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## “How Can I Uproot the System?”: Justice-Oriented Outcomes From Community-Based Research in Schools

Allison H. Blosser  
*High Point University*

Joe Blosser  
*High Point University*

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## **“How Can I Uproot the System?”: Justice-Oriented Outcomes From Community-Based Research in Schools**

### **Cover Page Footnote**

The authors would like to thank all of the community partners involved in the creation and execution of this course.

# "How Can I Uproot the System?": Justice-Oriented Outcomes From Community-Based Research in Schools

Allison H. Blosser and Joe Blosser

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## Abstract

This paper is based on a qualitative case study designed to answer the following research question: "What learning about justice resulted from this collaboratively created service-learning class driven by a community-based research pedagogy?" It demonstrates how researching alongside primary stakeholders in Title I schools produced justice-oriented learning outcomes for students. Specifically, the course helped students better understand the value of diversity, their own deficit perspectives, systemic inequality, and the university's responsibility to the surrounding community. The course also fostered in students the ability to distinguish paternalistic models of service from empowering models of service, the ability to identify unjust policies, a desire for advocacy, and an openness to working in Title I schools. One author of this paper is a service-learning professional, and the other is a faculty member who instructed this course.

Since Ernest Boyer's (1990) seminal work detailing different forms of scholarship, community-based research (CBR), or the "scholarship of engagement," has been recognized by many as a mode of academic work. Yet CBR as a pedagogical practice in service-learning is underresearched (Beckman & Long, 2016; George et al., 2017). The case study at hand helps fill this void in the literature by examining the justice-oriented learning outcomes of multiple sections of a CBR service-learning course and suggesting strategies for promoting such learning.

As a pedagogical model, service-learning "intentionally integrates academic learning and relevant community service" (Howard, 1998). CBR is part of the larger world of service-learning, which in recent years has urged faculty to move away from "traditional" service-learning and to embrace "critical" service-learning and democratic learning more fully (Mitchell, 2008; Saltmarsh & Hartley, 2011). In keeping with the move toward critical service-learning, this study utilizes the three-part definition of CBR laid out by Strand et al. (2003), wherein CBR is a "collaborative enterprise" that brings together researchers and community members, uses "multiple methods of discovery" and "democratize[s] knowledge," and, most importantly for this study, "has as its goal social action for the purpose of achieving social change and social justice" (p. 6). Drawing on Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), CBR uses a critical pedagogy to upend structures and systems

that maintain privilege and exploit inequality, thereby transforming the status quo. It intends to help students develop "the capacity to think critically and analytically about existing structures of oppression and injustice" and about their own place and power within these systems (Strand et al., 2003, p. 12). Using this understanding of CBR, the authors worked with community leaders to create an undergraduate honors course centered on research with local Title I schools.

## The Course and the Context

This course was offered through a liberal arts university in the South whose student body is historically and predominantly White. The university has a low discount rate on its annual comprehensive cost of just over \$50,000. As part of the honors curriculum, students are required to take Social Scientific Inquiry (a four-credit course) in the spring of their first year. Like all honors courses at the university, this course employs a project-based learning (PBL) model, which pairs well with CBR. Faculty teaching the course may give their section a focus and unique title. The version of the course studied for this paper was titled "Co-opting the White Paper for Educational Change."

The course ran for three consecutive spring semesters, and each semester it partnered with a different Title I school. During the first two semesters, the class partnered with elementary schools in a large, urban, racially diverse, high-

poverty district. The third time the course ran, the class partnered with a PK–12 urban charter school. At all three schools, racial/ethnic minority students composed over 85% of the student population, though the specific racial compositions varied at each school.

In keeping with the ethical priority of caring (Noddings, 2005), the partner schools were selected based on existing relationships among school leaders, the course professor, and the university's director of service-learning. Nel Noddings (2005) has argued that caring relationships are central to the development of democratically engaged citizens, and the authors believe that this applies to service-learning relationships as well. Citizens are “born out of the fundamental recognition of relatedness; that which connects me naturally to the other, reconnects me through the other to myself” (Noddings, 2005, p. 49). In the 6-month period before each iteration of the course, the instructor and the director of service-learning met regularly with school leadership to develop the course structure, assignments, and research topics. The syllabus for each course included the name and contact information of a specific individual at the partner school, who served as a liaison and regular contributor to the class.

The class met twice per week. Before students set foot in the partner school, they attended a service-learning orientation, read about critical service-learning, and discussed service-learning in class. Students also learned about the partner school from the state's school report card, school websites, and school staff who visited the class. A few weeks into the semester, students took a tour of the school. The first 6 weeks of class also included readings and activities on educational and social scientific research methods as well as the social contexts of high-poverty schools. All students were required to complete human subjects training so that both the university's and the school district's institutional review boards (IRBs) could approve the students as researchers. Only after receiving IRB approval 6–8 weeks into the semester did students begin collecting data.

Each iteration of the course engaged different research questions generated by the partner school. The schools' leaders identified between four and six issues in their community—for example, student transiency, parent engagement, school readiness, community perception of the school, and teacher morale—that they wanted to better understand and address. Students in the course completed surveys about their individual strengths

and the school issues that most interested them, and they were divided into groups and assigned an issue to research accordingly. Students then practiced reciprocity (Cook-Sather et al., 2014) by taking ownership of the data collection process and amending the data collection protocols the professor had developed. Only then did students begin collecting empirical data in the form of individual interviews or surveys administered to school stakeholders (e.g., parents, staff, community members, etc.). They also researched how other schools and districts have addressed the issues under study. The data collection process stretched many students out of their comfort zones, especially when it came to interviewing parents who differed from them in terms of social class, racial background, and/or native language. After collecting and analyzing their data, students were responsible for crafting and presenting white papers to each school that detailed the results of their analysis and recommendations that the school could implement with their existing resources.

The assignments for the course consisted of five service-learning reflections, two final essays (one was assigned to all students enrolled in a service-learning class and the other was assigned to all students in sections of Social Scientific Inquiry), a group white paper, and a white paper presentation. The five service-learning reflections were based on prompts, some of which were created by the instructor to assess the justice-oriented learning outcomes stated on the course syllabus. Students' reflections were assessed not only for their relevance, clarity, analysis, and mechanics but also for students' demonstration of self-criticism. As part of the reflection process, the instructor urged students to consider how their biases and assumptions were shaping their experiences.

The course had multiple tiers of intended learning outcomes (service-learning outcomes, honors outcomes, and course-specific outcomes), and assignments were structured to assess them. These assignments also followed best practices in service-learning pedagogy and PBL, and before the course was ever taught, it was approved by the university's service-learning committee, the honors committee, and the curriculum committee. Both the service-learning outcomes and the course-specific outcomes included specific justice-oriented outcomes. The two relevant service-learning outcomes were: “Develop students' appreciation of diversity through engagement with people who are different from them” and “Explain and address at least one unscripted problem that

faces the [local area] by engaging the community through authentic conversation and leadership." The two course-specific justice outcomes were: "Identify the challenges and assets of high-poverty schools" and "Identify unjust policies and practices that impact schools."

This article contends that using a CBR pedagogy that partnered students with primary education stakeholders enabled students to learn firsthand what it takes to create more just communities. "Justice" can take a variety of forms; this article focuses on "social justice" as defined in Colby et al.'s *Educating Citizens: Preparing America's Undergraduates for Lives of Moral and Civic Responsibility* (2003): Education for social justice leads to "social change and public policies that increase gender and racial equality, end discrimination of various kinds, and reduce the stark income inequalities that characterize this country and most of the world" (p. 65). For the students in this course, immersion in Title I educational environments changed how they thought about social justice—that is, how they thought about inequality, privilege, service to others, and social policy.

## Methods

A qualitative case study was conducted to answer the following research question: "What learning about justice resulted from this collaboratively created service-learning class driven by a community-based research pedagogy?"

IRB approval and participant consent were obtained to collect two semesters of course assignments (five individual reflections, one group white paper, and two individual final essays) from 24 student participants<sup>1</sup>. Each piece of data was given equal weight in the analysis, though the reflection prompts designed to address justice-oriented outcomes generated more data than others. Open and axial coding of the data was conducted in several stages (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In the initial round of coding, the intended justice-oriented learning outcomes described above served as a priori codes, while open codes were developed to cover other unintended justice-oriented outcomes. A thorough analysis of the data produced a nuanced understanding of how students interpreted the intended learning outcomes, so

the second round of coding involved refining the codes to reflect student learning outcomes more accurately. In total, seven overarching themes, each of which reflected a justice-oriented learning outcome, were identified. While one author, a social scientist trained in qualitative analysis, coded the entire data set, the final themes were discussed and agreed upon by both authors.

## Findings

Seven justice-oriented learning outcomes emerged from the data:

- valuation of diversity as an asset
- recognition of deficit perspectives
- deepened understanding of systemic inequality
- awareness of the university's responsibility to the surrounding community
- ability to distinguish "bad" service from "good" service
- recognition of unjust policies and inclinations toward political advocacy
- openness to working in Title I schools

For each of the outcomes, the authors offer examples of student voices and some of the best practices that seemed to contribute to the realization of these outcomes.

### *Valuation of Diversity as an Asset*

One of the course's intended learning outcomes was for students to be able to identify the challenges and assets of high-poverty schools. Students identified challenges such as obtaining adequate resources and facilities, recruiting and retaining quality teachers, and engaging parents. The students frequently mentioned assets such as devoted teachers, a warm environment, and a challenging curriculum. But many students also acknowledged diversity as an asset. This outcome was much more prominent among students partnered with the more demographically diverse of the two schools. The following passages offer two examples of how students demonstrated an appreciation of diversity. One student wrote,

All interviewees mentioned that diversity is a huge part of why families chose not to send their kids to South Elm<sup>2</sup>, but it should [be] a reason why families

<sup>1</sup>Though the class has been taught and data collected three times, we chose to exclude data from the most recent semester, spring 2020, because the service partnership and project had to be modified significantly due to COVID-19 and the physical closure of both the university and the partner school.

<sup>2</sup>The names of all schools and individuals are pseudonyms.

choose South Elm. I understand where these families are coming from because of my own biases and views. Sending your kid somewhere that they may not fit in or [where they might] be different from other kids is scary. It's scary being a kid, knowing not everyone is just like you. However, I've learned that diversity is an important part of everyone's life—especially a child's. I wish I had grown up with more diversity than I did and wish [the university] had much more of it, but I understand not everyone feels that way about diversity and exposing their kids to all different kinds of people.

Another student similarly reflected,

On a positive note, South Elm has families of all different ethnicities and minorities, as many high-poverty schools do. This exposes children to all different types of culture and people. At school, children can learn from a young age to be accepting of other children who may not look like them. My elementary school was in a mostly White suburb and, therefore, lacked diversity. I was constantly surrounded by people just like me and it would have been beneficial to learn more about people of different cultures through interactions as a child and multicultural friendships.

Seeing the diversity of the partner school firsthand compelled these students to reflect on their own segregated schooling experiences. One of the most important choices in CBR courses is the choice of a partner organization (Quaranto & Stanley, 2016). These courses were successful because they involved partner schools that had preexisting relationships with faculty, were committed to the process, and challenged the preconceptions of the college students.

#### *Recognition of Deficit Perspectives*

As students began to recognize the assets of high-poverty schools, they also began to recognize the deficit perspectives they had once applied to these schools. This recognition was one of the most prominent justice-oriented learning outcomes in the course. The passages that follow represent students' realizations about their deficit thinking. One student explained how media influenced their assumptions about high poverty schools:

I did not know exactly what to expect the school to look like, but I still had my stereotypes about the people and the surrounding area. Since the elementary schools in my county were well funded and in middle- and upper-class areas, I had trouble forming an unbiased view of the school. In a way, I expected to be in a school with some type of security (like an officer on duty) or a loud school that was vandalized or dingy looking. I expected these things because I have only seen schools in high-poverty areas on television or heard about them through social media or the news. On TV, poor schools are portrayed as being a terrible place to go and kids have to go through metal detectors before they can enter the school. Contrary to what I assumed, the school was beautiful and very homey. It was bright and colorful, and I loved all of the artwork throughout the building. The people I met were so kind, and the kids were so happy and loving. . . . Furthermore, the school gave me a sense of hope.

Two more students made similar realizations. This student wrote:

I also realized that I cannot assume that a condition such as poverty has a certain look or description attached to it. Walking around the school, none of the children appeared to be poor; they all seemed to be on the same level (financially that is). Recognizing this problem is important because if you think poverty is dirty with holes in its shoes, you might miss poverty trying to fit in.

While another student admitted:

I felt like being Title I was going to make it be a lot worse than it was for some reason. This is probably because as far as I know, I haven't seen a Title I school all the way through, and in return it made me perceive them as being not as good as they could be.

Then, there were students who compared their partner schools with the ones they attended growing up, like this student:

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I went to a public school in Minnesota and the schools in my area were all very nicely designed. We always had new resources and I was very privileged. I never realized how privileged I was though because the schools around me were also nice. My schooling experience definitely gave me a narrow perspective on school.

And other students acknowledged assumptions they had made about the lives and academic motivations of children attending our partner schools:

I assumed that most of the students in South Elm probably came from lower-class families and moved around a lot. I also assumed that because of the location and the demographics of the area, the students would not be as motivated to succeed in school because they lacked support back home. It is sad to think this [is] what I assumed about the students at the school because what I discovered was the complete opposite.

Students wrote most of these statements in response to a prompt that asked them to reflect on their first impressions of the school and their assumptions about its students. It is important to note that students recorded these reflections within the first weeks of class. Many of the students had never entered a high-poverty school, and their preconceptions were thus based solely on stories they had heard or media they had seen.

In all service-learning classes, it is imperative to get students reflecting early and often on how their experience is connecting with their preconceived expectations (Eyler et al., 1996, p. 17). Paul Gorski notes in *Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty* (2018) that "the only way to position ourselves to be a threat to the existence of inequity" is to "root the deficit view out of ourselves and our spheres of influence" (p. 66). In this class, the simple act of walking into the school and meeting people for an hour helped students start to name their privilege and social location. It also led students to express an appreciation for diversity and recognize their deficit perspectives. These responses may also have been prompted in part by the expectation set in the rubric for service-learning reflections that students should question their biases and preconceptions.

### *Deepened Understanding of Systemic Inequality*

While students' first impressions of the school prompted them to acknowledge their deficit perspectives, it took longer for them to articulate their deepened understanding of systemic inequality. Though this was not a stated learning outcome of the course, the course helped students recognize that conditions such as poverty are not just consequences of poor individual decisions. This learning outcome was evident in students' frequent use of terms like "cycle" and "generational" to explain the persistence of poverty and injustice. Students also realized that outcomes such as high teacher turnover and low parent engagement resulted from compounding circumstances beyond the control of any individual. The examples that follow illuminate students' understanding of systemic inequality. For example, this student recognized that poverty is systematically maintained and then questioned what they could do to address the problem:

I have continuously questioned whether or not Title I schools like Summit Elementary are set up for failure. . . . I think sometimes, maybe the structure is systematically set up to produce the necessary conditions to prevent low-income children from moving up the socioeconomic ladder. And then I think to myself, as I watch the bright-eyed kids pass me in the hallways, what can I do to fix this? How can I uproot the system?

Another student recognized the compounding circumstances that lead to persistent inequality in education:

Schools with high levels of families in poverty tend to have an overall lower performing student body, which results in teachers being discouraged to teach there and having a high teacher turnover rate. This type of disparity between schools only increases the gap between the type of education that students are receiving and creates a system in which some students are more likely to be successful than others.

Students like this one learned that there are not simple solutions to complex problems like poverty:

This class has taught me there is not an easy fix to eliminate the unequal opportunities. Society cannot just decide to enact one policy and that will automatically fix

everything. Unearned privilege and unequal opportunity are built on a bigger social issue: generational poverty.

And this student wrote about how privilege is entrenched in our educational system:

I realize that naturally I am put at an advantage due to the privilege that I have. It honestly makes me upset and sad the way that some aspects of the education system are set up. I have definitely gained a new perspective due to this class. I feel as if advantaged people are in a cycle that favors them and disadvantaged people are in a cycle that does not favor them. . . . This type of cycle continues for generations and is hard to break.

The prevalence of the outcome of deepened understanding of systemic inequality is particularly noteworthy because students were not prompted to reflect on it. However, it was intentionally woven into every aspect of the class. The class pushed students deeper by challenging them to interview teachers and parents. As the students heard their stories and realities, they put the pieces together that poverty is maintained and perpetuated through structures in society, including schools.

#### *Awareness of the University's Responsibility to the Surrounding Community*

One of the goals of service-learning and CBR is deep engagement in the local community (Quaranto & Stanley, 2016). One of the university's service-learning outcomes specifically urges students to commit to understanding and addressing community challenges through authentic engagement. Among other tools, the course used the following reflection prompt toward the end of the semester to get at this outcome: "What have you learned about [this community] as a result of conducting research in it? What do you believe the university community needs to know about the city?" Student learning toward this outcome began during the 1-hour, university-wide, mandatory service-learning orientation. Most of the students' thinking on it, however, seemed to be prompted by venturing outside the university gates to learn about the vast resources of the city as part of creating proposals to address issues in the partner schools.

Repeatedly in their reflections, students (who were mostly freshmen) reported what they had

heard about the community before taking this class, and they noted that the campus can appear as a "bubble" to those both within and outside it. The students also began to recognize the university's responsibility to the city. The examples that follow include students' reflections on the city and the university's responsibility to it. One student reflected on what other students had told them about the city:

Coming to [the] university, I was told that the surrounding town was not safe and it held a certain amount of distaste for the students at [the] university due to our perceived economic status and behavior. I was told to stay within the gates and under the bubble for my own safety. The university community needs to know that although the community . . . may be a little rough around the edges, that does not mean that we should necessarily fear the surrounding city.

Another student explained their lack of knowledge of the community before taking this class:

As a first-year student, I did not have much awareness about what occurred outside of our university's gates in the greater [community]. However, throughout this research project, I have come to understand significantly more regarding the community . . . and the people, activities, and stakeholders within that community. I believe that I have discovered more about the supportive nature of the people and organizations in [the city] as well as the diverse population, and I think that the university community should understand that the city wants to connect with us, but we need to continue to enhance our end of that relationship.

Then, there was this student who reflected on the possible implications of the university's gates:

Nothing screams "embarrassed of our community" like a shiny gold and black fence aligning the edges of campus. I understand the intentions of having a fence completely, and that parents are the target client when closing on a sale, i.e., a student attending the university. Safety becomes the biggest priority. However, the fence creates a barrier between the

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students and the community. From the outside looking in, it must be easy for community members to feel like we are not one and the same.

These reflections demonstrate that students began to see the university as part of the larger ecology of the city. Though at times the students voiced a paternalistic perspective that the university should “inspire improvement” in the city, they often recognized the university’s responsibility to work “with” and not “for” the city. Some students even practiced empathy by putting themselves in the position of community members. Interestingly, each of the reflections listed here notes the impact of the university’s gates. While the gates connote safety and security to some, the students saw that they have the potential to discourage students from engaging in the city (because it is perceived as dangerous) and to make community members feel unwanted.

### *Ability to Distinguish “Bad” Service From “Good” Service*

The data also revealed that the course helped students distinguish “bad” (i.e., paternalistic and unsustainable) service from “good” (i.e., collaborative, empowering, and sustainable) service. The service partnerships were deliberately structured to prompt this outcome (Pigza, 2016), and the outcome was also supported by in-class activities and readings. For example, in one class, students were asked to examine the critiques of service-learning in Eby’s article “Why Service-Learning Is Bad” (1998) and to determine if and how the critiques applied to the class’s own service project. Intentional reading and reflection on the design and impact of the class itself modeled the self-awareness about justice that the class intended to promote in students (Colby et al., 2007). In reflections and essays throughout the semester, students demonstrated their learning about “good” and “bad” service. For example, one student wrote,

To ensure that the communities received the help they needed, we included them in the entire process. . . . The project was very collaborative to make sure that everyone has a say and it does not feel like an imposed plan. We are also leaving it up to them as to what they choose to implement.

Another student made a similar comment:

Instead of helping the school and community directly, I feel we empowered them so our proposed plans are long-term changes rather than a 1-year quick fix.

And then there was this student who articulated common misconceptions that people serving may have about those they serve:

If one goes into service thinking that the people he/she is helping are incompetent or unable to solve their own problems, then the service will be of no help to those people.

These reflections demonstrate that the students recognized the benefits of approaching service as a collaborative partnership. Students didn’t select what issues to research—school stakeholders did. While each school hosted only one CBR class, the projects were deeply enmeshed in each school community’s larger goals. And the projects were sustainable because there was an established group at each school committed to carrying the work forward, increasing the likelihood that each project would have long-term impacts (Beckman & Wood, 2016). Further, in order to empower a community, students recognized that it is important to believe in the community’s own capabilities and that the students themselves were not “saving” the community with their work.

### *Recognition of Unjust Policies and Inclinations Toward Political Advocacy*

The course intended to help students recognize unjust policies and practices that impact schools. This outcome directly reflects Colby et al.’s (2003) definition of education for social justice and critical CBR, and it aligns with CBR’s goal to promote social change (Strand et al., 2003). Students most commonly identified unjust school funding policies and the unjust use of standardized tests to evaluate schools and students. Students in one section of the class also recognized injustices around student transiency policies. Reviewing the schools’ “report cards” and test scores, talking with school stakeholders about school resources and funding, and researching their assigned issues likely prompted the students to recognize these injustices. The passages that follow illustrate these recognitions. For example, one student reflected on the implications of prioritizing proficiency over growth for both K-12 students and teachers:

Additionally, I have learned that a challenge (particularly for teachers) is to provide a quality, equitable education for all of their students given required standards from the state. As student achievement is measured whether or not a student reaches a benchmark instead of by growth in a subject area, teachers may be forced to focus their attention on the students on the verge of reaching the benchmark instead of those either far below or far above. This strategy is extremely ineffective for students, especially in high-poverty areas, as underachieving students cannot receive adequate attention for them to grow as a learner.

Another student reflected on problems with school funding policies:

The way in which schools are funded is related to policy decisions made by national and state representatives. Initially, one would need to focus on how policies on education are passed. Policies regarding funding create drastically different educational experiences for students. If a school is sufficiently funded, they will be able to have an arts program, additional aides, specialists, and technology. Schools that do not have sufficient funding have to cut art programs, cut staff, and are not able to afford new technology. Again, this lack of resources creates two different schooling experiences.

A different student made a related observation about school funding:

If more affluent parents elected to send their children to public school, and if tax dollars were allocated by need rather than strictly by population (or the size of the student body), [then] the schools that are struggling the most could likely raise the quality of their facilities, their standards, and their test score results. The allocation of tax dollars cannot be done by a formula. Politicians and administrators must begin to spend tax dollars according to need rather than by a mathematical formula. Unfortunately, I think many more affluent parents are not willing to jeopardize the academic future of their children to

improve the local public schools. They also don't want to pay additional taxes to improve public schools.

One student noticed problems with the lack of a bus system that could keep frequently transient students at a school even if they moved out of that school's zone:

If the students were constantly moving in and out because of changing addresses, then maybe the option is to provide buses for the students to keep them in their home school.

And significantly, a student even expressed an inclination toward political advocacy upon realizing how social and educational policies affect schools, teachers, and students:

I have also discovered the importance of political action in education, especially surrounding high-poverty schools. Every decision, whether a school district budget change or national legislation, can lead to major change, either positive or negative, in every school. As a student considering double majoring in political science, I am excited to continue to learn how both legislators and advocating citizens can make a difference in K-12 education.

These students recognized how changing social policy could change student outcomes. In fact, one group of students worked with school leaders to bring their research to the attention of administrators in the central office of the school district, who over the next few months implemented a version of the students' recommendations.

The students' desire to make social change—to affect policy—seemed driven by their reflective work, the problem-posing model of the CBR project, and their own critical analysis. In line with more critical approaches to service-learning, the course followed Cipolle's (2010) suggestion that "students must connect their critical reflection to social action in order to become change agents" (p. 87).

#### *Openness to Working in Title I Schools*

A less prominent but still noteworthy outcome was that a few students developed an openness to working in Title I schools. The course included honors students from all majors, but occasionally education majors were in the class. Some of these

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education majors expressed a newfound openness to teaching in Title I schools. For example, one education major wrote:

I learned that I should always have an open mind, especially in the future when I will be deciding where to teach. Now, I think I will be more open to teaching in rural or high-poverty areas because the students are still the same as the students in middle- to upper-class areas.

But even other students were swayed to work in Title I schools. One student from the class accepted a position working as an AmeriCorps VISTA member with Title I schools upon her graduation. This outcome is particularly notable, as some teacher education departments intentionally place student teachers in high-income, high-performing schools so they do not scare student teachers away from teaching (Ronfeldt, 2012). Evidence from this course suggests that the opposite approach—meaningful engagement in Title I schools—may be what is needed to persuade education majors to seek jobs in such schools, which are typically harder to staff.

### Discussion and Lessons Learned

This service-learning course worked against some of the primary incentive structures for all involved. Students are lured to want easy classes with high grades. Faculty are lured toward classes that are not too time-intensive. Nonprofit leaders are drawn to produce short-term, highly visible service opportunities to entice volunteers and excite donors. School leaders rarely have the time to participate in CBR. And service-learning professionals can feel pressured to deliver direct-service courses that are easy to manage and that look good in university publications (Blosser, 2016).

The United States is a society of deeply embedded structural injustice. If faculty want to teach students to recognize, analyze, and work against these injustices, then they have to teach courses that push back against them (Gorski, 2018). If faculty want students to learn how to “uproot the system,” then the courses they teach have to overturn the traditional academic incentive structures. This course models that work. It not only teaches for justice-oriented outcomes—it embodies them.

To achieve these outcomes, the authors used and developed some best practices. Foremost,

the course worked because it evolved organically from existing relationships between the instructor, the service-learning director, and the community partners (Pigza, 2016; Quaranto & Stanley, 2016). The preparation for this class was time-consuming for all involved. The planning stage required numerous meetings between the instructor and the community partner as well as calls with the chairs of the university IRB and school district IRB. During the semester, there were two IRB applications to file, instruments and protocols to craft and amend, and logistical concerns to work out, such as transportation, securing interview spaces, and scheduling. It was a lot. The rewards, however, were monumental. The class produced data that contributed to actual change in the community, which is often lacking in CBR classes (Beckman & Wood, 2016). It deepened relationships and partnerships. It transformed students’ worldviews and professional goals. It helped nurture a sense of community responsibility and good citizenship in students and school stakeholders (Colby et al., 2003).

The course also required the students and community partners to rethink service. Many community members are used to being served “by” the university, but this course gave them opportunities to be heard, to have the university work on their behalf, and to work with the students and professor. Similarly, consistent with Freire’s (1970) problem-posing education and its contemporary offshoots of viewing students as partners in service-learning (Cook-Sather et al., 2014), the course positioned students as cocreators of knowledge alongside the professor and community members. This experience changed how these first-year students understood education and their world. The course helped students recognize their social location, privilege, and prejudice, and it showed them ways inequality is systemic, structural, and perpetuated by schools (Gorski, 2018). It promoted justice, as it showed students how to drop their paternalistic ideas of service and join with others in raising critical consciousness and promoting community action. The class moved students through a process of awakening to justice issues and lured many of them into social action.

If the service-learning field is going to help promote justice outcomes, this is the kind of class that is needed. It takes courage because there must be trust among the students, the community partner, and the professor. And it takes grace. Some students have their worlds blown open, and it takes a special kind of community partner

and professor to walk alongside them, ensuring that they continue down the path of discovery and do not shut down and reject it all. It's not a class someone can copy and paste. It's built around a particular context and particular people. But it's a method that can be replicated: a method of developing relationships, seeking ways to promote justice, and working with community members.

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## About the Authors

Allison H. Blosser is an assistant professor in the Department of Leadership Studies and program coordinator of education studies at High Point University. Joe Blosser is an associate professor in the Department of Religion and Philosophy and executive director of the Center for Community Engagement at High Point University.