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Tynisha Meidl and Beth Baumann

Abstract

Pre-service teachers are on an educational and professional journey in which they are trying to figure out the "right stuff" needed to be an effective teacher while being a "student." Many pre-service teachers engage in community service projects, yet it is unclear how these experiences inform the dispositional development of pre-service teachers. In this study, the authors examined the outcomes of a community service experience pre-service teachers (n = 20) participated in as part of the [student group]. The authors present the results of a qualitative study. Findings suggest pre-service teachers realize the multiplicities of student needs in an authentic setting and the potential disconnect between what is learned during one's teacher education undergraduate program and the realities of being a teacher once employed as a classroom teacher. The authors conclude with reflections on the importance of having concrete ways for pre-service teachers to develop dispositions beyond the course-based field experiences and student teaching.

Introduction

In the field of education, there is no clear consensus on the specific behaviors of an effective teacher. As a means to define a set of behaviors or ways of acting, dispositions have been included as part of many teacher preparation programs. As a result, teacher preparation programs in the United States (US) have struggled to find concrete ways to develop, document, and assess dispositions (Borko, Liston, & Witcomb, 2007).

At the undergraduate level, many students are engaged in much more than just their coursework. Many students are involved in extra-curricular activities, which may or not be associated with their program of study. Community service is an experience that many undergraduates engage in during their undergraduate experience. Pre-service teachers are not exempt from these experiences. There is a limited body of research that attempts to explore community service as an alternative means for helping pre-service teachers develop teacher dispositions.

This paper examines how community service may serve as an opportunity for pre-service teachers to develop dispositions needed to be an effective teacher. The purpose of this study was to examine how pre-service teachers viewed community service as part of their teacher development specifically as it relates to dispositional development. The study also sought, to understand how dispositions might be developed in a non-academic setting. Results from the study shed light on how to develop pre-service teacher dispositions beyond what can be accomplished through field experiences and student teaching. These findings contribute to our emerging understanding of how best to develop dispositions among pre-service teachers.

Dispositional Development in Teacher Education

The term "disposition," is a fairly new term as applied to teacher education. It was not until the late 80's and early 90's that this term emerged. It is the goal of teacher education programs to foster existing behaviors, introduce new behaviors, or change existing behaviors of pre-service teachers. Dispositions are of importance because many students in teacher education programs are encouraged to think of themselves as pre-professionals and behave as such.

Dispositions are difficult to define because of their subjectivity. In 2000, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) mandated that teacher candidates completing an NCATE accredited program must acquire the "professional knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to help all students learn" (www.ncate.org). NCATE (2002) defines dispositions as the beliefs that guide teachers' attitudes and behaviors that affect student learning. Katz (1993) defines disposition as " a tendency to exhibit frequently, consciously, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior that is directed towards a broad goal" (p.1). In teacher education programs, the term disposition is equally equated to beliefs, values, and attitudes needed to be an effective teacher (Demmon-Berger, 1986; Mino, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James,

2002). In this study, dispositions are defined as observable patterns of behaviors of teachers driven by one's personal values and beliefs to benefit student learning and well-being (Carroll, 2012; Demmon-Berger, 1986; Mino, Onwuegbuzie et al., 2002; Welch, Pitts, Tenni, Kuenlen, & Wood, 2010). Despite this definition being used there is still "little consensus on what the term dispositions specifically means" (Ginsberg & Whaley, 2006, p. 273). The term disposition lacks a definitive singular meaning (Welch et al., 2010).

Dispositions are subjective and vary from program to program. The variance is dependent upon how programs define dispositions. Programs may view dispositions as a specific set of attitudes or beliefs, while others may categorize them as personality traits (Welch et al., 2010). Although NCATE does not specifically identify a set of dispositions some institutions name specific dispositions that pre-service teachers should embody. Many teacher education programs have identified dispositions to include all or some of a list proposed by Armstine (1990) which includes: fairness, decency, service, pro-social behavior, honesty, humility, trust, empathy, healing, and a sense of community. Naming dispositions provide pre-service teachers with terminology regarding the expected attitudes and behaviors exemplary teachers exhibit.

How are Dispositions Developed?

One of the goals of teacher education programs is to influence values and beliefs held by pre-service teachers regarding aspects related to the practice of teaching (Doyle, 1997). The most common ways programs have done this is through course-based field experiences and student teaching. Dispositions within these contexts are documented through observations done by cooperating teachers and college supervisors (Welch et al., 2010).

Students in many programs are also responsible for documenting their experiences and how they perceive their growth and development. The process of reflecting on one's own growth and development is an identifiable disposition for some programs. Giovannelli (2003) studied being reflective as a disposition toward teaching. She found a reflective disposition has a positive correlation with effective teaching in the specific domains of "instructional behavior, classroom organization, and teacher expectations" (p.307). This self-reflective practice as one way to document dispositional development allows programs to have documented proof that dispositions of pre-service teachers change over time, using self-reflections as evidence of this change.

Field experiences and student teaching provide pre-service teachers with "real-time" classroom experience by placing the pre-service teacher in an actual classroom with the support of a cooperating teacher. Field experiences have been regarded as the most valuable component of teacher education programs (Adler, 1984; Griffin, 1989). As a result, every pre-service teacher candidate is required by law to perform a certain amount of field experience; student teaching is the most common form (Wade, 1997). The rationale for field experiences is grounded in the work of John Dewey (1910), who was a strong advocate for the experiential training of teachers. Field experiences challenge existing beliefs and values about teaching and learning pre-service teachers have held for the majority of their lifetime (Darling-Hammond, 2006).

Pre-service teachers learn by doing (Erckison & Anderson, 2005). It is the responsibility of the teacher education program to provide experiences in the field and leverage other experiences and opportunities for students to challenge their own beliefs (Doyle, 1997). The search for additional and meaningful activities has lead many institutions of higher education to look towards service learning as a high-impact practice within teacher education programs. Voluntary non-class related community service, although sometimes misused interchangeably (Howard, 2001) with service-learning, may serve as another means to develop teacher dispositions beyond classroom activities and structured practicum experiences.

Community Service in Teacher Education

Community service projects have the ability to enhance student learning because they frequently address real community needs (Erickson and Anderson, 2005). De Acosta (1996) describes teaching and community involvement as a synergistic relationship. As a means to help students see the value in this relationship an increasing number of teacher educators and preparation programs encourage teacher candidates to spend time in the local community (deAcosta, 1996). In this study, community service is described as service or volunteer experiences pre-service teachers voluntarily choose. These experiences are school-based in nature. Pre-service teachers perform service projects and activities within the physical environment of a school such as painting and organizing classrooms or educational support in the form of tutoring students.

Community service does not have a prescribed learning agenda as a co-curricular activity (Howard, 2001). The voluntary characteristic of community service allows for students to choose activities and sites of interest. There is greater variation in the types of experiences students may have based on what they choose to do. Community service aids in developing pro-social behaviors such as: (1) responding to the needs of others, (2) learning more about being a caring person, and (3) creating situations for personal reflection and growth (Swick, 2001). According to Serow (1991) "participation in community service is associated with positive developmental outcomes, including an enhanced sense of responsibility and concern for others" (p. 544). Students may be drawn to certain types of activities based on their personality, morals, values, and beliefs, all of which inform dispositions (Welch et al., 2010).

Service experiences, in which students are working with their peers and community, within an educational setting are able to develop the desired dispositions to serve as agents of educational reform prior to entering the teaching profession (Erickson and Anderson, 2005), while gaining insight needed to build communities that support all people (Shore, 1999). Service challenges students to think deeply about issues impacting student learning as well as reflect on their beliefs and values within the context of teaching.

Recognizing the increased number of students engaging in community service at the undergraduate level, the authors sought to explore how community service projects served as a means to develop pre-service teacher dispositions. Specifically, the researchers analyzed the impetus for student involvement in this specific service experience and the relationship between the experience and participants' professional development. The question informing the study is: To what extent do pre-service teachers ascribe the development of dispositions to community service?

Method

Investigation Site and Participants

"[The service project]" is an initiative started by the National Educational Association (NEA). The goal of "[the service project]" is to gather civic-minded individuals in a weekend event to volunteer at schools in need of rehabilitation (www.nea.org, 2012). "[the service project]" has been serving schools for 15 years, and the institution of study, a small liberal arts college in Wisconsin, created its own version.

"[The service project]" is a community service project done annually as a collaborative effort with undergraduate teacher education candidates across the Midwest. The student group hosts the event across the state, annually. This project seeks to beautify schools in need. Pre-service teachers engage in projects such as painting, landscaping, building shelves, sanding doors, refinishing walls, and other projects to "make-over" a school with minimal resources. [Service project] gives future educators "real experiences and opportunities to work with current educators, association members, and involved parents, while helping to create a bright and pleasant learning environment" ([Student group] personal communication, 2010). For example, prior to pre-service teachers arriving, the community raised $15,000 with the help of over 100 community members, 30-40 school staff, and parents. [Student group] raised $6000 to contribute to the beautification project as well.

Public schools throughout the state are eligible to apply. Schools are required to submit a paper application and a video or PowerPoint presentation to illustrate how the school will benefit from a beautification weekend. Before schools are chosen, the following is taken into account: the number and type of K-12 students the project would impact, the school's current conditions, the impact of revenue controls, and whether they had enough projects to do that could sustain 150–180 people working for two days.

This research occurred during the 2009-2010 academic year. The two elementary schools chosen share many of the same key characteristics, showcasing their need for the additional help as indicated in their application. The two schools chosen were Title 1 schools with over 30% of the students at each school qualifying for free or reduced lunch programs; both schools reside in the same rural district serving a total of 905 students in four schools (NCES, 2010). The two elementary schools share similarities in both need and student body characteristics but their student body size is significantly different. One school serves kindergarten through fifth grade and the other kindergarten through second grade, with a student enrollment population of 373 and 35 students respectively.

During the time of study, the service project drew students from 21 colleges and universities from [state of service], who were enrolled in teacher education programs at the undergraduate level. The 180 student volunteers ranged from freshman to seniors for the weekend community service event.

Procedures

Data were gathered from the following sources: transcribed participant interviews, field notes, and documents such as flyers, emails, videos and handouts. The multiple data sources provided opportunities for triangulation "a process of using multiple perceptions to clarify meaning" (Stake, 2000, p. 443). Interviews were semi-structured with prepared questions and probes. The goal of the interview was to gather rich descriptions. The following questions were prepared along with probes for richer responses:

1. How did you become involved in "[the service project]"?
2. What drew you to this type of experience?
3. How do you feel this experience will impact what you do in the classroom?
4. What do you hope to learn from this experience?
5. How is this different than field experiences connected to current course work?

The primary researcher was a full participant as she participated in the event, served on the executive board of the [student group], which reviews applications to determine which school districts will be served. The researcher understood the role of "[the service project]" as it was her second time participating in the event. While engaged in the weekend event she kept field notes and conducted interviews. The researcher kept a participant journal, as a means to document field notes, initial impressions after the interviews, as well as her reflections on the experience as it applied to her role as a pre-service teacher. Lankshear and Knobel (2004) describe this data collection method as a resource that captures personal insights and reflections while in the field.

Data analysis, a systematic process to make sense out of what has been collected (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1998), was conducted by reading through field notes, interview transcripts and documents. Field notes were gathered by the researcher in the field and analyzed by developing a set of codes along with documents and transcriptions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The multiple data sources allowed the researchers to triangulate the data as well as categorize the data according to groupings that were alike or similar. After categories were identified, the data was manually coded to visually denote the patterns and the contradictions. The researchers created a table that documented the topics that emerged from the interviews for each researcher.

This gave each researcher an idea of how they made sense of the data. Then using the field notes as an inductive method of constructing categories (Merriam, 2002), the researchers identified the following themes from the data: (1) the incongruity of pre-service teachers' understanding of external and internal issues related to student learning, (2) the disconnect between what was learned in the program and the realities of teachers, and (3) the realization of need.

The interpretive nature of qualitative research often comes with limitations. The interview sample was small (n = 20) compared to total participants (180) in "[the service project]" There was only one researcher conducting interviews, but her time was limited because she was also an "[the service project]" volunteer. As a result, the findings of this study may not be generalizable to all contexts. Merriam (2002) pointed out, generalizations as traditionally defined are not the goal of qualitative research but to allow readers to "determine how closely their situations match the research situation and hence, whether findings can be transferred" (p. 211).

Findings

From the analysis of the data, three themes were extracted concerning how pre-service teachers viewed community service in relation to disposition development. The themes are interrelated and expressed in conjunction with each other. Data is used to support these themes: (1) the incongruity of pre-service teachers' understanding of external and internal issues related to student learning, (2) the disconnect between what was learned in the program and the realities of teachers and (3) the realization of need.

Understanding of External and Internal Issues as Related to Student Learning

The process of learning is influenced by a variety of internal and external factors, as seen by participants. The focus of pre-service teacher education tends to be predominately concerned with student learning, development, and motivation. All of which teachers have influence over and can monitor in their classrooms. These internal factors are often included under the heading of "psychology for teaching", encompassing such topics as motivational theories, Bloom's taxonomy, and Gardner's multiple intelligences, to name a few as identified by the researcher in her teacher education program (Researcher Fieldnotes, 2010). External factors are aspects that inform student

learning that teachers have minimal or no control over. These may include building upkeep, condition of playground equipment, educational resources or places to store supplies. These types of issues may be out of the hands of even school administrators.

When these factors are contextualized, pre-service teachers can become proactive having developed an awareness and responsibility to mitigate the effects these factors have on student achievement. Several participants noticed the role of the environment and atmosphere of a classroom and school. They named "brightness of lights, bright colored walls, murals, painted playground equipment, and updated landscaping" as necessary for student learning. Participants saw their role as "helping to create a better environment for the students," "it is the behind the scenes work, " as they painted slides, murals on walls and assembled shelving units. This is an external factor teachers have no control over but participants saw themselves as inducing change, "changing the environment" and " the exterior or the looks of the school to make them [children] more excited and willing to learn."

By working with other teachers, community members and peers, participants reflected on their experiences as pre-service teachers. In these reflections they were making connections between their learning and their experience in their programs and when they were students. The way participants discussed factors that impact learning demonstrates how they care about the profession they are entering. These comments may be seen as demonstrating a "professional attitude," because of the observable actions by these pre-service teachers. This sense of caring and responsibility to the school and the educational community demonstrates dispositions posited by Armstine (1990).

The disconnect between what was learned in the program and the realities of teachers:

> In early childhood theories we talk about creating a quality learning environment. This [the service project] directly relates to creating a quality learning environment because coming into a school where the paint is chipping doesn't help students learn.

This participant vignette highlights the difference between what is presented in course work or field experiences at a purely theoretical level and what is internalized as a result of community service. Although pre-service teachers

are trained to see themselves as pre-professionals, the course content most students are exposed to focuses on the "what" and the "how" of teaching; the academic nature of the profession. Pre-service teachers are taught how to create lesson plans, unit plans, create assessments, and engage in data driven instructional practices. However, teachers are more than deliverers of knowledge. Teachers are responsible to create inclusive classroom cultures and productive learning environments that are part of a greater learning community. Through this experience participants were able to get a glimpse of teachers who were committed to the community and school by giving of their time during the [service project] weekend.

In relation to dispositions such as equity, participants elaborated on the awareness "that there are people who are in more need than us [participants]," and "how tough some schools have it and how some communities don't have everything." Participants worked with teachers, parents, and community members who displayed compassion that allowed them to develop a sense of empathy. Participants connected to the "resources" the school had or did not have. Five participants discussed the lack of resources the school sites had. They compared this to what they remembered having growing up. As a means of showing empathy, participants stated, "We should be less-self centered" while another mentioned being "more appreciative and aware of what I had growing up." Participants were able to see how their schooling experiences may not be the same as others.

Becoming empathetic to diverse teaching situations suggests that participants are on the path towards having the attitudes, beliefs, and values that inform how dispositions are actualized. Pre-service teachers were not concerned about the "what" and "how" of teaching but more concerned about what it takes to have a bright welcoming place for students. The commitment to the project demonstrated ways they were more empathetic to the different educational environments that exist.

The Realization of Need

> We [pre-service teachers] talk about budget cuts and referendums. The reason why we are here is because of those things. So, we get the business aspect of teaching and then we get the behind the scenes stuff about being a teacher.

The aforementioned quote captures how participants expressed the realization of need in two different ways; school as a community fixture and the implications of policies on resources and conditions in schools. The essential component of community involvement and support was the community finding value in the school as part of the community, this was one of the components taken into account during the selection process to determine the school to host [receive the make-over] (Researcher Fieldnotes, 2010). The application video for each of the schools, highlights how old the schools are and that "generations" of families have attended these schools, which speaks to the ways the school has been part of the community for an extended period of time.

As participants discussed school as a community fixture the following sentiments were shared, "[it is] nice to see how you impact not only the school, teachers, and administrators, but also the community in which the school resides." It was not only school community that valued the work being done, but also the community at large. One example of this community gratitude was manifested in the form of handmade thank you cards written and placed within the lunch boxes each participate was given. A different participant stated, "not everyone has that [a brand new elementary school] and [that] the community really does appreciate it [the service project]. [This was evident] from the notes we got [everyday] in [our] lunchboxes to the signs around the community [and school]." The type of service that the pre-service teachers engaged in did not include teaching or developing their skills to execute a lesson more effectively. Instead, they were able to capture a glimpse into the realities of budget cuts as it relates to schools.

Participant responses show ways in which a school is more than a physical building but more an essential part of the community at large. Half of the participants (n = 10) named different pro-social behaviors in their comments as it related to understanding the needs of the school and the community. Some participants named "teamwork." This was discussed in relation to work with others from across the state and individuals from the community. Three participants named "communication." Communication was described as "hearing the stories" from parents, teachers, and others in the community. They heard stories about budget cuts and referendums and the impact these have had on the school. Finally, another participant named "compromise" as another pro-social behavior. This was contextualized in relation

to the specific tasks the pre-service teachers were doing. They had to determine which tasks needed more people or took more time and prioritize what needed to be done. The implicit disposition that participants gain is a sense of community. Being community minded is inclusive of many dispositions such as having empathy, respect, collaboration, and caring. The pro-social behaviors Swick (2001) highlights are informed by this mindset or disposition.

Implications

The results of this study hold important implications for teacher education certification programs at the undergraduate level. The study provides an example explaining how pre-service teachers develop the attitudes, beliefs and values that inform the dispositions that many teacher education programs require. In this study participants gained a greater sense of community awareness than they could experience within a class or in a field experience. While programs seek to help students see how theory and practice intersect, it is quite difficult to do this in four years, given the expectations of accreditation agencies.

It is important for teacher education programs to seek out ways to support pre-service teachers on a curricular and co-curricular level. As community service becomes more integrated into higher education learning environments as a means to initiate civic engagement, it is important to understand its value to pre-service teachers. Serow (1991) states, service provides a renewed sense of "social awareness among young people." For this study, the sense of community, empathy and caring were outcomes for teacher education candidates.

These results suggest that community service is a way for students to develop desired teaching dispositions, particularly those most difficult to measure because they are not often observable in a college classroom or a field experience. It is important to note community service may serve as an additional way to facilitate dispositional growth in pre-service teachers.

Conclusion

As teacher educators seek to provide authentic classroom learning experiences for teacher candidates, the need to develop the necessary attitudes and behaviors to be effective classroom teachers should receive careful consideration. This project sought to explore how community service influences the dispositional development of pre-service teachers. The researchers intended

to understand how community service within an educational setting intersects with theory and learning.

One's ability and willingness to learn is not only an incredibly complex and dynamic process; it is one that is in a cycle of contentious change and evolution. It is within this cycle that teachers are challenged to find ways to motivate and understand how students learn in order to truly become effective. As academic service learning secures a place in teacher education programs, continued research into pre-service teachers' dispositions will be necessary. Academic courses provide a variety of learning experiences, however; non-academic opportunities such as community service have positive and sometimes unintended consequences such as fostering dispositional development and awakening students' perceptions to the realities of working in K-12 schools. The following vignette sums up the work and its results.

"Sometimes as a teacher you loose that perspective about all the other background stuff. So I think that [this experience] gives pre-service teachers a well-rounded view and they see what needs to be done beyond the curriculum. Like renovations on the school, new painting to keep the school atmosphere and environment in which kids want to learn in."

Pre-service teachers who engage in community service, even when it is unconnected to classroom activities, will have a greater sense of student needs, internal and external issues related to learning, as well as a way to contextualize non-classroom related issues. They are challenged to reexamine what drew them to this profession and identify ways that will keep them committed to serving students.

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