

## **Experiencing the Other: The Impact of Service-Learning on Preservice Teachers' Perceptions of Diversity**

**By Barri Tinkler & Alan Tinkler**

In response to the increasing diversity in American public schools and concerns over inequities in opportunity and achievement, many teacher education programs are infusing multicultural topics and coursework into their programs (Akiba, 2011; Hollins & Guzman, 2005). While some programs utilize what O'Grady (2000) called the Human Relations approach to multicultural education with an emphasis on "reducing prejudice and getting along with others" (p. 11), other programs drive things further and seek to foster a social justice orientation in their students (Zeichner, 2003). O'Grady (2000) has labeled this social justice approach as Social Reconstructionist Multicultural Education since it "teaches directly about oppression, discrimination, social justice, and how to take action against these inequities" (p. 4). Fostering a social justice disposition can be a challenging endeavor when working with white, middle-class pre-service teachers who have grown up in rural or suburban environments with very limited experience with diversity (Causey, Thomas, & Armento, 2000). Because of this, teacher educators have to consider an approach that allows an opening of students' minds to ideas of diversity and

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social justice. This study explores our attempt to initiate this process through the use of a service-learning experience.

This interpretive study elucidates the experiences of a group of preservice teachers (n=37) participating in a service-learning project as a course requirement for a social foundations of education course. The preservice teachers were required to complete ten hours of service (with at least six visits) at a local Job Corps Center. They tutored Job Corps students seeking to complete their high school diploma or General Educational Development (GED) high school equivalency diploma. This experience required the group of predominantly white, middle-class preservice teachers to interact one-on-one with a diverse group of students primarily from urban areas. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact that this experience had on the preservice teachers' perceptions of and receptiveness to diversity.

### **Review of Literature**

There is a growing need for an emphasis on diversity within teacher education programs. There are several reasons for this. First of all, as Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) pointed out, America's schools are becoming increasingly diverse. The growing population of English Learners has created challenges for teachers and schools who are not prepared to provide the support required to help all students reach their academic potential. Another concern is the persistent achievement gap for students of color (Hollins & Guzman, 2005) and students in poverty (Murphy, 2009). A growing body of research has pointed to poverty as the most important factor influencing academic achievement in U.S. schools (Berliner, 2006), particularly given that low socioeconomic status students tend to be concentrated in schools with less experienced teachers and fewer resources, thus reinforcing the opportunity gap (Carter & Welner, 2013). As important as an emphasis on diversity is to support the success of students of color, English Learners, and students in poverty, attention to diversity is also important in supporting the social and moral development of White youth who are living in increasingly segregated communities (Ladson-Billings, 1994) and attending increasingly segregated schools (Garland, 2012).

Since the teaching population continues to be predominantly White (Assaf, Battle, & Garza, 2010), tackling issues of diversity and social justice within teacher education can be a challenging proposition. Preservice teachers with little experience with diversity are often resistant to a critical examination of these ideas (LaDuke, 2009). A study conducted by Gaine (2001) found that students were defensive and angry during explorations of these issues and resisted the discussion of these topics. Gay and Kirkland (2003) described strategies that preservice teachers used to try to avoid or shut down discussions about race. LaDuke (2009) described the use of silence as one form of resistance.

Some teacher educators successfully utilize instructional strategies to try to address this resistance. McFalls and Cobb-Roberts (2001) utilized cognitive dis-

sonance instruction to address resistance. Students were introduced to readings that challenged their ideas about race and were asked to analyze their reactions to the readings using the lens of cognitive dissonance theory. The authors found that using this metacognitive process reduced student resistance. Brown (2004) posited that teacher educators can improve cultural diversity awareness by utilizing instructional practices that require students to examine their own cultural identity as a first step in examining cultural issues. An initial assignment used by Brown (2004) asked students to “research their heritage and come prepared to introduce themselves in a ‘cultural puzzle’ that described the influences that made them who they are” (p. 331). The author found that focusing initially on self-awareness led to decreased resistance to course content.

However, research has also been conducted that points to the idea that course content alone may not be enough to change student beliefs about diversity. A study by Cockrell, Placier, Cockrell, and Middleton (1999) found that a multicultural foundations course had little impact. The authors found that the ability to change student beliefs was impacted by prior experience, political beliefs, and beliefs about schools. Research by Johnson (2002) demonstrated that racial awareness was determined by previous significant experiences with diversity. What do we do for students who have not had previous experience with diversity and who are resistant to course content alone?

Some teacher educators have sought to supplement multicultural coursework with field experiences in diverse settings (Hyland & Noffke, 2005; Sleeter, 2001). Melnick and Zeichner (1998) pointed to the value of immersion opportunities for increasing awareness of diversity. Burant and Kirby (2002) conducted a study looking at preservice teachers who completed a field experience in urban schools. In addition to the practicum, the preservice teachers also completed a community project for ten hours. Almost half of the students said that the experience deepened or transformed their understanding of diversity and urban schools.

In addition to utilizing diverse field placements, there is also a growing movement in teacher education to incorporate service-learning experiences into teacher preparation programs. Though there are multiple definitions of service-learning, the definition we employ in conceptualizing and constructing service-learning experiences is the definition developed by the National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (n.d.). This definition states:

Service-learning combines service objectives with learning objectives with the intent that the activity change both the recipient and the provider of the service. This is accomplished by combining service tasks with structured opportunities that link the task to self-reflection, self-discovery, and the acquisition and comprehension of values, skills, and knowledge content. (What is Service-Learning section, para. 1)

Based on this definition, the goal is to achieve change for both the students participating in the service-learning experience as well as the recipients of the service. While

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this definition focuses attention on the need to affect change, researchers are finding it necessary to differentiate between different forms of service-learning since different forms engender different outcomes. Marullo and Edwards (2000), for instance, have distinguished between charity service-learning, which focuses primarily on the service itself and the benefits to university students, and social justice (or critical) service-learning which focuses on the idea of understanding underlying social problems and seeking to create change for and with the community (Mitchell, 2008).

A growing body of research demonstrates the benefits of service-learning for preservice teachers. Some of these benefits include increased self-esteem and self-efficacy (Root & Furco, 2001; Wade, 1995), improved problem solving and autonomy (Root & Batchelder, 1994), and enhanced academic development (Root & Furco, 2001). According to Swick (1999), another benefit is strengthened perspectives of caring. This is important since the literature on culturally relevant pedagogy points to caring as a central aspect of this teaching stance (Garcia, 2000; Pang, 2001).

Another benefit that is of particular interest to teacher education programs is the impact of service-learning on preservice teacher's perceptions of and receptiveness to diversity. Multiple studies have shown that multicultural service-learning experiences provide a greater awareness of diversity (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001; Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Bell, Horn, & Roxas, 2007; Boyle-Baise, 2005; Stachowski & Visconti, 1998; Wade, 2000) as well as helping preservice teachers to develop a more complex understanding of their own ethnicity (Bollin, 1996). In addition to increased awareness, a study by Boyle-Baise (1998) demonstrated that service-learning can also improve preservice teachers' receptiveness to multicultural issues. Boyle-Baise (1998) found that a multicultural service-learning experience prompted greater acceptance of students of color in the K-12 classroom and a willingness on the part of preservice teachers to try to change their own pedagogy and curriculum while a study by Conner (2010) demonstrated that a service-learning experience changed preservice teachers' perspectives about urban students of color. Brown (2005), in a study of a multicultural service-learning project, found that in addition to increased awareness and receptiveness to diversity, the service-learning experience also raised "the level of commitment toward social justice" (p. 67).

Though multicultural service-learning experiences have shown promise in terms of preservice teachers' responsiveness to diversity, there can be unintended effects. Boyle-Baise and Langford (2004) utilized a service-learning experience working with low-income, urban youth. Though students came away from the experience with an increased awareness of social problems and a commitment to social change, the service-learning experience did not prompt awareness of the preservice teachers' own privilege and fostered negative perspectives of community members and parents for some students. Bell, Horn, and Roxas (2007) conducted a study of a multicultural service-learning experience completed by preservice teachers working with youth in an afterschool program. The authors found that the service-learning experience encouraged a more complex understanding of diversity. However, there

was limited evidence that the preservice teachers developed knowledge of how to apply this enhanced understanding of diversity to their classroom practice. These results point to the need to construct course content using a critical lens in order to support social justice outcomes.

This study seeks to add to the growing body of research that looks at the impact of multicultural service-learning experiences. The research question which guides this study is: Can a service-learning experience impact preservice teachers' perceptions of and receptiveness to diversity?

### **Conceptual Framework**

When considering how to articulate what we were hoping to achieve with our students, we turned to philosophy. We used the writings of the philosopher Alphonso Lingis (1994; 1998) to conceptualize what we were trying to achieve through the use of the service-learning experience. Lingis is a contemporary philosopher whose work has been greatly influenced by both Kant and Levinas. His work is grounded in the construct of the imperative. Lingis defines the imperative as the drive within us to provide meaning and order to our world. This drive is both physiological and psychological. It is this drive, this imperative, which directs our thought. Lingis (1998) stated:

The imperative itself is not a concept, with which we represent some content. It is a command that we conceptualize correctly. It is not a principle or a law or an order. It is a command that there be principles and that our thought represent order—or that we represent the unprincipled and the chaotic correctly. (p. 179)

It is this imperative which drives our thoughts and perceptions, and in turn, influences how we view the world.

Lingis acknowledges that one's imperative is influenced by the coding of the culture to which one belongs. He wrote:

The posture and movements of the other, as one perceives them, do not only show position and displacement coded by physical and physiological laws; they also show a cultural coding... When the other speaks, it is with the tongue of a nation, the intonation of a class, the rhetoric of a social position, the idiom of a subculture, the vocabulary of an age group. (Lingis, 1994, p. 24)

Both our knowledge and our cultural systems are manifestations of individual imperatives. How we view others, including how we conceptualize beauty, are constructs that are culturally determined and thus, in turn, are subject to the imperative.

It can be difficult to recognize one's own imperative; in fact, the recognition of the self usually comes through exposure to the other. Most writers who use the terminology of "the other" are describing those who are very different than oneself; however, Lingis describes the other as everyone outside of oneself. For Lingis, coming into contact with the other allows an individual to become aware of their own

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imperative. One usually recognizes this difference as culture since imperatives are manifested in culture. By recognizing difference, one realizes that each individual is operating from a different imperative.

It is as difficult to understand one's own imperative as it is to understand the imperative of the other. But, it is through interactions that we are able to more fully understand our own imperative as well as the other's imperative. For Lingis (1994), "to recognize the other is to respect the other" (p. 23). The respect for the other involves the recognition that the other is ruled by his/her own imperative without making any value judgments about the other's imperative. For Lingis, aside from abuse, there is no right or wrong, only difference. Unless an individual recognizes and respects these differences, that individual holds his/her imperative in authority over the imperative of the other.

Lingis believes that individuals need to experience the other face-to-face in order to approach an understanding of the other's imperative. Interaction cannot be merely an intellectual process, nor can one access the other through reading. Lingis (1994) wrote, "It is with the nakedness of one's eyes that one exposes oneself to the other, with one's hands arrested in their grips on things and turned now to the other, open-handed, and with the disarmed frailty of one's voice troubled with the voice of another" (p. 11).

This face-to-face interaction was what we hoped to provide to our students. We wanted them to begin to recognize their own imperative, and for many of our students, this was an imperative characterized by white, middle-class cultural norms. We also wanted our students to begin to recognize and develop respect for the imperative of the other in order to gain the awareness that we are all influenced by the cultural manifestations of our imperative. In a study conducted by Stachowski and Mahan (1998), the authors focused on the impact of cultural immersion experiences on preservice teachers who spent time on a Navajo reservation. One student reflecting on the experience wrote:

I had a chance to learn a lot about the Navajo world, and people here learned more about the Anglo ways. Whether we like certain aspects of one another's culture is irrelevant. Cultural immersion allows one to realize that people are the way they are for valid reasons, no judgment attached. (p. 157)

This quote exemplifies the respect that we are seeking to promote in our own students because we feel that it is this respect that is an important step in fostering a disposition that seeks to create change.

## **Methods**

### ***Participants and Pedagogical Context***

The participants of this study were 37 preservice teachers (two students chose not to participate in the study) enrolled in two sections of a social foundations of

education course taught by the first author in a small, public, Mid-Atlantic university. The foundations of education course is completed as the second course in the teacher education sequence. Most students complete the course during their first or second year of college. The teacher education program seeks to foster a disposition that is open and receptive to issues of diversity and social justice. In order to place an emphasis on these ideas, the program has chosen to weave these topics throughout every course in the program rather than creating one stand-alone course (Hollins & Guzman, 2005). Research by McGuire and Schiller (2003) demonstrated that this infusion approach can be successful in increasing students' awareness of multiculturalism. The foundations course explores many of the traditional topics covered in a social foundations course, such as the history and philosophy of education, but also spends a considerable amount of time exploring issues relating to diversity. Course content and readings are chosen with the intent to promote dialogue and exploration of issues relating to power, privilege, and oppression within American society.

In order to bring these issues alive for the students participating in the course, the department chose to implement a service-learning component as part of the course. All of the preservice teachers in the course are required to complete ten hours of tutoring at the local Job Corps Center. The service experience was initiated at the beginning of the semester when the academic manager from Job Corps came to campus to introduce the preservice teachers to Job Corps. As part of the orientation, several Job Corps students talked about their goals and aspirations for the partnership and how the preservice teachers could support these goals. The preservice teachers then attended an orientation at the Job Corps center with a tour led by Job Corps students. After the orientation, the preservice teachers were required to conduct at least five tutoring visits for a minimum of ten hours. Since most tutors and tutees had tutoring sessions of one to one and a half hours, most tutors made at least seven visits to the Job Corps Center in addition to the orientation at the beginning of the semester, providing a sustained experience over the course of the semester.

The students at the Job Corps Center, a federally funded program, range in age from 16-24. While there is a mixture of ethnicities and socioeconomic backgrounds represented at Job Corps, the majority of the students are students of color from regional urban areas who come from economically disadvantaged families. The population of students is consistently around 78% African-American males. Most Job Corps students have come voluntarily seeking out new opportunities while a small percentage are required to complete the program because of a court mandate. The Job Corps students are working to complete a high school diploma or the General Educational Development (GED) high school equivalency diploma. After completing their high school diploma or GED, the Job Corps students typically complete training for a trade.

When the Job Corps students first arrive at the center, they are given a test to determine their basic skill levels. According to the academic manager of the Job Corps Center, it is not unusual to see students testing at the 3rd or 4th grade level

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in reading and writing, and many of the students test at lower levels in mathematics. Some of the students have learning disabilities, sometimes diagnosed, sometimes not, while others have just been passed through the system without developing the needed knowledge base. An issue of particular frustration for the academic manager is when a student enters Job Corps with a high school diploma, yet still tests at low levels on the basic skills test. Even though these students can train for their trade, the academic manager pushes them to expand their knowledge base in the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics while they are completing their training.

In contrast, the preservice teachers who participated in this study were primarily White (reflecting the population of the university which is 91% White). Most of them came from rural or suburban areas in the region; only a few came from urban areas or have lived in urban areas in the past. Some of the preservice teachers identified themselves in written reflections as coming from lower socioeconomic status homes, and there were a few first generation college students in the group; however, most of the preservice teachers in this sample came from middle class backgrounds (only about 22% of the university population is eligible for federal PELL grants). The preservice teachers ranged in age from their late teens to their early thirties, but the majority were 18-19 years old. In this group of 37 students, there were 28 female students and nine male students. One section of the course was cross-listed with a graduate foundations course in the MAT program. Therefore, three of the students in the sample of 37 were graduate students. The two sections of the foundations course included a mixture of elementary, secondary, and K-12 preservice teachers.

#### **Data Collection and Analysis**

In order to pursue our research question, we designed an interpretive study since “interpretive research seeks to perceive, describe, analyze, and interpret features of a specific situation or context, preserving its complexity and communicating the perspectives of the actual participants” (Borko, Whitcomb, & Byrnes, 2008, p. 1025). We collected a variety of data to explore the impact that this service-learning experience had on the participants in the course. One of the primary sources of data that we utilized in the study was reflection papers. Throughout the semester, the students were asked to write brief reflection papers (one to two pages) on their experiences tutoring at Job Corps and the connections they were making to the topics we were studying in the course. For example, when examining school funding, the preservice teachers were required to talk with their Job Corps tutee about the resources available in the schools they attended prior to coming to Job Corps. Many of the Job Corps tutees described overcrowded, dilapidated schools with insufficient or dated classroom materials. At the end of the semester, the students were asked to write a comprehensive reflection (five pages) on the service-learning experience that synthesized what they experienced at Job Corps and what they felt they learned from the experience. We analyzed three sets of reflection papers written throughout the semester (111 papers), and we analyzed 37 final reflections.

In order to provide credibility for the study, we utilized methodological triangulation (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In addition to analyzing the reflection papers, we also administered a brief, anonymous questionnaire that allowed the students to provide feedback on the experience. This questionnaire included both open-ended and closed-ended response items (Creswell, 2002). The questionnaire asked students what they learned from the service-learning experience in general, whether the service-learning supported their understanding of what we were in studying in class, and whether the service-learning experience provided them with a better understanding of how to work with students from diverse backgrounds.

Using an open coding process, we coded the reflection papers and questionnaires line by line. We then identified major themes that emerged through the coding process. Our analysis was an iterative process of moving between close analysis of individual codes and broader categories and themes. We then grouped themes using a process of axial coding (Charmaz, 2006) which allowed us to identify three broad overarching categories or themes. To provide an example of the coding process, some of the codes that emerged during the initial coding process included: “first experience with diversity,” “experience of culture shock,” and “feeling uncomfortable in the Job Corps setting.” These codes were grouped into the category of “recognizing the self as other” which is a category within the overarching theme of “the self as other.”

After coding the reflection papers and responses from the questionnaire, we conducted interviews with six students seeking to confirm or disconfirm tentative themes that had emerged from these data. We interviewed five females and one male student with students represented from both sections of the course. We selected students based on their previous experiences with diversity as described in their final written reflections. We sought to include students with different levels of experience with diversity in their own schooling experience, ranging from extensive experience to no previous experience.

During the interviews, we used a semi-structured interview protocol (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). We had specific questions that we asked in each interview to support cross-interview analysis (Patton, 1990), but we also allowed the conversation to flow in whatever direction the interviewee chose, and we used probing questions to explore these meanderings more fully. The interview protocol included questions that asked participants to reflect on what they learned from the service-learning experience, to describe what they learned about working with diverse learners, to make connections between the experience and course content, and to compare the experience to other more traditional field experiences they had completed in the teacher education program. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and we used a similar coding process that was used for the reflection papers and questionnaires. In addition to confirming themes that had emerged through the analysis of the reflection papers and questionnaires, the interviews also added depth to these emerging themes. As a form of member checking, the findings were shared with

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course instructors teaching the other sections of the foundations course as well as the academic manager at Job Corps.

### **Findings**

This study sought to determine whether a service-learning experience could impact preservice teachers' perceptions of and receptiveness to diversity. All of the data collected provide evidence that this service-learning did have an impact on this group of preservice teachers to varying degrees. Students who began the course with an openness to diversity found that the experience further broadened their understanding of these topics and ideas. For students who were less open, the experience created some awareness that understanding and addressing diversity was important to their continued growth as future teachers.

The reflection papers that the students wrote at the end of the experience were overall very positive; the students expressed that they felt they had grown through the experience. The first author established early in the course that students' grades would not be penalized if they were critical of topics we were examining in the course; the essays were graded based on completeness not content. One of the reflections students wrote earlier in the semester required that they respond to the article by Peggy McIntosh (1990) titled "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." Students who were very critical of the essay were not penalized in their grade for the reflection, and the students recognized this. We maintained an open and critical dialogue throughout the course, and the first author encouraged students to express their own opinions regardless of what they thought the instructor's opinion might be. Data from the anonymous questionnaire also support the themes that emerged in the reflection papers. Only two respondents expressed negative feelings toward the experience and felt they did not learn from the experience.

The themes that emerged from the reflection papers and questionnaires and that were supported in greater depth through the interviews tie directly to the philosophical framework of Alphonso Lingis. The three broad themes that emerged are: seeing the self as other, recognizing the imperative of the other, and moving toward social justice. Though we explore these as three stages or levels, students did not necessarily experience these as a linear process. However, we present these stages in a linear way because we believe that each stage must at least be touched upon, whether or not it is realized in depth, as part of the process of moving to a greater level of awareness.

### ***The Self as Other***

During the first stage, which we titled "The Self as Other," the preservice teachers recognized themselves as the other and they began to examine their own imperatives.

*Recognizing the self as other.* Many of the students recognized themselves as

the other for the first time when they went out to Job Corps. On the questionnaire, 12 participants (32%) described this as their first or most extensive experience with diversity. One student wrote, "I think I came into contact with more diversity in my ten hours and twenty minutes at Job Corps than I have my entire life." This lack of experience with diversity was echoed by many students in the reflection paper and interviews. One student stated during the interview, "I'll be completely honest with you; in my school district we had no African-American students."

For many of the students, this was an eye-opening experience. Some of them used the term culture shock when describing their first visit to Job Corps. One student stated on the questionnaire, "It was a culture shock at first to go to Job Corps." Some of the students also commented on the fact that they were the minority for the first time. One student wrote:

Having the opportunity to tutor at Job Corps placed me in a situation I had never been in before. The tables were turned on me; instead of being the majority I was the minority and put in an unfamiliar environment.

The experience of being in an unfamiliar environment caused fear and nervousness for some of the students and many felt that they were pushed out of their comfort zones. As Wade (1993) has stated, students are often apprehensive when initiating a service-learning experience with those who are different than themselves. One student stated in the interview, "It was far out of my comfort zone, and from what I've listened to from other people, a lot of other people's comfort zone." In a study by Gaine (2001), the students in Gaine's course expressed that in order to change attitudes about race, people needed to be made to feel uncomfortable. As one of our students pointed out, "It makes you uncomfortable, and when you're uncomfortable you're more likely to adapt."

*Recognition of own imperative.* Pushing students out of their comfort zone and allowing them to see themselves as the other helped them to begin to recognize their own imperative. For many of them, this imperative was one of white, middle-class norms. One student stated in the interview:

I was at first a little bit nervous about it because I knew that I wasn't used to that demographic, being primarily African-American students from the inner city. And so I was concerned about how they would respond to me being a very White boy from the country.

We tried to support our students' awareness of their own imperative through the use of course content which required them to examine what it means to be White and the corresponding benefits of Whiteness.

In the early stages of the service-learning experience, the students were asked to read Peggy McIntosh's (1990) essay, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack." The first author asked the students to write a reflection paper responding to the essay, and they were also asked to write three discussion questions. We used

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these discussion questions as the basis for a class discussion, and in both classes the debate was contentious. Some students agreed with the ideas, some students expressed confusion about what to think, ten students (27%) expressed that they believe that race is no longer an issue today, particularly if you work hard, five students (14%) felt that talking about these issues makes it worse, and two students expressed anger about the ideas introduced in the article. Solomon, Portelli, Daniel, and Campbell (2005) described similar responses to using the McIntosh article in a foundations class.

These responses to the McIntosh essay point to the challenges teacher educators can face in moving White preservice teachers toward a more comprehensive understanding of race that is inclusive of the recognition of Whiteness and the attendant privileges of being White. The preservice teachers in this group who stated that race is no longer an issue if you work hard are working from the confines of the myth of meritocracy rather than recognizing the role of social reproduction in advantaging White youth (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990). Teachers who fully ascribe to this belief are not likely to modify their curriculum and instruction to respond to individual students' needs and interests. Likewise, preservice teachers who think that talking about race creates more problems are working from a color-blind perspective that does not allow for student difference and makes students of color invisible. Bonilla-Silva (2006) reframed the notion of color-blindness as color-blind racism. Bonilla-Silva's reframing puts pressure on White, preservice teachers to recognize inaction based on the refusal to acknowledge difference as a form of racism that reinforces the status quo.

Though this examination of White privilege may have planted some seeds of awareness in the students' minds, the examination of Whiteness is an intellectual process and one cannot gain an understanding of one's own imperative through intellectual means only; one must experience the other. For some students, the service-learning experience did enhance their understanding of their own imperative. One student wrote, "The students I worked with exposed me to many hidden white privileges that I was not aware of." Another student, who had expressed anger about the McIntosh essay earlier in the semester, at the end of the semester wrote, "I learned how important it is to continue to encourage an understanding of diversity in education."

#### ***The Imperative of the Other***

The second stage, which we titled "The Imperative of the Other," includes two aspects: (1) recognition and respect for the other's imperative, and (2) recognition of a common humanity.

*Recognition and respect for the other's imperative.* Responses to the questionnaire provided evidence that the service-learning experience fostered a recognition and respect for the imperative of the other. On the questionnaire, 25 participants

(68%) made statements that demonstrated that they viewed the service experience as reciprocal. In other words, they recognized that they gained something from the experience. One of the questions on the questionnaire asked: In general, what do you think you learned from this service-learning experience? When coding these responses, we found that 22 respondents (59%) mentioned topics directly relating to diversity. Another question asked: Do you believe your experience at Job Corps provided you with a better understanding of how to work with students from diverse backgrounds? The responses demonstrated that 81% of the participants (30 respondents) felt that they have a better understanding of how to work with students from diverse backgrounds. Two of the students that responded “no” to this question expressed that they had previous experience with diversity.

This move toward recognition and respect for the other began with the realization of difference. On the questionnaire, 26 respondents (70%) wrote comments that were coded as recognizing difference. Many of the students pointed out these differences while acknowledging that difference is not negative. One student wrote, “The total experience in the classroom and with Job Corps has really opened my eyes up to how different we really all are.” Acceptance of this difference is an important step toward respecting the imperative of the other. One student stated in the interview, “I just think of not so much the fact that we’re different but the fact that we realize and accept we’re different.” This realization of difference is one facet of seeing the other’s imperative. The service-learning experience allowed the students to come face-to-face with the imperative of another. One student stated in an interview, “The service-learning forced you to not just go and look at the world through a glass mirror, but to actually go in.”

The descriptions the preservice teachers provided in their reflection papers of working with Job Corps students demonstrated that some of the preservice teachers were able to see the imperative of the other. One preservice teacher wrote, “During my time tutoring the students at Job Corps, I came to know these students as individuals.” This process of seeing the other allowed another student to recognize some of the challenges the Job Corps students were facing. This student wrote, “All of the students I encountered had one trait in common: fear of vulnerability.” Through seeing the other this student was able to recognize her tutees’ vulnerability.

The written reflections also demonstrated a respect for the imperative of the other. One student wrote, “While I hope that the Job Corps students I tutored learned from me, I also learned a great deal from them.” One student described an important experience with his tutee. He wrote:

One of my students never seemed to have had a teacher or tutor allow her to write about what interested her or something she could relate to. As soon as I allowed her to pick the topic and we began working, she switched from guarded hostility to open interest in how I would help her write about her favorite movie.

This anecdote demonstrates that some students learned that their willingness to

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accept and relate in a personal way to their tutee allowed them to make a connection that supported their tutee's learning.

The process of beginning to see and respect the imperative of the other required many of the preservice teachers to rethink stereotypes that they held. On the questionnaire, 14 respondents (38%) made statements that were coded as rethinking stereotypes. One respondent wrote, "I was exposed to a very diverse group of students at Job Corps, and each student I worked with helped break the stereotypes I had previously held." This recognition of stereotypes also helped some preservice teachers to realize that though students may come from similar backgrounds, they are not all the same. One student wrote:

It would be easy for one to assume that students at Job Corps are all gathered from a similar group of people. This is most certainly not the case, and the backgrounds of hundreds of high school students are likely to be even more diverse.

This realization is an important step in recognizing the particularity of each person's imperative.

*Realization of common humanity.* An aspect of recognizing the imperative of the other is understanding that though we are different, we have a common humanity. This recognition of a common humanity stems from the realization that we are all working from an imperative. We all have an imperative that drives our need to survive and to connect with other human beings. Since every imperative has a cultural context, there will be some similarities across imperatives that will be recognizable just as there are similarities across cultures. Many of the preservice teachers pointed out these common elements. One student stated in the questionnaire, "Those students, Black and White, are the same as me." Another student wrote, "I realized quickly that they simply wanted the same things I did."

Though this recognition of a common humanity is a step for some students in moving beyond stereotypes, there is the concern that for some of them this realization might reinforce the tendency toward a color-blind approach. This issue did seem to be the case for one of the students we interviewed. He stated in the interview, "So when you're there and you're working with the kids, the colors just disappear and it's individuals." As Irvine (2003) has pointed out, some teachers view the color-blind approach as a way to be fair and non-biased. However, this approach does not get at issues of inequality in our society because it "ignores the realities of racism in this country" (Irvine, 2003, p. xvi).

### ***The Move toward Social Justice***

In the final stage, the students began the move toward social justice. This involved a recognition of injustice, an acknowledgement of transformation or change in self, and the realization of the need to create change.

*Recognition of injustice.* Many of the students expressed surprise and anger

at what their Job Corps tutees had experienced with teachers and schools before coming to Job Corps. The preservice teachers realized that many of the Job Corps tutees had been short-changed by the system. On the questionnaire, 26 participants (70%) included responses that were coded as demonstrating an increased awareness of educational inequalities. This realization of injustice related to multiple factors. Some students specifically wrote about issues of race. One student wrote, "All three of my students attended a predominantly Black school, which made me question how far we have moved since *Brown vs. the Board of Education*." Another student stated, "This experience has made me realize that there is still racism in this country. Not every person is treated equally." Many students also pointed to economic inequalities. One student wrote, "In my time there I worked with a total of eight different students. Out of these students there was not one who had been in a quality school system with affluent surroundings." According to Ayers, Quinn, and Stovall (2009), the notion of equity is an important pillar of social justice education. Fostering an awareness of issues of equity is an integral step in advancing a social justice perspective.

Another topic of concern was the attitudes of past teachers who did not seem to care about their students and made them question their abilities. One preservice teacher shared a particularly disturbing story about her tutee. She wrote:

One student told me that she quit going to class [at her previous school] because the teachers only cared about the White kids. When I asked what she meant she said the teacher would answer the White kids' questions but make the Black kids keep asking the question until she liked the way they said it.

This anecdote is an example of a teacher forcing his/her imperative on a student and demonstrates the lack of power that students may feel in these situations.

Considering the obstacles that many of the Job Corps students have had to deal with, there is the concern that the preservice teachers may begin to view the Job Corps students as victims. However, many of the preservice teachers recognized that the Job Corps students were seeking to make a change in their lives, and they respected this determination. One student wrote, "I was surprised to see how nearly each tutee desired to improve his or her life with a solid education." Many of the preservice teachers described working with tutees who had goals for a career or who were seeking to find a better way to support their family. On the questionnaire, 12 respondents (32%) made comments that were coded as demonstrating their awareness of the capability of the Job Corps students. One participant wrote, "I learned that the students at Job Corps are just as capable and determined to succeed as I am."

*Acknowledgment of transformation or change in self.* Many of the students conveyed in their reflection papers and in the interviews that the service-learning experience had been transformative for them; they recognized a change in themselves. One student wrote, "It has been eye opening, educational, and life changing to tutor at Job Corps." Truly experiencing the other is often a transformative experience. This recognition of change was expressed in many ways, including:

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changes in knowledge, changes in outlook, and changes in perception. In relation to knowledge, the questionnaire asked—Do you feel this service-learning experience supported your understanding of the ideas and issues we were studying in class? 36 respondents (97%) replied yes to this question. When asked to specify in what ways, 15 participants (41%) gave responses specific to diversity.

Some students focused on their changed perceptions of schools. One student wrote, “Before going to Job Corps, I had a particular view of education and teachers that has been radically altered after this experience.” Another student wrote, “The experience has had a profound impact on my understanding of the world of education.” Students also described how the experience impacted their understanding of diversity. One student wrote, “In the time spent there I have learned more about educational diversity and the need for it than I could have ever hoped to learn in a classroom.” Overall most of the students described the experience as having an impact on their knowledge and understanding of diversity.

*Need to create change.* The students’ recognition of injustice and realization of their change in thinking also led many of them to acknowledge that they wanted or needed to create change. On the questionnaire, 22 respondents (59%) made comments that demonstrated that they understood the external factors that impact achievement and that need to be changed. For some of them, this was change within their own classrooms. One student wrote, “As a teacher I now know more than ever that I have to be sensitive and considerate of one’s background and change my style to accommodate it.” Another student said, “It is up to individual teachers to find a creative way to learn more about their students and then present their subject in a way that the student can understand.” This inclination toward change is important since change begins with each teacher, and as Irvine (2003) has pointed out, “there is growing recognition among the educational research and policy communities that one of the key variables related to the school achievement of culturally diverse students is the teacher” (p. 72).

Some students focused not only on the need for change within their own classrooms, but also recognized the need for change on a larger scale. On the questionnaire, four respondents (11%) made statements that were coded as desiring to challenge the status quo. In the reflection papers, some students wrote that they see themselves as future advocates for their students. One student wrote, “It has changed my perspective on how I view students. I want to be their advocate so no more students fall through the cracks.” Another student stated, “I will not be shy when I know that I must act on behalf of the good of my students.” One student saw her role as an advocate as extending beyond schools and children and into the broader society. This student wrote:

As an oppressor in a system I helped to create, albeit unconsciously, I will now have heightened awareness and use my inherited empowerment to help stand against social injustices that plague my immediate world and beyond.

This quote exemplifies the goal we were seeking to reach with our students: a commitment toward seeking change for social justice. According to Ayers, Quinn, and Stovall (2009) the move toward activism is another pillar of social justice education. If preservice teachers commit to activism in support of their students and communities, they have the potential to foster an activist orientation in their own students. This is important as activism is a “move away from passivity, cynicism and despair” (p. xiv).

#### ***Putting Pressure on Assumptions***

As we developed our findings, we sought to be aware of areas where the service-learning experience may have fallen short of our goals or instances when the experience may have been miseducative. One area of particular concern is that the experience seemed to foster deficit perspectives of the Job Corps students for some of the preservice teachers. On the questionnaire, 14 respondents (38%) made statements that were coded as reflecting a deficit perspective. One wrote, “I had no idea how far behind the kids were.” This outcome is reflected in research conducted by Tilley-Lubbs (2009) who found that a service-learning experience unintentionally created deficit perspectives of the community.

The service-learning program has provided benefits for the Job Corps students. The academic manager at Job Corps reports that since the start of the service-learning collaboration, the test scores on the basic skills test have improved every semester. In addition, the pass rates for the GED and high school diploma program have improved. However, we have concerns that if our preservice teachers are working from a deficit perspective that they might not push the Job Corps students to achieve at high levels. We have concerns that a deficit perspective might lead to low expectations. In order to counteract this perspective, we have made a concerted effort to infuse the tenets of critical pedagogy into the social foundations course (Stenhouse & Jarrett, 2012). We now start off the semester asking students to read an essay by Herbert Kohl (2007) titled “I Won’t Learn from You!” In the essay, Kohl describes the choice that some students make not to learn. The article prompts discussion about the choice to not learn as an act of resistance when schools make no attempt to be responsive to the culture of the students in the school. Another change we have made in the course is to teach explicitly about what it means to work from an assets-based approach. We examine how schools might approach cultural difference and examine the implications when schools work from a cultural deficit approach (Erickson, 1987). We have also worked to select readings and frame class discussions around student capabilities rather than student deficits. Moving forward, we will continue to endeavor to emphasize an assets-based approach as part of the service-learning experience.

Another issue that came up in several papers that concerned us relates to deficit perspectives of the parents of the Job Corps students. Some of the students made the assumption that the Job Corps students had parents who did not care about

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them. Only one student conveyed that she was actually told by her tutee that he had uncaring parents. The rest of them just assumed that this was a part of the reason why the Job Corps students ended up in the situation they were in. We realized that we need to counteract this assumption directly through our course materials and subsequently added course readings that provide different views into parent involvement (Finn, 1998).

A final concern was that we found no evidence in the data that the preservice teachers recognized that multicultural education is as important for White students as it is for students of color. They did not seem to make the connection that since many of them came from predominantly White schools that it is important that teachers begin to think about how they can support students in predominately White schools in becoming more aware. They did not seem to realize that if White teachers teaching in White schools do not infuse diversity in the curriculum that they are just perpetuating the cycle of non-awareness that they themselves experienced. We have subsequently focused on making explicit connections in the course to the value of multicultural education for all students.

### **Implications**

Our primary goal for including a service-learning experience in the social foundations course is to support the development of a social justice perspective. We would like all of our preservice teachers to recognize their role as potential change agents in their future classrooms and in society as a whole. As Ayers, Quinn, and Stovall (2009) have pointed out, “education for social justice is the root of teaching and schooling in a democratic society, the rock upon which we build democracy” (p. xiv). This study demonstrates that utilizing a multicultural service-learning experience along with course content can broaden preservice teachers’ perceptions of diversity. This service-learning experience forced students out of their comfort zone and allowed them to experience themselves and to experience the other. Through contact with the other, the preservice teachers began to realize the need to affect change.

The need to affect change is incredibly important given the current crossroads we are at in education. As a country, we have to decide whether to continue with a focus on accountability and sanctions or to truly embrace the notion of equal educational opportunity. Our goal is to impact future teachers who will become activists for true equity for all students. We think that including a service-learning component in the social foundations course is a step in this direction. The data demonstrate that this experience impacted the preservice teachers in positive ways. However, the question now is whether or not this service-learning experience will lead these future teachers to make meaningful changes in their future teaching practice. We question whether these future teachers will be able to resist “the pull of schooling-as-usual” (Michie, 2009, p. 705). This is an important question that warrants further study. We are working to develop a longitudinal study to follow

the students as they continue through the program and into teaching to see what lasting impact the experience in the foundations course might have. As Hollins and Guzman (2005) have pointed out, this type of research is greatly needed in the field of teacher education.

Many teacher educators who are using service-learning in their courses recognize the multiple benefits that these experiences have for their students. Multicultural service-learning experiences have the potential to impact students beyond what is possible through course content alone. It is important that we expand the body of research to demonstrate to others the transformations that we see in our students. It is also important that teacher education programs begin to think about how they can provide multiple opportunities for transformative experiences. These experiences can lead to greater awareness with the long-term goal of changes in classroom practice, and changes in classroom practice can lead to broader change. As stated by Ayers, Quinn, and Stovall (2009), “We change our lives, we change the world” (p. xiv).

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