as Mandzuk, Hasinoff, and Seifert’s (2005) study of social capital in a cohort, or bonding social capital between in-service teachers, such as Penuel, Riel, Krause, and Frank’s (2009) study of social capital in a professional learning community. Only a few studies examined social capital between teacher education and the community. One such study (Reed, 2004) found that schools of education can build bridging social capital in under-resourced communities.

This comprehensive case study seeks to add to the limited body of research that examines how service-learning between teacher education and the community impacts social capital. It is important for teacher education programs to better understand the role they can play in building social capital. Through experience *with* and *in* the community, teacher educators and future teachers can build bridges between families and schools.

### **METHOD**

The authors designed this study using a case study approach because “case study offers a means of investigating complex social units consisting of multiple variables of potential importance in understanding the phenomenon” (Merriam, 2009, p. 50). Using case study allows researchers to delve deeply into

the case in order to unearth the meaning that can be taken away from that particular phenomenon. According to Miles (2015), “case study methodology provides an account of practice through which to explore, contextualise and theorise practice” (p. 309).

The purpose of this case study is to illuminate practices that build bridging social capital. The next section includes a brief case description followed by a delineation of the participants, data collection, and data analysis.

### CASE DESCRIPTION

In seeking to better prepare our pre-service teachers to be effective teachers of all students, our teacher education program decided to integrate service-learning experiences across the secondary preparation program. These experiences were designed to supplement the traditional school-based practical within the program and to provide targeted experiences with English learners. Given that the community in which the university is located is a center for refugee resettlement, there is a regular influx of English learners. Since a goal of the service-learning initiative was to better prepare preservice teachers to be effective teachers of all students, including English learners, the authors developed partnerships that were community-based or community-focused. While the initial impulse to partner with community agencies was based on the limited capacity of local schools to support additional classroom-based placements, the authors discovered the benefits of working in partnership with community organizations.

Partnerships were developed through a participatory lens (Tinkler, Tinkler, Gerstl-Pepin, & Mugisha, 2014) with extensive dialogue at the outset of the initiative. This included individual meetings with potential community partners as well as the development of a Community Partner Advisory

Committee (CPAC) that brought together various service and advocacy organizations that work with resettled refugees. Each advisory committee meeting provided the opportunity for open dialogue in order to allow community voice to guide the work.

Through this collaborative work, the authors identified partners who could sustain ongoing service-learning placements and subsequently integrated experiences in three courses in the secondary education course sequence. In other words, this collaborative process allowed the authors to identify, integrate, and value community assets as integral to the design process, which supported the activation of student learning in line with community resources. Through the dialogues that were foundational for this collaborative process, the authors developed networks and frameworks for thinking about this community-based work.

### PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION

Data were collected to attend to both community partner and student perspectives. The following sections detail the data specific to each group.

#### **Community Perspectives**

When working with the community, the authors generated a range of data sources typically used in case study research, including observations, interviews, and documents (Merriam, 2009). Observational data were collected using a participant observation approach (Patton, 2015) since we engaged in dialogue while also observing and recording notes. The authors used an observation protocol that focused on both “descriptive and reflective notes” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 169) and that sought to capture dialogue, actions, and the physical environment.

Data sources included observation notes from nine one-on-one initial meetings with community members generated by the first author. The meetings included a range of potential community partners providing educational support to resettled refugee youth within the community, including non-profit organizations, advocacy groups, education services organizations, and K-12 school affiliates. These initial conversations focused on organizational capacity and mission to determine whether the organizations could support service-learning partnerships. These nine participants were invited to contribute to Community Partner Advisory Committee (CPAC) meetings to help guide the work of the initiative, and they identified other community organizations to include in the meetings. At the CPAC meetings, the authors collected meeting minutes and participant observation notes.

In addition, the authors conducted semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2015) with four community partners that hosted service-learning placements. The interviews included questions about organizational strengths and needs as well as identifying placement options. These interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The authors also engaged in more intensive dialogues (Constantino, 2008) with two of these community partners about what makes for effective service-learning partnerships (Tinkler, Tinkler, Hausman, & Tufo-Strouse, 2014). These interviews were not structured through a specific protocol, but were instead conversations that allowed the community partners to direct the dialogue as it related to effective partnerships. Finally, the authors collected a range of documents generated during the development of the initiative, including email communication.

### **Preservice Teachers**

In order to understand the experiences of our preservice teachers, during one semester the authors administered qualitative questionnaires (Johnson & Christensen, 2010), with open-ended questions, in the three courses that included a community-based or community-focused service-learning component. Students were asked to examine what they learned through the experience and analyze whether the experience supported course content. The questionnaires included some common questions for all of the courses as well as questions that were specific to the content and service-learning experiences of each particular course.

In the introduction to education course, which is the first course in the secondary education course sequence completed during freshman year, students partnered with a local school district to survey parents (primarily English learners) about a school reform initiative. Regarding student participants, 57 students in this class (out of 73) chose to participate in the study. The other two courses, an adolescent development course, which is generally a sophomore level course, and a content literacy course, which is generally a junior level course, included a service-learning component where preservice teachers provided weekly academic support across one semester for youth (primarily English learners) at three different local community centers. For the adolescent development course, 18 (out of 19) chose to participate, and 24 (out of 25) chose to participate from the content literacy course. In total, there was an 84% response rate (99 participants). The participants of the study reflect the student demographics of the program: predominantly White (86%), middle-class (only 22% eligible for Pell grants), and female (80%).

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The authors' bias as researchers is

toward viewing service-learning as a positive pedagogy that has benefits for students and community partners. During data analysis, we sought to bracket our bias (Creswell & Miller, 2000) so that it did not influence our findings. We were systematic in exploring both the limitations as well as the benefits of the service-learning experiences. Through a variety of procedures—triangulation of data, member-checking, comparative data analysis—we established validity for the findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Data analysis was managed in stages. Using an open-coding process (Benaquisto, 2008), the authors initially coded the data collected in the work with community partners. Each author coded all data sources (within text documents) including the observation notes, interviews, and documents (including email communication). The authors then examined the coding from a comparative stance to determine points of convergence and difference in our analysis. We then sorted codes into categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and identified themes that emerged across the data. To confirm or disconfirm our emergent findings (Creswell & Miller, 2000), we shared the findings with two of our community partners for input.

The data from the 99 student questionnaires were analyzed separately. Using HyperRESEARCH as a coding tool, the authors used descriptive coding to assign “labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data” (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 74). Twenty-six codes emerged across the data from the three courses. Working together, with a focus on interpretive convergence (Harry, Sturges, & Klingner, 2005), codes were grouped into eight categories. Finally, using a process of axial coding (Charmaz, 2006), broad themes were identified that spanned the data sets.

Social capital emerged as a theme during our initial analysis of both sets of data; we found that participants across stakeholder groups (community partners and students) identified gains that aligned with increased social capital. We then used a deductive approach (Gilgun, 2005) to more closely examine the coding categories specific to social capital. Through an iterative process of coding and recoding, we illuminated the themes presented in the following section.

Regarding our partnerships with community agencies, this study articulates the formative stages of our partnerships as well as ongoing work. Partnerships have continued to move forward using the core attributes of our aforementioned participatory process. The participatory process, in other words, has been the foundational ethos for our partnerships with community organizations. This attentiveness to a participatory process has fostered the development of bridges across the community, which is one of the primary findings presented in the following section.

## FINDINGS

The primary finding of this case study is that the service-learning initiative built bridging social capital for all participants. In addition to finding that teacher educators built bridging social capital with the community and between preservice teachers and the community, the findings show that new connections were made between community partners through the participatory process. The following findings represent broad thematic representations of the findings along with specific elements examined under each of those themes.

### TEACHER EDUCATORS BRIDGE WITH THE COMMUNITY

This theme explores how we built

bridging social capital between the teacher education program and the community through 1) focusing on the process, 2) responding to community needs, and 3) supporting ongoing partnerships.

### **Foundational Process**

One important outcome of the participatory process we used when initiating the comprehensive service-learning project was the construction of bridging social capital between our teacher education program and community organizations that extended beyond our partnerships with K-12 schools. By intentionally engaging in dialogue at the outset of the work, we set up a framework to support reciprocal relationships, a point that was explicit in the invitation we sent to community partners: “Through dialogue, we hope to develop a better understanding of organizational needs in order to align community needs with course-based service-learning opportunities.” By focusing on reciprocity, we were seeking to develop what Enos and Morton (2003) call transformational relationships. These relationships, built through dialogue and reflection, are ongoing, sustainable partnerships that lead to important changes for both parties. The conversations and ongoing dialogue we had with community partners led one community partner to note: “[First author] has shown us that a partnership can be win-win. We have a mutual agreement to help students grow.” Affirming mutual agreement through enduring conversations is central to the participatory process and bridging social capital.

### **Responding to Needs**

Community partners recognized that the consistent dialogue led to changes in structure and process that led to better outcomes for all involved. An example of this relates to the scheduling structure of the academic support offered in the adolescent

development course and the content literacy course. Two of the community partners noted from the outset that they wanted the university students to make a weekly commitment for a specific time and day rather than completing hours when convenient.

The community partners made this request for several reasons, including the concern about college students seeking to condense hours at the end of the semester, but the primary consideration was around the potential to build relationships. If the college students were available at the same time each week, the adolescents using the services of the center would know when that individual tutor was available for support. This structure was subsequently enacted, and the community partner’s predictions about relationship building came to fruition for many of the college students. One community partner noted, “we found that when we pair with a class, an education class where they either need the hours to fulfill a requirement or they need to teach a certain number of lessons that we get more consistency which the kids really come to rely on.” Another community partner acknowledged our responsiveness to feedback and thanked us for “always thinking of us and the community perspective.” By recognizing the community partners and allowing their imperatives to have voice, community partners understood that their voices mattered.

### **Ongoing Partnerships**

As the partnerships continued, the first author met regularly with community partners to make changes to the structure of programming to meet the shifting needs of the community organizations. This included paying attention to the ebbs and flows of youth seeking assistance on particular days of the week or particular times within the window of support. Our responsiveness to these shifts led one community partner to note, “We would like more partnerships like the one with [first

author] where there is an ongoing commitment and a cycle of feedback.” This ongoing cycle of feedback leading to program innovation and change has led to strong partnerships where each side of the partnership consistently seeks to support the other. The first author consistently directs university students looking for volunteer opportunities to the community partners, and these volunteers support the organizational capacity of the centers. One community partner wrote: “Thanks for sending those two wonderful students!” He also publicizes education related job openings at the centers to our graduates, and the centers frequently hire our graduates to support their programming. These ongoing relationships have led to programmatic social capital that extends beyond one person. Through building foundational relationships, other faculty within the program have stepped forward to work with these community partners.

#### PRESERVICE TEACHERS BRIDGE WITH THE COMMUNITY

This theme explores the networks that were developed between preservice teachers and the community through the service-learning experience. In particular, we examine how the preservice teachers 1) developed knowledge and understanding of the community, 2) recognized the reciprocity of learning through the experience, and 3) used their new knowledge and understanding to support bridging social capital with schools.

##### **Understanding the Community**

The findings demonstrate that preservice teachers built bridging social capital with the community through an improved understanding of the local community. On the questionnaire, 43 of the participants noted an increased awareness of the diversity of the community. One wrote, “I learned that there was a very diverse community right in my

backyard!” Another participant wrote, “By doing this service-learning project, I learned more about the [local] community.” This is important since research has begun to demonstrate that understanding community context supports teachers in becoming more effective teachers of diverse learners (Gimbert, 2010). One of our community partners recognized this need. He stated, “[preservice teachers] will want to be prepared for the future and figure out how to work in a diverse community.” This awareness and understanding of the community is an important precursor to forming relationships that increase social capital.

##### **Reciprocity of Learning**

The participants in the two classes providing academic support built relationships with the students at the centers that allowed for reciprocal learning growth. Many of the participants explicitly referenced the importance of building relationships as an essential characteristic of supporting student growth and development. For instance, one participant wrote, “I really benefited from this experience because it reinforced the necessity of building relationships with students.” Another wrote, “I was able to have 1-on-1 time to work and create a personal connection.” Participants recognized the learning they gained through these relationships in regard to understanding language acquisition, learning effective strategies for communicating with and teaching English learners (ELs), and understanding the differences between learners. One participant noted, the “service-learning experience showed me that students really do learn in so many different ways, and what works for one student may not work for another.” Some of the participants returned to tutor at the centers after the requirements of the course were met in order to continue to learn and grow. One of these university students in particular became an ongoing resource for the



community center, even providing an orientation to incoming tutors in subsequent semesters. As noted by the community partner, “[this tutor] is especially great with the teens and interacts with them a lot, even when there is no tutoring to be done.” This ongoing commitment demonstrates a recognition of the role that community centers play in educating community youth.

### **Bridging to the Community**

Through the service-learning experiences, the preservice teachers built social capital with community organizations and community youth. In addition, some of them also created bridging capital between community members or organizations and the local schools. For example, the preservice teachers in the first year introduction to education course partnered with a local school district to survey parents about a school reform initiative. Since many of the parents surveyed are resettled refugees who are English learners, the school district provided interpreters to assist. Through this process, the university students were able to collect feedback that the school district could use to better shape the initiative and to consider how to better communicate the work to parents. As noted by a school district employee who participated in the community partner meetings,

So a lot of this work is about helping our different communities learn more about what American education is. And so when you enter the pipeline, what are the rules formally and informally. So parent education is a facet of the work, sometimes not seen as core, but I see as core, in working with refugees and supporting them.

In return, the university students learned more about parent engagement and effective strategies for communication. As one participant noted, “I learned that schools are changing

every day, making new policies. Schools need to get parents’ opinions on these policies.”

Another example of bridging social capital relates to a student who provided academic support at one of the community centers. When this student entered student teaching in a subsequent semester, he wrote in his licensure portfolio about an important interaction that happened at the beginning of the school year. The student teacher met with his mentor teacher who was going through his roster of high school students for the year. He wrote:

During in-service [prior to the start of school] my mentor teacher and I were reviewing our roster of students and I heard him mutter to himself, “I do not know most of them.” Many of the students that I tutored at the [community center] are in the class I am working in. Tutoring them at the [community center] has given me an understanding about who they are as a learner, and how they process the material they are given by their teachers. I instantly communicated to my mentor that I have worked with these students before and we bounced ideas back and forth about how to accommodate the challenges they may face.

This particular mentor teacher is very invested in building relationships with his students. Through the insight provided from the student teacher, he was better able to support student learning and to form relationships. This student teacher acknowledged the value of schools and community centers working in partnership. He noted, “it is important for teachers to be aware of after school programs like [the community center] because they can reach out and learn more about their students.” If teachers are to become advocates for their students, they need to understand the social

networks and resources available to support students and families.

### NEW BRIDGES ACROSS THE COMMUNITY

This theme explores how the service-learning initiative built bridging social capital between community organizations and then examines the role of teacher educators as bridge builders.

#### **Bridges Between Agencies**

One unexpected finding from the study was that the initiative was a catalyst for building bridging social capital between community agencies. The advisory committee meetings brought together organizations from across the community that work with resettled refugees. Since these meetings were held at community partner sites, they allowed a view into the work of those organizations. As noted by one partner: "Thank you for organizing the grant partner advisory committee meeting that was held here a couple of weeks ago. We are glad to have been able to attend and grateful for the opportunity to introduce folks to our programs." During these meetings, community partners began to have dialogue about how they could work together as well as working with the university. One community partner stated, "we'd like to partner with other agencies. If [our center] can't meet their needs, where can we send them?" One of the community partners noted, "I think the collaboration between [the university] and the community provides all of us with an opportunity to share experiences, make professional connections, and improve the services we offer our students." For many organizations, finding the time and capacity to collaborate with other community organizations is challenging. As teacher educators working to prepare future teachers to work in schools that are situated within communities,

we have a responsibility to help build those connections.

#### **Teacher Educators as Bridge Builders**

The data provide evidence that the teacher educators in this study helped build connections that formed bridging social capital. One example relates to the first author's work with one of the community centers that hosts preservice teachers completing the service-learning for the content literacy course. During initial conversations with the director of youth programming at the center, the director noted that he wanted the programming to be more "teen led" with the goal to "empower the teens who attend to take more leadership, have more of a sense of ownership of the teen center." The first author worked with the center to develop academic support since this was requested by some of the youth at the site. Prior to the implementation of the experience, the director wrote: "I am excited and appreciative that tutoring will be a bigger part of the [teen center] program this year. Looking forward to making it happen." This new programming led to greater gender diversity of student participation. The director wrote that "there are a handful of girls who show up specifically for homework help." Later that semester, the director noted, "One of the consequences of our success with the tutoring program is that [local high school] students are now showing up every day, afternoons and evenings, for tutoring."

As the new programming at the center began, the first author was contacted by an English Language Learner (ELL) teacher at the local high school who had many students using the services of the center. The ELL teacher was happy that students had access to additional academic support at the community center. He noted, "Most ELL students find it difficult or impossible to do schoolwork at home because of the needs of their families

(childcare, cooking, cleaning, and shopping). Many students have a second job when they go home, which involves babysitting their siblings or preparing meals for other family members.” The first author helped initiate a conversation between the director of the center and the ELL teacher. In an email to the director of the community center, the first author wrote: “I visited with [the high school ELL teacher], and he’s excited about what’s happening, and he’s glad that you’ve got some tutoring scheduled for the teen center. He’s also looking for ways to involve more parents, so we may be trying to coordinate a meeting between the three of us.” By facilitating this communication, a symbiotic relationship developed where the community center updated the ELL teacher on the tutoring work being done with his students. This included information provided by the university students about what they worked on with the student and areas for continued growth. In return, the ELL teacher developed tutoring materials for the university students to use to better support effective tutoring.

Another example of bridging social capital relates to a school reform effort that was launched in 2014 when the state passed a law (Act 77) that requires schools to develop personalized learning plans for students in grades 7-12. As part of these plans, students are allowed alternative pathways to meeting graduation requirements (that are based on proficiencies), and these pathways can include community-based work. In order to support the possibility of alternative pathways, the first author coordinated a meeting between the university Upward Bound program and two long-term community partners to discuss how they could support schools in expanding learning opportunities across the community. They identified a number of ways that they could collaborate across programs to support middle and high school youth who were seeking engaged learning opportunities in the

community. As noted by one community partner, “we would like to form relationships with professors who will be our voices.” Our goal has been to try to ensure that community partner voice is heard in collaborative planning.

The first author also became a bridge for other professors seeking to form service-learning partnerships. As the first author continued to meet with community partners, he became aware of an organization seeking help with analyzing a quantitative data set. He was able to connect the organization with a professor in another department seeking to find a real data set to use in his statistics course. In addition, the first author has connected organizations seeking assistance with communications projects to a degree program at the university that supports community-based communications projects as part of a service-learning capstone experience. As noted by Putnam (2000), “bridging social capital can generate broader identities and reciprocity” (p. 23). As teacher educators, we have stepped beyond our typical identities to become community-engaged leaders and scholars.

## DISCUSSION

This study provides evidence that teacher education programs can build bridging social capital with the community through service-learning initiatives. Importantly, the participatory process allowed this bridging capital to be developed and amplified across multiple spheres. In other words, bridging social capital gains are not limited to the service-learning activities when they are supported through a dynamic participatory process. The gains are across the entire interconnected system, which has the potential to improve learning outcomes for community youth. As noted by Bloomgarden, Bombardier, Breitbart, Nagel, and Smith (2006),

“As representatives of academic institutions, we must recognize that our fate is intrinsically tied to that of our neighboring communities, and that we share a responsibility for each other” (p. 117). Using service-learning partnerships that build social capital can have benefits for communities and teacher education programs alike that can lead to stronger, more resilient and connected communities.

For our preservice teachers, we hope that they work to build social capital between their schools and the community in their future teaching positions. To support this, we continue to be explicit about the importance of bridging capital and ways to amplify bridging capital through meaningful partnerships. We think this approach aligns with what Olson and Brennan (2017) describe as “development *in* community” (p. 14) that leads to an enhancement of human and social capital. We also hope that our preservice teachers will engage with the participatory process, either by initiating conversations or being part of conversations, allowing for even more robust connections across the community. This will require teachers to think beyond their school’s grounds and to put themselves out into the community, a community which may be very different from their own lived experiences. After all, as Putnam (2000) notes, “To build bridging social capital requires that we transcend our social and political and professional identities to connect with people unlike ourselves” (p. 411).

In order to better prepare our preservice teachers to connect with others and build relationships, we have begun to conceptualize our work through the lens of cultural humility. Cultural humility is a “stance where critically-minded individuals are persistently self-aware and self-reflective when interacting with others in order to be attentive to culture,

power, and privilege” (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2016). Since the strength of the bridges that are built is dependent on how relationships are formed, it is important that our future teachers approach their interactions with a culturally humble stance. This stance will support the expansion of social capital for all stakeholders across the community.

## CONCLUSION

This study has implications for teacher educators as they consider pedagogical practices that extend learning into the community. As the results demonstrate, using participatory processes that seek to provide reciprocal benefits for the university and community can build social capital. Through bridging with the community, the local context became a central part of the curriculum in preparing our future teachers. To examine the long-term impacts of the service-learning experiences on these future teachers, we are exploring opportunities to conduct longitudinal research because we want to examine whether these community-engaged experiences have influenced their thinking about how they engage with their communities in their current teaching positions.

As our work continues with the community partners described in this study, we strive to be responsive to community needs. In order to be more responsive, we intend to systematically revisit the foundations of our partnerships to further explore how we can continue to create social capital because our partnerships illustrate the importance of context. Our partnerships allow us to more fully recognize and understand community needs, and our partnerships empower us to amplify social capital to advance the public good.

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