WHAT TEACHER CANDIDATES LEARNED ABOUT DIVERSITY, SOCIAL JUSTICE, AND THEMSELVES FROM SERVICE-LEARNING EXPERIENCES

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This article examines how service-learning provides undergraduate teacher candidates opportunities to cultivate deeper understandings of diversity, social justice, and themselves. Participants were from a mid-Atlantic university and a rural southeastern university. Although from different regions, the teacher candidates shared predominantly White, middle-class backgrounds. Three themes framed the discussion—preconceived notions about teaching in diverse settings, how preconceived notions were overcome (or reinforced), and "learning about myself as a teacher." Findings suggest that service-learning, emphasizing multiculturalism and social justice, has the potential for empowering prospective teachers to confront injustices and to begin deconstructing lifelong attitudes and constructing socially just practices.

Keywords: literacy; physical education; qualitative research; service-learning; social justice; teacher candidates

Shifting demographics in schools toward greater ethnic and linguistic diversity require teacher education programs to teach future teachers how to be effective with all learners. The inclusion in the curricula of multicultural theory through service-learning foregrounds diversity and emancipatory pedagogy (Banks, 1997; Gay, 1995; Swartz, 1998). It serves as a vehicle through which to examine in depth personal bias and racism and to better understand the meaning of diversity. The added dimension of social justice requires prospective teachers to critically analyze the perceived realities of social and environmental injustices that affect teaching, learning, and curriculum (Guyton, 2000; Nieto, 2000; Wade, 2000).

Issues of social justice and multicultural education are not limited to the social studies. Embedded in all content areas is the "hidden curriculum," characterized by tacit understandings and implicit beliefs that underlie the explicit subject matter (Ginsberg & Clift, 1990;

McLaren, 1989). It is through this unspoken influence that curriculum today, just as throughout history, has the authority to define cultural perspectives (Mangan, 1993). Learners are taught to be "good citizens," and historically good citizenship consists of accepting authority rather than questioning existing practices. Teachers model such good citizenship through their own conformity to the published curriculum and, by proxy, the hidden curriculum. For example, modern physical education curricula, even "good" ones, still focus on games, sports, and activities with Euro-American origins (Hastie, Martin, & Buchanan, 2006). In doing so, the movement domain in education has a persistent history of representing the dominant group, thus further subordinating already marginalized groups. It is not unusual for physical education teacher candidates (TCs), however unintentionally, to perpetuate that hegemony through continued focus on traditional games and activities that lie within their comfort zones.

Likewise, TCs in literacy courses experience similar issues when selecting literature to share with children. Often their selections represent the dominant culture and are not likely to be meaningful to children in multicultural settings. TCs assume that their own educational and life experiences are similar to or identical to those of their students. Such an assumption may lead them to select irrelevant content and to teach in ways that do not resonate with the lives of the children they teach (Stringer, 2004). With the increasing diversity in the nation's classrooms and the continuing majority of White, monolingual, middle-class, and female TCs, teacher preparation programs are challenged with building bridges across a critical gap in the understanding of diverse socioeconomic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds and the inequities existing for people different from the mainstream culture. These sociocultural developments require the infusion of multicultural education with a social justice orientation into teacher education curriculum as theory, as practice, and as social action (Banks, 1997; Gay, 1997; Guyton, 2000; Nieto, 2000). TCs' depth of knowledge about social, political, and economic conditions in the world provides the foundation for examining existing inequities and

oppressive practices, in a local and global sense. Critical reflection and dialogue encourages self-interrogation and questioning of institutional practices that continue to suppress human potential (Hackman, 2005; Oakes & Lipton, 2003; Sleeter, 2001).

The current study explored how service-learning programs, situated in diverse community settings, can provide undergraduate TCs opportunities to cultivate deeper understandings of culturally diverse learners and the challenges that face them. We examined service-learning programs in two different settings: an urban oral-history partnership and a rural motor-skills program. The questions that guided this study are

How does a service-learning experience affect TCs' desire and/or dispositions toward teaching in diverse settings?[1]

How does a service-learning experience promote learning about diversity?

How does a service-learning experience promote questioning of societal inequities among undergraduate TCs?

SERVICE-LEARNING

There is considerable agreement in the academic community that service-learning is a multi-tiered pedagogy that can be implemented at any level of education, preschool through graduate school. Wade (2000) recommended that in teacher education programs (a) field experiences and goals be collaboratively developed to minimize the asymmetry between the "server" and the "served," (b) types of community experiences be varied to provide multiple perspectives on societal issues, and (c) critical reflective papers and discussions be planned so that TCs confront preconceived biases and/or beliefs. In addition, for a program truly to be service-learning, it should involve the following aspects:

- Service-learning in teacher preparation programs involves the achievement of curricular goals through authentic community or school-based experiences. The experience must relate directly to the subject matter of the course in which the TCs (or other students) are enrolled. They learn the course content (e.g., children's motor development) as they engage in the service-learning experiences. Many have investigated service-learning outcomes in terms of student achievement, as

well as the social components of civic engagement and personal growth (Roldan, Strage, & David, 2004).

- Central to service-learning is the notion of reciprocal impact; that is, outcomes achieved are also beneficial to the community and/or school partners. Service-learning as a collaborative process promotes mutual respect and benefits for TCs and community partners (Jacoby & Associates, 2003).
- For service-learning programs to be effective, the issues addressed in the experience must be meaningful and of consequence. Harkavy (2004) emphasized the importance of targeting global problems occurring at local levels:

Relationships of trust, so essential for effective partnerships and effective learning, are also built through day-to-day work on problems and issues of mutual concern . . . the local community is a real-world site in which community members and academics can pragmatically determine whether the work is making a real difference and whether *both* the neighborhood and the institution are better as a result of common efforts. (p. 16)

- Related to the issue of trust is that the vitality and sustainability of service-learning projects are dependent on the commitment of the university and the community and/or school partner (Harkavy, 2004). Lack of commitment from either front will most certainly commit the program to failure.
- Service-learning includes the vital component of reflection, which engages TCs in knowledge construction and reconstruction as they analyze their own previous understandings of teaching and learning and preconceived notions about people from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 1998; Buchanan, Baldwin, & Rudisill, 2002; Sleeter, 2000). Experiences in diverse settings enable TCs to gain insight from children, providing the beginning of a "coming to understanding" of children who happen to live in seemingly different worlds. Through reflection, TCs begin to move from accepting the school and/or society status quo to questioning it. Ultimately such questioning can lead to altered understandings and perhaps even subsequent action. Thus, service-learning has the potential for being the catalyst for transforming thinking.
- Likewise, service-learning involves having, or being willing to attain, an in-depth historical understanding of the people and the context of the site (Hecht, 2003). Having this understanding enables TCs to acknowledge and even celebrate the culture of the local community. Therefore, a critical component for preparing teachers for today's classrooms is to situate them in diverse communities where they interact with its members and reflect on those experiences. Service-learning, with its focus on collaborative community service and learning and emphasis on critical reflection, can provide TCs with experiences outside their own comfort zone.
- Service-learning allows TCs to engage the children in collaborative decision making about meaningful activities and tasks (Billig & Welch, 2004). Through service-learning, TCs begin to identify and acknowledge children as contributing community members. They come to recognize the significance of children's "real worlds" to school curriculum, and children's communities as educational resources (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzales, 1992).
- Potentially, such consciousness raising through engagement in community settings introduces prospective teachers to the concept of *teaching for social justice*. They and their students together can examine conditions and forces that work against children's efforts toward achieving their full potential in school and life and can take action to remove those obstacles (Ayers, 1995; Guyton, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000).

Clinical practica are important educational practices that are similar to service-learning in that they often are in diverse settings, and they are intended to meet curricular goals. However, they are not the same. Clinical practica serve the purpose of socializing TCs into the school setting. TCs are placed in classrooms where they have little or no opportunity to experience the community in which the school resides (Guadarrama, 2000). In their classrooms, they follow the lead of the host teacher and abide by the preestablished rules, routines, and curriculum into which neither they nor the children have input (Buchanan, Baldwin, & Rudisill, 2002). In such environments, TCs may be more willing to accept the behaviors and practices they observe rather than to question the status quo. In contrast, community-based service-learning involves negotiated decisions between community partners (teachers and children) and TCs. Thus, service-learning in community-based placements has greater potential for diffusing TCs' previously held deficit perspectives (Sleeter, 2000). Furthermore, service-learning benefits the community partners and the university, whereas clinical practica tend to benefit primarily the university student. Although TCs may glean some other outcomes similar to those of service-learning, such experiences and outcomes are not a part of most clinical practica.

Service-learning has the potential for developing TCs' abilities to question their own assumptions, societal inequities, and existing curriculum. Engaging TCs actively in service-learning with communities different from their own provides practical and personal experiences through which they begin to grasp the concept of *culturally responsive teaching* (Ladson-Billings, 1994). They develop rudimentary understandings of the significance and importance of forming relationships with the children, families, and the community (Wade, 2000). Thus, they identify and realize the strengths and the contributions of the family and community (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 1998; Buchanan et al., 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Moll et al., 1992) and the importance of capitalizing on those attributes. At the same time, TCs begin to recognize the challenges faced by families and their communities. In service-learning, TCs benefit by increasing their understandings of what it means to be a teacher, whereas members of the community benefit by being teachers and learners in this collaborative effort (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Buchanan et al., 2002, Wade, 2000).

Professors of the courses in the current study thoughtfully and deliberately placed TCs in diverse settings not only to provide experience with diversity but also to nurture introspection of personal bias. Classroom discussions and oral reflections provided opportunities for TCs, professors, and peers to address the difficult questions that arose from their experiences. These aspects and those discussed above bring into distinct relief some of the many differences between service-learning and traditional clinical practica.

METHOD

The methodology for this study draws from Lincoln and Guba (1985) and uses the interpretive process outlined by Denzin (1989). This approach focuses on the lived experience of the participants to explore different definitions of problematic events. Such understanding goes beyond mere cognition and rationality. It includes emotional meanings evoked through epiphany, joy, calamity, and shared experience (Denzin, 1989).

In the current study, undergraduate TCs engaged in service-learning in settings vastly different from their own experiences. The cohorts of undergraduate TCs were located in two different programs and places: a content literacy course with a tutoring and/or mentoring service-learning component in an urban mid-Atlantic city, and a children's motor-skill acquisition service-learning program in a rural southeastern community.

Participants

Participants included 41 undergraduate TCs. In the content literacy course there were 19 women and 1 man. Of the women, 1 was African American and 1 was Latina. All were elementary education majors in their junior year. The motor-skill acquisition course comprised 11 men and 10 women, 1 of whom was African American. They were all K-12 physical education majors in their junior or senior year. All participants gave informed consent for their data to be used after the courses were completed. Although the two university programs were very different, the TCs from the two schools shared a predominantly White, middle-class background. Participants' prior experiences in diverse educational settings were limited to one course or none at all.

Data Sources and Collection

Data were captured in interviews and reflective papers. Participants in both programs completed six written formative reflections. In addition, TCs in the content literacy course completed an extensive summative reflection, whereas 10 participants in the motor-skills program agreed to participate in in-depth interviews after the course ended. For the interviews, Spradley's (1979) ethnographic process provided a means of capturing the voices of the participants. Interviews and the reflective papers focused on the participants' expectations and perceptions of the service-learning lab and of

their conversations and interactions with the children in the setting. The two in-depth interviews, each lasting 30 to 75 minutes, were unstructured (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in that questions were designed to elicit each participant's idiosyncratic account of the experience. The interviewer was not seeking normative responses but rather facilitated the TCs' reconstructions of the service-learning experience through deliberately open-ended, descriptive questions. Interviews were conducted and transcribed by a doctoral student who was not involved in the teaching of the courses. Following are some actual interview questions:

- Tell me about a typical day in the service-learning lab.
- What do you hope to get out of this experience?
- What were your expectations before going to the service-learning site?
- What do you hope the children get out of this experience?
- Before you went out there for the first time did you feel like you were ready to teach these kids?
- What were some key experiences you came away with from this lab?

Following are two actual follow-up questions:

- You just mentioned the ethnic and cultural diversity of the setting. How do you think that is specifically going to help you in today's school environment?
- Coming from a background such as you just described, what are you thinking when you find yourself at the site?

Professors' persistent presence in the classroom and field settings provided additional evidence to corroborate the interview and reflection data. Professors were always present in their respective labs sites (6 for Partners in Learning [PAL] and 12 for motor skills) and classrooms.

Each of the TCs in the content literacy course assembled a portfolio as a final product of the experience. The portfolio included the original lesson plans and in-depth reflections for each of the six sessions with the students, a final reflection paper—responses to specific questions posed by the professor—and a collection of the artifacts from the project. All TCs agreed to participate in the current study.

Every 2 weeks, TCs in the motor-skills program completed in-depth reflections on their prior two teaching sessions. The TCs alternated weeks, so that one half of the groups completed reflections and led discussions 1 week, and the other one half of the class the next week. Each teaching group completed a total of six reflections and led class discussions about their experiences. All of them consented to the use of their written reflections for the research. In addition, 10 of the TCs consented to two in-depth interviews, which lasted from 30 minutes to 1 hour 15 minutes.

Data Analysis

Our data analysis process followed the teachings of Lincoln and Guba (1985) and Denzin (1989). We examined "the lived experiences that relate to and define the phenomenon under inspection" (Denzin, 1989, p. 60). The central data sources for the current study were TCs' written reflections (formative and summative) and in-depth interviews. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Data were collated from site visit reflections and final reflections. Professors' observations were used to corroborate the data from interviews and reflections. The qualitative data analysis followed a sequence of reading, interpreting, rereading, noting patterns, categorizing, and identifying themes. We used a repetitive inductive process described by Lincoln and Guba (1985) through which data were coded into descriptive units of shared meaning. We identified key points and repeated elements through repeated readings of the data. We noted what we recognized as phrases and/or sentences having significance that we identified as units of meaning and coded them with the program, data source, and initial of the assigned pseudonym. For example, this unit of meaning "I was teaching her and at the same time learning from her" was coded *PAL (program)-FRP (data source-Final Reflection Paper)-L (pseudonym assigned-Lacey).* Another example, "Have to put yourself in their shoes . . . see how they feel" was coded *MSP-I (Interview)—C (Caitlin).*

Through interpretive analysis (Denzin, 1989), these points were categorized as to the shared meaning they generated. These categories were then scrutinized and when appropriate were collapsed under other categories. Continuing with the two examples used above, we determined that TCs were recognizing that they were learners and the students were their teachers, thus, creating two categories: teachers as learners and students as teachers. Eventually, we collapsed these two categories under the heading of "All are teachers and learners." Further analysis led to the additional categories—curriculum relevance, role models, along with all are teachers and learners, from which the theme "Learning About Myself as a Teacher" emerged. The final themes—preconceived notions about teaching in diverse settings, how preconceived notions were overcome (or reinforced), and "learning about myself as a teacher"—provide the framework for the discussion.

Service-Learning Program Descriptions

Characteristic of service-learning, the two programs described here were initiated by the schools and accommodated by the universities. Through mutual collaboration and negotiation among the participants in the two programs, the TCs were able to provide service to the communities while simultaneously accomplishing course goals and assessing their learning from their experiences through critical reflection. All of the names of participants and schools are fictional.

Partners in Learning (PAL). PAL is a tutoring and/or mentoring service-learning requirement for the undergraduate content literacy course. Historically, the professor (one of the authors) for this course, in collaboration with the coordinator of the campus Service-learning and Community Programs Office, has worked with community agencies' after-school program and schools that have requested assistance to arrange service-learning experiences for TCs. In the current study, a cohort of 20 TCs enrolled in a 4-week summer session at a mid-Atlantic private university, partnered with 30 culturally (African American, Haitian, and Hispanic) and economically diverse fourth- and sixth-grade children in an urban area (Aston Point) that had experienced severe economic setbacks. The university class met three mornings a week for 3 hours and 15 minutes. The meetings with the students at the school were imbedded in the allotted class time. The TCs met with their assigned PALs at the school six times for 75-minute visits. The fourth- and sixth-grade teachers of the children, the university professor, and the principal of the school were present during each of the six meetings.

The TCs engaged their fourth- and sixth-grade partners in an oral-history project about their community: "Aston Point, Then and Now." The children had been learning about different aspects of their community, so the oral-history project added another dimension to the school's curriculum. For each session, the TCs prepared lesson plans that included community building and activities related to the oral-history project, incorporating literacy strategies and/or activities that reflected course content. The TCs and the professor held debriefing meetings after each session at the site. Afterward, the TCs captured the essence of the session in an elaborated reflection. Class time was allotted for small group planning for each PAL meeting and continued discussion of the TCs' experiences.

For the first meeting, the TCs engaged their PALs in community-building activities. Following getting acquainted time, they introduced the oral-history project by using the K-W-AP-L, an instructional strategy to find out what the children already Knew about their community, what they Wanted to know, how were they going to find answers to what they wanted to know (Action Plan), and finally, what they Learned. For the final product the student partners became contributing authors and illustrators of *Aston Point, Then and Now*. This bound collection of their art and writing was added to their school library.

In the remaining sessions, the student partners researched to find answers to their questions about Aston Point and prepared for the interviews with the community members. They researched Web sites that provided information about the community's past, present,

and projected future. Numerous sites displayed photos of Aston Point "then," the shore resort that it once was. They read different written accounts of Aston Point's economic decline and other problems that led to what Aston Point is today, their community as they know it. They caught a glimpse of the future through the Web site of an architectural firm involved in the redevelopment. In addition, TCs collected numerous local newspaper articles and excerpts from books to read with their PALs.

In preparation for the interviews, the children developed questions that they would ask their interviewees—two police officers, a school neighbor, a local businessman, a minister, and a teacher. These community members had been invited by the principal of the school who was a lifetime resident of Aston Point. For the interviews, the groups were divided evenly among the interviewees. Five groups met their interviewees at the school. The sixth group conducted its interview at the clothing store of the local businessman. The students conducted the interviews, while the TCs audiotaped them and took notes.

On the last day of the PAL program, the students filled in the "L" column of what they had learned and then organized and displayed their learning in a visual map. Students invited family and community members to a celebration of their accomplishments during which they shared their anthology and other visual representations of their learning. All of the PALs received a copy of the anthology.

The Motor-Skills Program. The Motor-Skills Program is a service-learning program offered through required physical education and/or teacher education courses in a land grant doctoral-research university in the southeastern United States. The university professor (one of the authors) was contacted by the principal of a local rural Title I school (Jemison Elementary) in an underserved area and asked to conduct an after-school program. The professor changed the class meeting time to meet the request, and as a result, one afternoon per week for 12 weeks 21 TCs worked with 50 African American children in Grades K through

6. Instructional sessions lasted approximately 1 hour. TCs began by interviewing the children at Jemison to determine their specific interests, and with them decided on two or three motor skills (e.g., dance, football, stepping) for their focus. The children then were loosely divided by grade and activity interest. Children in K to Grades 1 and 2, Grades 3 and 4, and Grades 5 and 6 were grouped together, and each pair of TCs worked with a group of three to six children. TCs, working as partners, continued collaborating with the children to determine what activities they would be learning in the motor-skills program. Based on this input, every other week TCs turned in lesson plans covering the next two sessions. With assistance from graduate students from an assessment class, the TCs informally assessed the children's skills in the chosen activity and formulated their next teaching sessions based on the results. As part of the course objectives, TCs identified issues encountered in their teaching that they perceived to influence children's learning, researched the factor in the literature, and developed lesson plans to address it. TCs returned to the classroom weekly for reflection, presentations, and discussion.

The purpose of the current study was to describe and interpret the experiences of undergraduate TCs engaging in service-learning programs in culturally diverse settings. Specifically, the current study examined participants' perceptions and interpretations related to teaching in diverse settings, and awareness and questioning of social inequities.

RESULTS

The results of the current study revealed that service-learning can have an impact on TCs' dispositions toward teaching in diverse settings. The TCs live in communities very different from those of the children. For most of them, it was their first experience in a setting where they were the minority and working with children of diverse backgrounds. It caused TCs to examine the limited expectations they had for the children, their families, and their communities. Emergent themes are detailed below.

Preconceived Notions About Teaching in Diverse Settings

For the undergraduate TCs, service-learning promoted learning about diversity and emancipatory approaches to teaching. Initially, their preconceived notions caused apprehension about entering the setting. Yet, once they did enter the setting, what they learned from these students grounded what they had been reading and discussing in their teacher preparation classroom.

Prior to their service-learning experiences, TCs from both universities typically held assumptions that underserved communities, rural and urban, were poverty stricken and plagued by crime. In addition, they held a common perception of the children as causing discipline problems, seeming unmotivated, and being difficult to work with. Their preconceived notions caused apprehension about going into these neighborhoods and the children's responses toward them and their projects. They were concerned about their own safety and about how they would be received by the school personnel and the students. Kristen elaborated in her final reflection:

> When I was told about this part of the class I was a little apprehensive. . . . I had heard that Aston Point was a bad neighborhood and there were a lot of racial problems. I didn't know how this was going to work or how we were going to be accepted, especially when we came from a private school.

Hannah expressed in class how she interpreted the first visit to the school: "the majority of us— White and female from a private university— descending on this line of Black students—how did this look and feel to the children?" Max made an illuminating comment in class when he said that he graduated high school

> with 83 students. Eighty-three of which were White. But out at Jemison it was a whole new experience for me. I had never had any experiences with different races as far as teaching. This was good for me to get that experience.

TCs' reflections on their first time in the community setting revealed that they were pleasantly surprised at how they were received. One described the setting as having a "friendly atmosphere, and enthusiastic staff and students."

How Preconceived Notions Were Overcome (or Reinforced)

Many of the TCs from both universities began their service-learning experiences with negative assumptions about the children's intellectual abilities, interests, and motivation. They anticipated working with children who lacked intelligence and interest in learning and would be difficult to handle. Jordan's comment in her final reflection was indicative of a generalized correlation between low SES and intelligence: "I learned that despite their age and SES these kids were extremely intelligent. Our society is full of stereotypes." She went on to say, "Mary made me realize that we future teachers must take time out to know each one of our student's home lives to understand where they're coming from each and every day." TCs realized levels of expectations they held for the students. In Emily's weekly reflection, she commented that her expectations had greatly changed, and that she quickly learned that she was not challenging her students enough: "I shouldn't assume that he or she cannot do a certain task." Likewise, Brittany expressed that "the children were wonderful to work with, not only were they open to learning about college but they had the mind-set that will take them to college."

As revealed in the second debriefing meeting and TCs' weekly reflections, TCs anticipated that their student partners would lack interest in the oral-history project. Their expectations changed after hearing all of the children's concerns for their community. Amanda expressed in her second reflection, "This really surprised me because I really thought that a fourth grader would not care so much about this topic and would be bored with it."

Nicholas exemplified the few TCs whose negative assumptions were reinforced when he said in an interview,

> You go out to (nearby upscale suburban school) and the kids are more disciplined. When you get out to Jemison you kind of have to . . . I don't

know if it is the parents or teachers or what, but the kids act different.

The belief that "parents don't care" is often used to describe low-income and minority households. One young man remarked,

Attitudes were the big thing . . . and just the way they are brought up some kids just don't have the respect for their elders, and if their parents don't make them give it to them, why should they give it to the teacher?

Other TCs, however, challenged that stereotype. In an interview Reese contrasted Jemison with the suburban school, which he described as

a dream world—the kids are great, it's like the top! Jemison—maybe it's not the greatest setting, but you can learn a lot—the kids have great attitudes— they are willing to learn, but they get in trouble way too much.

They heard from their children about the interest their families have in their education. Amy reported, "She and her family have high goals for her, just as her brother and sis who are in college—one to be a doctor and one a lawyer." Participants discovered that the children's families had pride in them, as exemplified in Vivian's fourth reflection: "Andrew told me that his aunt entered his first poem that we created in a contest. He also told me that they were going to enter this one as well."

TCs initially expressed stereotypical perspectives about a lack of concern within the communities. They learned otherwise, however, as a result of the children's interviews with local community members in Aston Point. Bailey commented in a reflection,

These adults are so passionate about the children and their well-being, and making a difference in the community. A previous conception of mine was that Aston Point was falling apart because no one cared, and now all of those thoughts are wiped from my head by hearing what I heard today.

The children and the community members offered the TCs the opportunity to see their world through their eyes. Morgan described her impressions, stating,

I was absolutely amazed at how concerned the people of Aston Point are about helping to rebuild their community. It is very easy to prejudge people, but you must enter their world and see how they live and listen to how they feel and what they hope for before judging them.

Webber elaborated his thoughts in an interview:

I think that wherever you go you have to be able to connect at a certain level. If you don't get to do that some of them, especially the older ones, think "all you do is care about school you don't care about me as a person." So in a sense you have to act a little bit different, not because of socioeconomics, but treat them differently because they are different because you can't just take away their background and not even look at it because it makes them who they are . . . . With someone like me who has never grown up in the projects—I'm not really going to know until I've been around those kids quite a bit like how they are going to react, what they are going to do. It's not fair for me to come in and all of a sudden say "hey you've been doing this your entire life and it has to stop right now." I don't think that is realistic. Yeah there are certain things you don't allow like fighting or language stuff, and they should know about those up front; but some of the differences in culture you have to work with like not knowing exactly how they are going to act to kind of have to adjust yourself.

Learning About Myself as a Teacher

By working with the children in their community settings, the TCs realized that we are all teachers and learners. Their public school partners' stories illuminated the challenges and obstacles they faced in their communities. Lacey's journal reflected this reciprocity in her observation, "I was teaching her and at the same time learning from her."

The children's interest in the oral-history project taught the TCs about building curriculum around social issues that are relevant to the children's everyday lives. The TCs were introduced to the meaning of *teaching for social justice* when they learned of the children's desire to take action to make their community a better and safer place to live. When they introduced the oral-history project with the KWAPL strategy, the children surprised them

with their comments about the filth, crime, and lack of safety in their community. In her first reflection, Heather commented,

> I was quite surprised when we started to talk about what they knew about Aston Point—they became quite negative and only knew what it used to be like. I asked if they knew anything about it now, and all they said was that it is dirty and when will it be clean like it used to be.

They shared their stories about encountering drug transactions as they walked to school and about not having a safe playground on which to play. Their questions focused on what they could do to clean it up. Abbey related, "Khalil wanted to know how he could raise money for the school and the town to clean everything up." The TCs discovered that the children were aware of how Aston Point used to be and seemed angry at its present condition. They also found, however, that the children liked aspects of their community and were eager to work toward making it a better place to live. Amanda wrote,

> I found out that Chase was very interested in sharing his thoughts on his town and what he would like to see changed. For only being in fourth grade he seems to be very concerned and aggravated about how people treat the town in which he lives. He feels like he can't do certain things because of that, and kind of seemed angry for it.

The community concern voiced by the children taught the TCs a lesson in civic responsibility. The anthology of the children's art and writing was an opportunity for the children to be heard and was shared with the city council. Haley commented,

> There is a lot more to a child than meets the eye. . . . Each student has hopes, dreams, and ideas that they want expressed. Each student has a voice and that voice deserves to be heard . . . if we just step back and listen to children their ideas will not only make a difference in their own community, but in the whole world, too.

Finally, the importance of listening to children's voices was realized in the following TC's final reflection:

> Looking through the book I was in awe of the ideas and creativity that each student had contributed. I

agree that this book is very powerful and should be shared. It makes you realize that children are impacted by the world around them, along with the fact that they have the ability to help change Aston Point. Reproducing this book to share with officials in Aston Point may help them to see that children need an environment in which they feel safe and protected. These children have also proved that they have ideas that should be listened to.

In the process of learning about themselves as teachers, several evolved from being teachers who blamed the students into reflective professionals who questioned themselves and constantly worked to meet the children's needs:

> I wasn't as flexible as I should have been and that was a problem for me—not for the kids. So I tried to change that about my teaching . . . most of my problems were based on myself and not really the kids.

Alycen stated in an interview,

> I looked at myself and my teaching technique . . . and looked up information, and I called some old friends that worked in the school system and said, "Hey, what happened here, what did I do wrong?" And they gave me some good advice.

She continued that she realized she needed to be honest with herself, and not to "blame the students for their not being motivated or not paying attention."

The TCs working in the motor-skills program began to scrutinize their own behaviors. Tiffany reported in an interview that service-learning at Jemison "takes us out of our selfish college bubble and involves us in real-life situations in the community." Jeffrey related an epiphany when he said, "Seeing how this kid looked at me—it made me feel like I should maybe act a little different [more mature]." Caitlin elaborated, "Working with the kids—you have to put yourself in their shoes and see how they feel. [At first] I was mad all the time because the kids were bad—but a lot of times, we just don't understand." Several agreed that they needed more patience when teaching, and that being more patient frequently alleviated or prevented problems.

While some TCs expressed interest in teaching in diverse settings, others realized that they would prefer another kind of setting. One participant expressed,

Although I still know that it will probably not be my first choice to teach in an environment such as Aston Point, I am grateful for the chance to do what we have done, and to gain the experience, especially such a positive one that this has given me.

Data from interviews and reflective papers alike yielded similarities in the TCs' beliefs and their responses to the service-learning programs. Ultimately, TCs in both settings realized the value of their respective experiences. Webber's lament reflects the sentiment of many participants in both programs: "My only comment is that I wish we had more time to work with the kids because it was an extremely influential project."

DISCUSSION AND RELEVANCE TO SERVICE-LEARNING RESEARCH

Teacher education is charged with the complex task of preparing a teaching force with the skills for teaching to high standards while meeting the needs of all the learners in the classroom. Indeed, it is probably safe to say that most teacher education programs in North America instill their charges with the notion that children are individuals who collectively exhibit a broad spectrum of experiences, learning styles, abilities, and backgrounds.

However, simple acknowledgment of the uniqueness of an individual does not go far enough in facilitating a social conscience. Having knowledge and an understanding of the sociopolitical context—the families and communities of their students and the challenges that face them—helps teachers to develop curricula sensitive to students' knowledge and life experiences, to question, and to take action (Kohl, 2002/2003; Ladson-Billings, 2000). Therein lies the importance of providing TCs with experiences that place them in settings where they realize the human connection to the many facets and complexities of teaching. Such experiences as the ones described in the current study offer opportunities for undergraduate TCs to engage actively with communities different from their own, to interact with diverse sociocultural groups, and to reflect on those experiences as an ongoing transformative process (Nieto, 2000).

These learning situations created opportunities for dialogue about societal issues that prospective teachers would often prefer not discussing (Sleeter, Torres, & Laughlin, 2004). Such situations opened these TCs' eyes and minds to conditions in the students' neighborhoods. As a result, they raised questions about their own assumptions and the existing inequities prevalent in the lives of children and their communities. Such consciousness raising enables TCs to avoid the assumption that marginalized students are somehow deficient (Bartolome, 1994), and to circumvent what Haberman (1991) called the "pedagogy of poverty" (p. 290), referring to the practice of using a directive pedagogy in which students have no input.

Redirecting TCs to examine their own beliefs and to ask hard questions about their biases and about social injustices can begin with service-learning experiences such as the ones described. Learning situations that promote problem posing and critical dialogue must continue to promote transformation in thought and action (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 1998; Freire, 1990; Nieto, 2000; Sleeter et al., 2004). When prospective teachers are faced with the challenge of teaching in settings that differ vastly from their own, they experience a dissonance that requires resolution. TCs confront such dissonance when their expectations are challenged, and they must be provided guidance to reconcile their beliefs through self-reflection and critical examination of their own biographies. When they achieve resolution they not only learn more about themselves as teachers but also are better equipped to face head-on the complexities of teaching in diverse settings. Service-learning experiences, unlike most clinical practica, foster in TCs the autonomy for questioning existing practices and for further developing their own theories about teaching and learning (Gomez, 1993; Zeichner & Tabachnick, 1981).

Our findings support the notion that many TCs naively hold the stereotypical belief that children of color are difficult or unmotivated and have poor attitudes toward school (Schultz, Neyhart, & Reck, 1996). We found

that the TCs did indeed carry such preconceived notions prior to the service-learning experiences. As stated earlier, the TCs in these two universities were very different from the children they taught in that the TCs were, for the most part, raised in conservative, White, middle-class families. We cautiously suggest that many of them were not restricted by the "conservative socialization" (Curtner-Smith, 2004) that characterizes their upbringing. Through service-learning, TCs are immersed in community settings where they have the opportunity to meet community members and interact with the children in their own context. Active, goal-directed engagement in diverse service-learning settings affected the TCs in ways that led them to reexamine their assumptions and, for some, even their desire to teach in such communities.

TCs can have an exponential effect on future generations of children (Buchanan & Kamen, 2002). Thus, they need to be accepting of all learners and prepared to empower them to reach their full potential to confront the challenges many of them face. Service-learning coupled with teaching for social justice requires prospective teachers to scrutinize injustices that affect teaching and learning, as well as critically examine their own assumptions and biases. When they do, they come to a broader understanding of diversity and social justice and consequently structure their classrooms and gymnasiums as culturally relevant spaces (Burden, Hodge, O'Bryant, & Harrison, 2004). Our findings suggest that service-learning positively affects TCs' dispositions toward teaching in diverse settings. TCs learned about diversity and even began to question societal inequities that they encountered. Service-learning has the potential for empowering TCs to confront difficult issues of societal inequities and to begin the deconstruction of lifelong attitudes and the construction of socially just teachers.

NOTES

1. For National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) Monmouth University characterizes dispositions as values, commitment, and professionalism and includes the educational importance of diversity, equity, and social justice. Dispositions influence teacher candidates' behavior in relation to students, parents, colleagues, and the community, and their beliefs regarding teaching and student learning.

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