

Preservice Teachers as Change Agents: Going the Extra Mile in Service-Learning Experiences

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Educational psychologists involved in teacher education are expected to develop professional teacher dispositions of preservice students. The professional disposition “teacher as change agent” is used to frame actions in service-learning field experiences in a teacher preparation program. Preservice teacher service-learning journals, self-ratings, participant observations, and mentor teacher reports were used to understand service-learning design elements associated with preservice teacher dispositions as change agents. Frequent service visits extended over time, opportunities to develop relationships at sites, and perceiving that one makes a difference with preschool through high school (P–12) learners were linked to desirable disposition outcomes. Further suggestions for course design elements include (a) providing activities to help preservice teachers understand field contexts, (b) supporting a good match between preservice teachers and learner needs, and (c) making the characteristics and role of change agents part of the preparation and evaluation process.

We are educational psychologists engaged in teacher preparation. We use service-learning experiences to support our students’ understanding of the development of diverse learners. At the same time, we share with all those who prepare teachers a concern for the development of the necessary dispositions for teaching in diverse schools. This last concern prompted us to examine how best to support the development of candidate dispositions through our use of *service learning*. Service learning is not only a vehicle for teaching the *content* of educational psychology but also for supporting teacher candidate *dispositions* that all students can learn. It is imperative that educational psychologists teach both content and dispositions, especially now when teacher preparation institutions are under increased scrutiny for their ability to prepare teachers able to teach diverse students (Engel, 2009). Service learning links educational psychology

strongly to broad teacher preparation efforts that inevitably include work with teacher dispositions.

Service-Learning Pedagogy

Service learning is a pedagogy whose time has come in teacher preparation. Three current forces support this claim.

1. Teacher preparation is clearly headed in the direction of increased, earlier, and more integrated field experiences (National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education [NCATE], 2010; National Network for Educational Renewal [NNER], 2010).

2. Teacher preparation must address professional dispositions—the beliefs and actions that all students can learn, regardless of economic, language, racial, ethnic, or ability background (see, e.g., Jensen, 2009).

3. Service-learning pedagogy combines both the drive toward increased field experiences and the design elements

for addressing the dispositions necessary for teachers.

It is no wonder that service learning is rapidly becoming a common component of teacher preparation (Etheridge, 2006).

The use of service learning is far from a guarantee that students will come away from the experience with fully developed dispositions for equitable teaching. Unless carefully orchestrated, experiences can result in unintended interpretations (Jones, 2002). During her service-learning experiences, for example, one of our preservice teachers stated, “I learned that some parents of these kids just don’t see the bigger picture in the education of their children.” Like her, many preservice teachers are, in fact, unaware of the realities faced by students and families from underrepresented groups (Westheimer & suurtamm,¹ 2009). It is necessary to challenge and transform existing belief structures about diverse learners through careful design of experiences (Klug, Luckey, Wilkins, & Whitfield, 2006; Maxwell, 2009). In short, service-learning field experiences have great potential but require careful design to impact professional teaching dispositions.

Our article examines service-learning design elements most likely to achieve desirable disposition outcomes. We begin with a brief discussion of the current language of teacher dispositions to clarify our focus. We then describe how we used data from our own courses to identify features of the course most likely to achieve the desired outcomes. Finally, we provide

guidelines for service-learning design in teacher preparation.

Dispositions and Service Learning The Language of Teacher Dispositions

Because service-learning experiences are often linked in the literature to dispositions necessary for effective teaching of all students (Butcher et al., 2003), it is necessary to briefly explore the language of teacher dispositions to more clearly position our work.

The professional dispositions of teachers have in the past been linked to the term “social justice” (see, e.g., Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009a). Social justice is, thus, a concept widely discussed in teacher preparation. The term has more recently become generic: a catch-phrase that runs the risk of becoming cliché (North, 2008). Some clarity in defining the concept exists. In the preface to their book, *The Handbook of Social Justice in Education*, Ayers et al. (2009b) provided a useful articulation of the components of social justice teaching:

1) providing an equitable education to all learners; 2) instilling learners with a sense of agency that will encourage them to become change agents; and 3) promoting social literacy so learners understand the way complex issues influence the quality of daily life. (Preface, p. xiv)

Most recently, NCATE has abandoned the use of “social justice,” instead preferring the concepts of fairness and belief that all students can learn (NCATE, 2007). Others too, rather than discussing social justice, instead focus on the role of education in preparing all students to participate as citizens in a democracy (Cochran-Smith, 2004). Still others note teachers must become change

¹Name not capitalized at the author’s request

agents, a notion that underpins all other aims of teaching (Nieto, 2003). Building on the change agent theme, Rogers (2006) described early efforts at the preparation of teachers for their role as change agents, describing the shift in thinking and personal transformation of teachers necessary for teaching for social justice.

The role of teachers as change agents seems to us to embrace both historical concepts linked to social justice and to the disposition shifts necessary for teaching so all students can learn. We use “change agent” to encapsulate the desirable disposition outcomes we hope to support in preservice teacher field experiences. We see the shift to being change agents—that is, motivations and beliefs that change the educational picture for traditionally underserved students—to be uniquely important in teacher preparation (Lane, Lacefield-Parachini, & Iskin, 2003). Service-learning provides many opportunities for teacher educators to support dispositions of change agents (Lu & Ortlieb, 2009).

Service Learning and Change Agents

“Teacher as change agent” seems to be the flavor of the day. A recent search of peer-reviewed articles on “teacher” and “change agent,” using Academic Search Premier, resulted in 82 articles, with 40 of them published since 2006. The term is used in a variety of ways, including links to culturally responsive teaching (Frederick, Cave, & Perencevich, 2009), ownership in one’s work (Lane et al., 2003), and the moral dimensions of teaching (Fullan, 1993). Increased commitment to make a difference when teaching, linked to service-learning experiences (Howard, 2003), shares

aspects of these various definitions of the teacher as change agent role.

Less commonly found in the literature is a consistent definition of a change agent. Perhaps most useful is the definition from Lu and Ortlieb (2009): change agents are innovators who initiate the change, schedule the change, create the climate for change, find the support for change and the resistance to change, involve the people who support change, convince the people who resist the change, and launch or modify the change (Change Agents section, para. 2). This definition suggests several important features of change agents: (a) they envision change as possible; (b) they go beyond what is normally done or do things in a new way; and (c) they act to make change happen (Lu & Ortlieb, 2009).

We used these features to define and challenge preservice teachers to “Go the Extra Mile” in their service sites. We further articulated the things we would see in service-learning experiences as students who met the challenge as those who:

1. performed unexpected services;
2. provided significantly more service than was required;
3. demonstrated work actions well beyond the expected tutoring or homework support expected in the service; and
4. illustrated self-reflections showing asset views of students.

Both preservice teachers and mentor teachers used this language to analyze the quality of service-learning field experiences (see the Appendix: Teacher Rating Form).

Study Description

Intent

It is not the intent of our article to identify the components of well-designed service learning. This job has been done by many others (Bringle & Hatcher, 1999; Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996; Marchel, 2003). Nor do we want to emphasize the important role of reflection and change in attitudes that are hallmarks of successful service-learning experiences (Brookfield, 1990; Eyler et al., 1996). We want to describe how we designed service learning to help our students become change agents. Our focus is to recognize the actions students take on behalf of others, to illustrate

what being a change agent looks like when it begins to develop in service-learning experiences, and to identify course design elements that appear to be linked specifically to the development of a sense of agency. Table 1 provides examples from our students' service-learning experiences that we have identified as actions of change agents. Alongside the examples, we list common features of the experiences—shared features that suggest a rubric for the analysis of service-learning experiences that develop students capabilities as change agents.

Table 1. Examples of Change Agents in Service-Learning Field Experiences

Key design feature	Examples of going the extra mile
Increased frequency and length of contact.	Special education undergraduate in a self-contained classroom for students with severe disabilities continued service for semester after the course ended. Physical education major provided 32 (20 hr more than required) hr of service in one semester. Student provided tutoring in math and reading and outside materials for students to use. Middle-level major worked with after-school step team, extending number of visits by 10 hr and length of visits beyond 2-hr time block, to help prepare team and accompanied them to regional competition.
Demonstrated teacher efficacy from use of personal skills and evidence of personal impact on learners.	Theater education majors in a preschool setting for ELL students developed a literature-based theater production and performed for parents. Spanish education major in self-contained class for students with severe mentally and physical impairments sang songs, read books, and provided outside materials in student's first language. Special education major working with self-contained disability program developed fund-raising program with sorority to raise research monies for foundation serving students with particular genetic syndrome of one of the students.
Engaged in relationship building.	Elementary education major developed strong mentor relationship with students in middle school afterschool dance program for low-SES students. S/he developed dance routines, worked with students on dance competition, and accompanied them to the competition. Elementary education major tutored low-achieving student, encouraging high expectations through mentoring contacts with student. Went beyond mentoring to work with teachers and others in school on student's behalf. Two students tutoring in low-SES school organized a college campus visit for P-12 school students to familiarize them with university life.

Note. ELL = English language learner; SES = socioeconomic status.

Methodology

We teach a human development course paired with service learning as an early field experience. Throughout the Spring 2009 semester, we collected and analyzed student narratives, assessments, and class documents to understand change agent actions in our classes. Our methodology was qualitative, guided by ethnographic methods of participant observation and document analysis (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999). Ethnographic approaches were particularly helpful in the study of our courses; the methodology utilizes multiple ways of gathering information based on researcher decisions and informed by the research process (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). The learn-as-you-go aspect of ethnographic methodology allowed ongoing problem solving as a way to inform our own teaching (Marchel, 2003). Finally, ethnography allowed us to gauge how field experiences influenced preservice teacher development during the semester because the approach built on the perspectives of participants being investigated in the study.

Data Collection Methods

A variety of documents were collected in the five course sections we taught during the semester. We analyzed all documents in our role as teachers and shared the general patterns of what we learned through thoughtful analysis. We reported explicitly only the data from those students who agreed to participate in the study. Analyzed documents included informal surveys about the service-learning experience, a series of five reflective journals completed by students during their service-learning experiences, an end-of-course self-evaluation completed by

students, and P-12 teacher feedback provided at the end of student service (see Appendix).

At the end of the semester, students completed a self-evaluation in which they rated their own service and provided examples of their actions to illustrate their comments. Students were asked to include any information about important activities they did in their service projects that fit the category, "Going the Extra Mile." This section of the self-evaluation narrative was examined with particular detail to understand the actions students took in their sites, as well as how they interpreted those actions. Our own observations and notes also provided a rich source of information throughout the semester.

Data Analysis

Two documents, the reflective journals completed during the service-learning experience and the final student self-report completed at the end of the service project, provided the most explicit information on change agent actions. Reflective journals used a critical incident analysis technique in student journals to encourage self-reflection (Brookfield, 1990). The final service-learning self-report required students to explain if and why they thought they had "Gone the Extra Mile." We read the critical incidents and self-report documents to identify participants who had (a) performed unexpected services, (b) provided significantly more service than was required, (c) demonstrated work actions well beyond the expected tutoring or homework support expected in the service, or (d) illustrated self-reflections showing asset views of students.

Once we identified the participants whose work “Went the Extra Mile,” we looked at other documents they produced during the semester. For example, we reviewed teacher reports, participant observation notes, and course assessments to check the veracity of student accounts. Through this triangulation, we identified a set of cases that illustrated a range of service-learning experiences that fit the teacher-as-change-agent outcome. Finally, we identified shared aspects from the service experiences common to these experiences. Table 1 also illustrates a representative sample of these students. The right-hand column shows the thematic characteristics we found common among the experiences. Below we discuss each of these and provide some general information about preservice teachers’ actions as change agents in service-learning experiences.

Findings: The Actions of Change Agents in Service Learning

Three key course features were linked to change agency in service-learning experiences: (a) frequency and number of contacts; (b) strong interpersonal relationships; and (c) perceptions of efficacy in effecting change. Sometimes all three are present in an experience but not always. Quite often, these themes interacted. For example, when students spent regular and extended amounts of time performing service, they were likely to form relationships with people at a school and have more opportunities to provide meaningful services that increased their sense of self-efficacy.

Frequency and Timing

Students were required to complete 12–15 hr of service, spread out over the semester but in at least 5 visits. Student accounts of hours at sites were recorded on a signed teacher log, and student self-reports at the end of the course described their visit schedule. Change agents often worked for more than the required hours, many going to their site every week. Illustrating this pattern is Scott, who tutored students with special needs and went to his school site for 32 hours. He visited his school twice a week so that he could work with the students, talk to teachers, and take materials to the class. Scott wrote this about his experience, describing how spending more time with students allowed him to form relationships and see the contributions he made:

I worked a total of 32 hours, 30 minutes. I brought over materials for students who needed help with their reading. I helped Brady and Rachel with their reading and I showed Rachel ways to help her with multiplication and reading. I kept working with Brady. At first she didn’t want help, but then she came around.

In some cases, education students provided extended services to students and schools, increasing the timing of visits to two or more times a week, providing e-mail or telephone help on homework outside of school hours, or even continuing to work with students in semesters that followed the one in which the service-learning project was assigned. For example, Nancy, a special education major, continued to work on an individual education plan’s (IEP) communication goals with a student in a

self-contained program for severely handicapped students, going every week the semester following her service-learning semester. Increased frequency of visits and extending visits over time allow students to form meaningful relationships with teachers and students at service-learning sites.

Opportunities for Relationships

In many cases, our education students reported that relationships with the students they worked with were important. Laura's work tutoring an English language learner (ELL) at an elementary school illustrates her relationship with the student:

I tried to show him that I had high expectations for him. His teacher had almost given up, and his parents were tired of him always being in trouble. I was the only one constantly pushing him to do better and do more.

Students who recognized relationships as important made sure they apologized to P-12 students when they could not come, extended the length of time they worked in schools to well past the end of the semester, and provided special services to students and teachers outside of the service-learning requirements. When education students developed relationships with P-12 students, they began to understand the perspective of the other and were willing to act as an advocate. For example, Jack said this about his work with a low-socioeconomic (SES) student, about whom teachers made negative comments:

My response was to take into consideration Student X's issues but disregard negative comments. I treated him like any other student. I

did not treat him like a trouble maker. Now that I have worked with Student X, I can stand up for him if I hear any bad comments. I can also make sure that when I am a teacher, I pay close attention to what I say around students. Constructive criticism is important for helping growth, but I can restrain from gossiping with other teachers about bad behavior. If you want to make conversation, it shouldn't be done at a child's expense.

Relationships support the importance of extended time spent at service sites because only over time do positive relationships develop. When education students had strong relationships with P-12 students, they also were more likely to act on their behalf, leading to increased feelings of self-efficacy as helpers—the third theme, which we discuss next.

Teacher Efficacy

Teacher efficacy is the term we used for experiences in which our students described meaningful contributions they made at sites. In teacher education, teacher efficacy refers to beliefs that one is competent and can be successful in reaching teaching goals (Knoblauch & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2008). Similar beliefs are also central to acting as change agents in the future (Ayers et al., 2009b). Examples of teacher efficacy are wide ranging but share some common features. According to Knoblauch and Woolfolk-Hoy (2008), teacher efficacy experiences often involve using a unique skill or ability that fits a specific teaching context and recognizing one's role in successful outcomes. We saw features of teacher efficacy in the experiences of our

preservice teachers when they described personal actions that had an impact on P-12 students. For example, a student who spoke Spanish learned that a P-12 student with multiple and significant special needs was able to understand and respond to Spanish, when until that time, English-only school professionals thought the student had no language abilities. The journal entry below describes the experience:

While the other teachers were working with other students, I sat next to Ben. Ben was lying on a bed with his head and neck supported by a special brace and pillow. He was on his stomach, facing me. I began to sing softly to him some Spanish songs that I know by heart, so as not to disrupt the other teachers. He reacted in a way in which I had not seen him previously react. His eyes focused on me and widened, he lifted his head up with an obvious effort, opened his mouth and made a soft, high-pitched vocalization that appeared to be his way of trying to speak or outwardly express an inner emotion. Ben reacted similarly when Spanish music was played on the classroom CD player, and I had never seen him react to the English music that was almost constantly playing. He only physically responded to certain songs, which indicated to me that perhaps he was familiar with certain

songs outside of the classroom. . . . While working with Ben today . . . I feel that for a few moments I had engaged him emotionally.

In a second example, two theater education students who went “the extra mile” showed efficacy in their use of child literature to develop a theater performance. Their actions included creating stage sets and costumes to help preschool ELLs put on a performance for their parents. In her account of experiences at the site, Breanna clearly linked her work to the special skills of her discipline:

I worked with the children on numerous occasions, using my discipline of theater. I wrote narrative pantomime, led story dramatizations, and produced mini-plays for the children to perform with their parents.

Preservice teachers must be given opportunities to make an impact on P-12 students to make a difference. Opportunities to make a difference do not always require that an education student possess special skills, only that their presence at a school is crucial in some way. For example, Amy said this about her work at a school that serves many rural, low-SES students:

I was a huge help at my site. For most of the time I spent there, one of the teachers had a broken ankle. As a result, she needed me to demonstrate different activities such as jumping rope that she was unable to do. She was very thankful and told me several times

how good it was that I was here and willing to step into the gap.

It is important for preservice teachers to be able to use their skills in some ways that have an impact on P–12 students. Allowing preservice teachers to gauge their own skills and abilities and select sites where those skills will be used facilitates experiences of teacher efficacy. See our suggestions below for ways to encourage a good match between preservice teacher and P–12 student needs.

Suggestions

It is important for preservice teachers to begin to experience their role as change agents. Service-learning field experiences can support this desirable outcome during teacher preparation programs but only if carefully designed and implemented. Our analysis of preservice change agents during our own service-learning experiences suggests the following course-design features:

1. Have students explore and understand the context—Make sure preservice teachers understand the needs, resources, and social issues influencing the students, classrooms, and schools in which they work. Such understanding allows students to see why their work is meaningful and helps them understand the students with whom they will work, increasing the likelihood that they will form meaningful relationships with the students.

2. Provide opportunities to make a difference—Activities that require education students to collect direct evidence of the impact that they have on P–12 students allows them to see the importance of actions. For example, having students teach

a specific skill following a simple preassessment, and then measuring learning gains with an assessment, gives visible proof that one's actions make a difference. Providing students with skills likely to make a difference are important. For example, showing students how to support vocabulary development when working with ELL students and telling them what materials to take with them mean they are more likely to have an impact on the important targeted skills.

3. Maximize self-selection of sites—Although not always possible, allowing students to match their skills and interests to a service site means that they are more likely to provide meaningful service in that site. In our work, the following examples illustrate the match of ability and site: (a) a music education student provided after-school band lessons; (b) a biology student set up interactive science activities in an after-school program; and (c) a special education major helped a student with communication needs meet specific IEP goals. To promote self-selection of sites, we created a database of teachers in regional schools and listed the specific needs each teacher had. Our students contacted teachers to tell them what skills they themselves had and worked with the teacher to help use those skills.

4. Encourage extended time in the field—When planning service-learning experiences, students are more likely to develop meaningful relationships with P–12 students and teachers, engage in meaningful activities, and learn that they can make a difference if they are in the site over extended periods of time. Going to a site once or twice is less likely to have those strong outcomes, but weekly visits over the semester were more likely to result in

change agent actions. For example, one of the features of positive mentoring outcomes is increased length of time for the mentoring relationship (DuBois & Silverman, 2004). Many students in our courses continued to go to schools when the required service time was over, and in some cases, when the semester ended.

5. Make the role of change agent explicit—At the beginning of service-learning field experiences, discuss what it means for teachers to be change agents. Provide examples from educational settings to illustrate the concept. Describe the kinds of actions in service-learning experiences that show a preservice teacher acting as a change agent. Finally, use the language of change agent actions in course documents and assessments.

In summary, when evaluating whether service-learning field experiences supported change-agent dispositions of preservice teachers, look for those who have gone the extra mile. Preservice change agents often exceed minimal course requirements in a variety of ways. These include (a) believing that one is making a difference, (b) forming meaningful relationships with those at the site, and (c) making frequent visits to a site over an extended time period. All of these elements are present in Melia's analysis of her work tutoring after school students:

I went to the school extra hours and I would have gone more if my school was not ending earlier than theirs. The only time I missed was for Spring Break and once when I was sick. Those two times I apologized to my student for not being there.

Each day, I went knowing I would help the students more and my visits helped with their reading level rising.

These last comments capture many elements of making a difference; the student goes beyond merely fulfilling required times, recognizes the importance of his relationship with the student, and believes that the service he provides matters. When students "Go the Extra Mile," like this, service-learning field experiences for future teachers are at their best.

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Appendix
End of Semester Teacher Rating Form

Professional behavior

**Check
one:**

A. The student was on time for visits, and while at visits, followed the rules of the site. S/he focused on assignments, was pleasant to others, and dressed appropriately for the site. S/he checked in upon arrival. The student did not interfere with activities, but politely observed what was happening. <u>OR</u>	
B. In general, the student was professional, but there were a few times the student could have done better—see the list above. <u>OR</u>	
C. The student needs to improve his/her professional behavior in some way. Please specify problems:	

Comments:

Going the “extra mile”

**Check
One:**

A. The student did things beyond what might be expected related to the field observation. S/he worked more than 10 hours or came more than 5 times to your school; s/her brought ideas or materials along to work with students. <u>OR</u>	
B. The student did some things above and beyond in my observation, but could have done more. The student went the extra “half-mile.” <u>OR</u>	
C. The student did what was expected and no more while at the placement.	

Comments:

Signature of Supervisor or Teacher

Name of Student helper