Advocating for a Cause: Civic Engagement in the K-6 Classroom

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Abstract

In response to the marginalization of social studies instruction in U.S. elementary schools, these teacher educators developed a study to explore the impact that service-learning might have on the preparation of elementary teacher candidates. These authors specifically designed a study in which elementary teacher candidates created and implemented an interdisciplinary unit in which service learning was embedded as a critical piece of academic instruction for elementary students. Quality controls for the instructional units were ensured through the provision of instruction for the service-learning component for the elementary teacher candidates prior to their clinical practice semester. Data for the study were generated through pre- and post-surveys, focus groups, and document analysis. Findings revealed that elementary teacher candidates reported a greater understanding of service-learning, a greater degree of teacher efficacy, and perception of an increased notion of civic engagement by their students as a result of having created and implemented the interdisciplinary instructional unit during their clinical practice semester.

Introduction

Fifty years ago, Martin Luther King, Jr. raised awareness about the importance of service when he said, "Everybody can be great...because anybody can serve." In that spirit, this article situates service-learning as a way to enhance teaching and learning in public schools. Service-learning in the 21st Century casts a new light on the ways in which the civic mission of schools can advocate for the silenced. To that end, we define service-learning as instruction that includes any of the following: direct service, indirect service, research, and advocacy. It is through the inclusion of advocacy that P-12 students and their teachers can act on behalf of marginalized groups who may be largely silenced in society. Through this project-based experience with their students, teacher candidates not only develop and exercise their leadership skills, but also their citizenship skills (Lester, 2015).

As teacher educators, we came together with the common understanding that, because civic engagement and service-learning are marginalized in schools, young children are missing

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valuable opportunities to learn about social responsibility, personal responsibility, citizenship, and social justice (National Commission on Service-Learning, 2002). With this common understanding, we developed a study to explore how clinical practice candidates might implement service-learning into an interdisciplinary instructional unit and the impact that doing so might have on children's learning as perceived by the candidates.

Teacher education has recently shifted to inquiry and outcomes. This method of critical analysis and reflective practice is such that teachers act as researcher to improve practice on a consistent basis. Recent reforms in teacher education push for more active learning through real-word experiences where such opportunities as engagement in neighborhoods, community agencies and local institutions afford college students opportunities for meaningful work (Bettencourt, 2015). This specific type of collaboration between P-16 students and the community can be attained through service-learning (Couse & Russo, 2006).

Context of Study

In the spring semester of 2015, two faculty members of the Department of Teacher Education in a mid-size public university in the northeastern United States launched a study to explore the effects of implementing a service-learning project during the clinical practice semester. A group of elementary clinical practice candidates (n = 38) were assembled at the beginning of the semester for an introduction to service-learning through a large group assembly followed by an informational PowerPoint presentation that was emailed to each candidate. The candidates were provided with a definition of service-learning; exemplars of service-learning projects; and then brainstormed ideas for designing and implementing an interdisciplinary teaching unit with service-learning embedded, for an overall instructional design. The clinical practice candidates were placed in surrounding area school districts in K-5 classrooms. As part of their clinical practice experience, candidates were asked to embed a service-learning project into the preexisting requirement of planning and teaching an interdisciplinary thematic unit. The service-learning projects could reflect any of the following types: direct service, indirect service, research, or advocacy, as defined by Berger-Kaye (2004). As the teacher candidates planned and implemented their service-learning projects within their elementary classrooms, some key findings were revealed.

The research questions presented were consistent with a broader sense of the impact of teacher education programs and its connection to child outcomes. The following three Research questions guided the study:

1) What do elementary teacher candidates know and perceive about service-learning?

2) How might elementary teacher candidates embed service-learning into instructional units during clinical practice?

3) What impact does service-learning have on teacher candidates' perceptions regarding their ability to impact their students' lives through civic engagement?

The purpose of this study was to measure teacher education candidates' perceptions regarding both their own self efficacy towards civic engagement as well as their planned instructional impact on their students' civic engagement.

Applying the Existing Knowledge Base

The service-learning projects were designed to develop civic engagement in elementary school settings by building upon the foundations and research of service, beginning with the work of Robert Coles. According to Coles (1993) there are seven types of service, which include social and political activism, community service, personal gestures and encounters, charity, religious sanctioned action, government sanctioned action, and service to country. Social and Political activism involve activities that represent a desired outcome or change such as demonstrations, protests, media or print campaigns. Community service affords the opportunity for volunteers to work in a variety of settings such as schools, hospitals, soup kitchens, nursing homes, or animal shelters. The third type of service includes personal gestures and encounters and is represented by a solitary deed in response to a singular setting. Charity, another type of service involves giving something tangible such as money, food, clothing, furniture, or transportation. The fifth type of service involves religiously sanctioned actions such as building churches, clinics, teaching, and other religiously inspired actions around the world. Government sanctioned action is a broad type of service that can involve organizations such as the Peace Corps, but can also include such actions as assisting with voter registration or beautifying local

state and/or national parks. The final type of service is service to country. Activities in the armed forces, the USO, or the American Red Cross are some examples of this type of service.

For the purposes of this study, we have focused on five of the seven types of service as defined by Coles (1993). We believe that these five types encompassed civic engagement in an academic setting. Social and political activism, community service, personal gestures and encounters, charity, and government sanctioned actions were included in the focus areas.

In order to enact service in an academic setting, educators must take ordinary community service and develop it into what is called service-learning. Service-learning is a type of service that is interdisciplinary, embedded, and assessed (Eyler, 2002; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Jacoby & Associates, 1996; O'Byrne, 2006). To that end, service-learning is connected to a course, unit of study, or content area. Service-learning, as opposed to community service projects, are embedded within the curriculum and assessed according to standards and objectives. Further, service-learning is intended to be systemic and long-term in classrooms in order to foster students' burgeoning sense of civic engagement (Scott & Graham, 2015).

According to Eyler (2002), service-learning that is connected with academic study and deep reflection result in the greatest impact on student learning and dispositions regarding community engagement. Reflective service-learning results in numerous benefits for students such as raising student interest and engagement within their communities, developing life-long learning and problem solving skills, and helping students understand social issues. This study acknowledges connections between experiential learning, service-learning, and community building. A link arose between having our pre-service teachers incorporate service-learning and their own cognitive development. Service-learning experiences prepares candidates to strategically identify a social problem, design a plan, facilitate motivation and engagement for their young students, and reflect upon the impact and importance of the project. The service-learning component, when added to the current curriculum, provides connections to socially relevant issues that allows for a more connected learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999).

Berger-Kaye (2004) defines and describes four types or categories of service-learning: direct service, indirect service, advocacy, and research. Direct service is described as interpersonal interactions, which can include working with animals. Direct service follows a sequence from beginning to end that allows students to see social justice in action. Examples of

direct service include tutoring at-risk students or working at an animal shelter. In indirect service, however, students do not have direct interpersonal interactions with those who will benefit from the service. Instead, students engage in activities that focus on cooperation, team building, prioritizing, and organizing in indirect service. Examples of indirect service include constructing park benches or preparing kits for hospitalized patients. Advocacy is defined as the intent to create awareness and/or promote social action about an issue of public interest. While engaged in advocacy, students learn about perseverance, systems and processes, and working with adults. Examples of advocacy include letter writing campaigns, petitions, collecting donations for a cause, or sponsoring a town meeting. The final type of service-learning, research, involves students in finding, gathering, and reporting information that is centered around topics or issues in the public interest. While engaged in research, students learn how to conduct research, make discriminating judgments, and work systematically. Examples of research include studying the impact of bottled water versus tap water, doing experiments, and conducting interviews (Berger-Kaye, 2004).

Framework for Study

Drawing on a constructivist approach to progressive education, this study emphasizes meaningful and active engagement for students through service-learning. Hahn (2010) states that, "Importantly, today the dominant constructivist paradigm posits that youth are active constructors of meaning rather than passive recipients of adult messages." (p. 6). Service-learning actively engages children in activities that either directly or indirectly support a social cause as well as exposes them to issues of social justice (Billig, 2000). Jacoby & Associates (1996) state that, "Service-learning programs are also explicitly structured to promote learning about the larger social issues behind the needs to which their service is responding."(p. 7)

Further, preliminary discussions with candidates in focus groups and with classroom cooperating teachers suggest a deeper understanding of how service-learning is linked to civic engagement. This can lead to a more meaningful development of a social justice stance for all constituents.

There are many benefits for the student population, both at the P-12 and university levels for engaging in service-learning. According to Scott (2008), an immediate benefit is active

community participation. A long term benefit and outcome is that students will have increased systemic, civic engagement (Scott & Graham, 2015). Another benefit, according to Niegocki et al. (2012) is that when students are engaged civically, they are able to cultivate a capacity as individuals to enact social justice efforts. They can conceptualize empowerment as a process of strengthening their skills and developing resources. "Social justice efforts do not need to be grand, complicated, large-scale undertakings in order to spark change and have a positive impact on a community." (p. 53)

Wade (2003) suggests that service-learning is a meaningful experience in building real relationships through community service and academic skills. The Center for Civic Education (1994) states that, although young people may engage in community service, they are less likely to engage in the political process of our democracy. Related to constructivism, if students are actively engaged in meaningful service, they are likely to continue to do so on into adulthood (Shiller, 2013).

In keeping with a constructivist approach to service-learning, involving students in the selection process of service-learning projects increases impact. Research suggests "The simple act of asking students, engaging them in the issue-identification process, has power. The conversation itself ignites motivation." (Dundon, 1999, p. 34) Sudeck and Hartman (2009) also found that when students are directly involved with the project selection process, students demonstrated gains both academically and in terms of their self-efficacy as citizens.

Transformational Learning and Advocacy

Building on the work of Sudeck, Hartman (2009) and Dundon (1999), service-learning is transformational and builds an advocacy stance in our students. To that end, through engagement in service-learning, students begin to see the impact they have on the community and other people. For example, Ethridge (2006) sees service-learning as an effective method and a catalyst for engaging children in advocacy efforts. Research also supports that there is a link between academic curriculum and civic engagement. From that transformation, springs advocacy, which enhances ones awareness in ethical and political contexts (Cairn & Keilsmeier, 1991; Root & Furco, 2001).

In looking at the reality of youth culture, the importance of engaging students in service-learning becomes even more critical. Barton (2005) states,

> Young people believe that an individual can't make a difference. They see themselves as customers of government with no real responsibilities other than to consume the services offered…Finally, they believe that politics is fundamentally irrelevant and they have little interest beyond casting the occasional vote or signing a petition. (p. 75)

Without a direct connection to a specific subject or course content, students can fail to attach meaning to service-learning (Eyler & Giles, 1999). So therefore, this study followed a constructivist approach to service-learning in the classroom though the efforts of clinical practice candidates whereby their students participated in the selection of social and civic issues that are meaningful to them. Hence, the process of embedding service-learning into instruction teaches clinical practice candidates and their students of their worth as advocates and participants in a democratic society. "…we should help [students] to formulate possibilities for action to change the world to make it more democratic and just." (Banks, 2004, p. 291).

Methodology

This study represents a mixed-methods research design with a concurrent transformative strategy approach (Terrell, 2012).

Participants

This study took place within a public teacher education preparation program at a mid-sized university in the northeast. The participants were thirty-eight pre-service teachers in their final semester of study involved in clinical practice. Participants were selected as a group enrolled in the Clinical Practice Experience. Thirty-three of the pre-service teachers were female and five male. The candidates were all seeking elementary education certification. Thirty-two of the teachers were Caucasian, four African-American, one Asian, and one listed as other ethnical background. This 15-week experience concludes their academic degree program and leads to a state teaching certificate. Prior to the study, the researchers received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and participants signed an informed consent form volunteering for the study. The

researchers directly supervised a seven of these teacher candidates and served as a resource to the others via email.

Instruments and procedures

The triangulated data for this study was collected through pre- and post-surveys consisting of Likert scale rated questions administered at the beginning and again at the end of the clinical practice semester, three different focus groups following implementation of the projects, and document analysis of candidates' service-learning oriented instructional units collected as assessments. The survey instrument asked candidates to self-report a rating regarding their current degree of civic engagement, their understandings of service-learning, and their ability to design and implement an interdisciplinary unit with service-learning embedded into elementary classroom instruction. The survey consisted of eight questions using a 5-point Likert scale where 0 = Not at all, 1 = A Little, 2 = Moderately, 3 = Very, and 4 = Extremely. Survey questions are listed below in Table 1. The survey instrument was validated prior to the study by administration to a pilot group of teacher education candidates for content and construct validity. Submitted surveys were anonymous and collected within the candidates' seminar course. Responses to the pre- and post-surveys were tallied and descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data.

Table 1

Pre and Post Survey Questions

1. I believe that having an impact on community problems is within my reach.

2. I understand how service-learning can be integrated into the curriculum in major content areas.

3. I plan to implement service-learning in my future classroom.

4. I am knowledgeable about strategies to implement an initiative that improves or supports the community.

5. I am confident in my ability to plan and imbed service-learning in the curriculum.

6. I am able to design strategies to assess student growth in service-learning.

7. Given the demands on classroom teachers, how relevant is curriculum imbedded service-learning?

8. Through service-learning I believe that I can make a difference in my students' lives.

Note. Each question was answered using a 5 point Likert scale where 0 = Not at all, 1 = A Little, 2 = Moderately, 3 = Very, and 4 = Extremely.

The second form of data collected was through a Focus Group Protocol. Teacher candidates participated in the focus group within their seminar course after the service-learning instructional units had been taught. The focus group questionnaire was developed by the researchers and then validated by administration to a pilot group of teacher education candidates for content and construct validity and is provided below in Table 2. The focus groups were recorded using an iPad and later transcribed and cross-checked for accuracy. Three separate focus groups were conducted with candidates involving roughly a dozen candidates in each group. The results were analyzed by coding the responses of the three different groups and organized according to similar themes.

Table 2

Focus Group Protocol Questions

1. What is your understanding of service-learning?
2. Describe what type of service-learning you implemented in your classroom.
3. Do you believe having done this has an impact on your own civic action?
4. Do you believe having done this project will have an impact on your students' present and future civic engagement?
5. How do you believe this project has impacted your influence as a classroom teacher?

Finally, the researchers engaged in document analysis, which closely examined the ways teacher candidates enacted service learning in their instructional units. Instructional units were evaluated according to a rubric, which teacher candidates received at the beginning of the semester. In this way, the instructional units received a holistic grade to capture the overall design of their unit, which included their incorporation of service learning for their elementary students, as well as how they were assessed. The rubric used to assess candidates' service learning plans can be seen in Table 3 below. These two elements were a component of a much larger rubric that assessed the entire performance task of the unit plan.

Table 3

Service Learning Assessment Rubric

	(0) **Unsatisfactory**	**(1)** **Developing**	**(2)** **Meets Target**	**(3)** **Exceeds Target**
Service Learning Lesson Integration	Candidate did NOT implement lessons targeting one of the four SL tasks.	Candidate attempted to implement lessons targeting one of the four SL tasks.	Candidate fully implemented lessons targeting one of the four SL tasks.	Candidate thoroughly and exceptionally implemented lessons targeting one of the four SL tasks.
Assessment of Student Growth for Service Learning	Candidate did NOT assess student growth related to a SL project.	Candidate adequately assessed student growth related to the SL project.	Candidate effectively assessed student growth related to the SL project.	Candidate effectively assessed student growth related to the SL project in multiple ways.

At the beginning of the teacher candidates' clinical practice semester candidates received instruction on embedding service-learning within instructional units during their orientation for clinical practice. The purpose of the instructional assembly was to provide teacher candidates with information about service-learning, the types of service-learning, and providing examples of how service-learning can be implemented in the elementary curriculum. At the conclusion of the orientation assembly, teacher candidates were emailed the instructional PowerPoint on service learning to use as a reference during their planning stages.

Teacher candidates were allowed to develop their own service learning projects in collaboration with their cooperating teachers, the extent curriculum, and the needs and interests of their students. Once the topics were chosen, teacher candidates conducted research, made appropriate contacts, and developed their lesson plans. The majority of project topics revolved around the science or social studies themes for instruction, but some projects were also related to Literacy or health topics. One example consisted of a candidate who designed an

interdisciplinary science unit on habitats for second graders which included awareness and advocation for the Polar Bears' diminishing habits as a result of global warming. The unit plan involved the students reading and researching about the Polar Bears and their endangered habitats, locating where the habitats were located in the world, and partnering with an international organization called *Polar Bears International* to help save the polar bears. Students wrote persuasive letters to their fellow schoolmates and held a school-wide campaign to raise money for this professional organization. Once the money was collected, these second graders received a math lesson where they counted the money raised before they sent it to the organization.
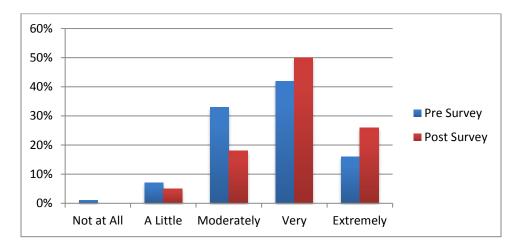
A second example of a service-learning project completed by a teacher candidate teaching in a first grade classroom consisted of indirect service for one student's family member serving in the armed forces in Afghanistan. The teacher candidate provided instruction on the armed forces, the location and geography of Afghanistan, and the sacrifices these service members make when they are deployed. The class then decided to write letters to the service member's platoon as well as assemble and ship care packages to them. Later in the semester, this same service member returned home and made a special visit to this third grade class. This was a unique experience that will be very memorable for these young students.
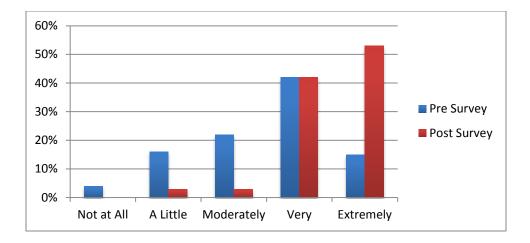
Findings

Surveys

Findings revealed that teacher candidates increased their overall understanding of and ability to embed service learning within elementary instruction. Moreover, teacher candidates reported an increase in their teacher efficacy and ability to have an impact on the communities in which they teach. On the pre-survey the candidates' responses varied reporting a minimal belief that they had the ability to have an impact on community problems. 33% moderately believed they could have an impact, 42% reported they very much believed they could have an impact, and only 16% extremely believed they could have an impact on community problems. Compared to the candidates' post-survey results which yielded stronger results, where 18% moderately believed they could have an impact, 50% very much believed they could have an impact and the remaining 26% of candidates extremely believed they could have an impact on community

problems through implementing service learning within their instruction. Overall, 94% of teacher candidates in the study indicated an increase in their belief that having an impact on community problems was within their reach. Figure 1 illustrates the data from the pre- and post-surveys related to teacher efficacy and service learning.
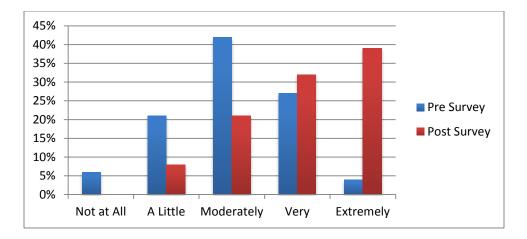

Figure 1. Results from pre- and post-surveys regarding candidates' self-reported belief on their ability to have an impact on community problems through service learning (Question 1).

Along with an increase in the belief that candidates can have an impact on community problems, candidates also reported an increase in their confidence and knowledge of how to implement service-learning into the elementary curriculum in major content areas. In fact, 100% of candidates reported an increase in their confidence and knowledge in this domain of teacher efficacy. On the pre survey, candidates self-reported that 4% had no knowledge, 16% had a little knowledge, 22% had moderate knowledge, 42% had very good knowledge, and 15% had an extreme level of knowledge. These percentages increase greatly on the post survey with 42% having very good knowledge and 52% having an extreme level of knowledge for implementation. Figure 2 illustrates the data from candidates' pre- and post-surveys for survey question 2.
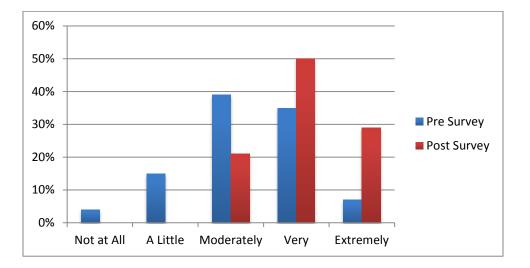
Figure 2. Results from pre- and post-surveys about candidates' self-reported confidence and knowledge of how service-learning can be integrated into the elementary curriculum in major content areas (Question 2).

In addition to an increase in candidates' teacher efficacy, 100% of candidates reported an increase in their understanding and knowledge of strategies to implement an initiative that improves or supports the community. On the pre-survey, the majority of candidates rated their knowledge of implementation strategies on or below the moderate level with only 27% rating themselves as very knowledgeable and only 4% rating themselves as extremely knowledgeable. These percentages increased dramatically on the post survey where candidates largely rated themselves above the moderate level with 32% rating themselves as very knowledgeable and 39% rating themselves as extremely knowledgeable. These results demonstrate that the candidates were successful in identifying strategies for implementation of their service-learning initiatives that improves or supports the community. Figure 3 illustrates candidates' pre and post survey responses for implementation strategies.
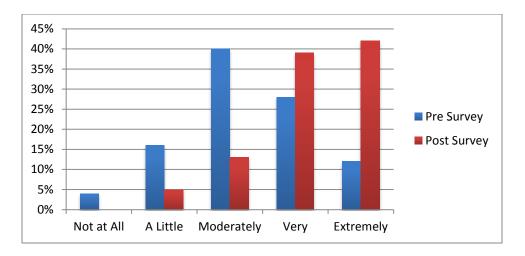
Figure 3 Results from pre and post surveys about candidates' self-reported knowledge regarding strategies to implement a service learning initiative that improves or supports the community (Question 4).

By definition, service-learning represents not only concepts embedded within the curriculum, but it is also assessed. Another important change identified as a result of this service-learning research with teacher candidates was their ability to design strategies to assess student growth in regards to service-learning. On the pre survey, 58% of candidates rated their ability to design assessments for service-learning at the moderate level or below. On the post survey however, 79% of candidates rated their ability to design assessments at very knowledgeable and above. Figure 4 illustrates the results of question 6 on the survey.

Figure 4 Results from pre and post surveys about candidates' self-reported knowledge regarding their ability to design strategies to assess student growth in service-learning (Question 6).

Of the eight questions on the pre- and post-survey, the largest increase was seen in the results of question five which asked elementary teacher candidates to rate their confidence in their ability to plan and embed service learning within their curriculum. On the pre-survey, only 40% rated confidence in their abilities above the moderate level. On the post-survey however, 81% of candidates rated themselves as either very confident or extremely confident. Results from the pre and post surveys illustrate this finding in Figure 5.

Figure 5. Results from pre- and post-surveys regarding candidates' confidence in their ability to plan and imbed service learning in the curriculum (Question 5).

Focus Groups

Three different focus groups were conducted with the elementary teacher candidates during their clinical practice seminar. Candidates were asked to respond to the focus group protocol consisting of five questions listed previously in Table 2. During the focus group sessions the majority of candidates were very excited about their service-learning projects that they had completed in their elementary classrooms and were more than eager to share. Each session had a few who were quiet and content to listen to the others share about their experiences. Each focus group was recorded using an iPad and later transcribed and cross-checked for accuracy.

In response to question one, a candidate shared, *"I feel like it gives the students their place in the world, seeing that they can actually help their community and they're not just students. They're part of a community, a place where they can make the world a better place."* This candidate's response demonstrates that they believed they were able to make an impact on their students' civic engagement. Another candidate stated, *"This is something they'll remember when they are older, and those are the most impactful lessons."* This response demonstrates that the candidates realized the value of designing lessons that were meaningful and authentic for their students.

Question two asked candidates to describe the service-learning projects that they conducted in their elementary classrooms. One candidate shared, *"In my class, our project was on 'Who's a community member?' We were able to identify a soldier serving oversees and we sent him a care package. He has been corresponding with us since we started the project and also came to visit once he arrived back home. He came into my first grade class in full uniform and brought us some pictures."* In this example the children were able to see first hand the fruits of their labor and experience the impact their service project had on the life of this soldier. A second candidate shared, *"Our class did 'How you can keep your community environment clean?' so we donated plants to the janitors in our school. Each janitor received two plants, one to take home and one to plant on the school grounds. I involved my kindergarten students in deciding what the project should be and they came up with this idea on their own!"* This candidate grasped the understanding of the value of involving her students in the decision making process for service-learning.

Question three asked candidates if this service-learning experience has had an impact on their own civic action. One candidate responded, *"Yes, I realize now that it is not as difficult as I thought it would be to get involved in a cause and to make a difference."* Another candidate replied, *"My family has often been involved in charity 5K runs and walks such as Relay for Life as I was growing up, but now this project has motivated me to become involved in my own events."* Other candidates responded in similar ways that the experience has motivated them to continue personal service projects in the future.

Question four asked candidates if they believe having done this project that it will have an impact on their students' present and future civic engagement. One candidate replied, *"My*

kids really got into it and all the time now they ask questions and think of sending things to other soldiers. They say things like 'we have to remember them' and are super into it. They have asked if they can do it again next year." The service projects provided intrinsic motivation for students as well as extrinsic. Candidates recalled that the experience was highly meaningful and valuable for their elementary students. Another candidate responded, *"It makes them [students] feel important because we also did Valentine's Day. I have two friends in the army and they're in Qatar, so we talked about how these guys cannot spend the Holidays with their families because they are fighting for us. So they made cards for them and they [students] weren't prideful, but just felt they can help them out by sending them cards to feel better so they won't be lonely. It gave them a sense of being an important part of the community too."* Candidates were able to identify the impact that the service-learning projects made on their students sense of civic engagement.

Question five asked candidates how the service learning projects impacted their influence as a classroom teacher. One candidate replied, *"It made me realize that even the kids in the younger grades realized that they could do something. You think that they're [students] so helpless and they need all the help, and then when they get to this service project and they're doing it themselves and they understand their impact on the community, it is simply amazing!"* Several candidates agreed and commented that they felt at first that a service project would be too difficult for their lower elementary students to grasp and understand, but they actually experienced the opposite. Another candidate responded, *"I think I'll definitely do it in my future classroom, especially since a lot of schools support teachers doing this type of thing and they do it as well. So, knowing now that you have support from other people in the school makes it more motivating as well."* The teacher candidates in the focus groups were 100% in agreement that the service-learning projects were very motivational for their students, that the students took ownership of the projects, and that they felt that the experience made a positive impact on their students' lives.

Document Analysis

The document analysis consisted of the elementary teacher candidates' interdisciplinary units on a thematic topic where the service-learning project was embedded. Some sample projects were as follows. Two different candidates prepared units on community workers and

planned collection drives for an animal shelter. One candidate wrote her thematic unit on Earth Day and conservation methods for second graders. The embedded service learning project involved the students donating money to purchase some plants for the school custodians to plant around the school yard as well as to take one home. Another candidate planned a thematic unit on community workers for first grade and the embedded service-learning project involved writing letters and collecting money to support the volunteer fire department. 100% of the elementary teacher candidates scored in the acceptable range (scoring a 1, 2, or 3 on a 0-3 point rubric) on the service-learning aspect of the unit plan. The service-learning portion of the assessment rubric was provided earlier in Table 3. The candidates' supervisors were required to conduct a formal observation of at least one lesson during the service-learning unit instruction. Candidates were scored according to the content, planning, and implementation of the lesson using the Danielson Framework rubric.

Overall, the findings from the triangulated data sources indicate that elementary teacher candidates' knowledge of service-learning increased as a result of having to incorporate service-learning into extant elementary curriculum. In addition to an increase in knowledge, candidates reported an increase in their teacher efficacy. Candidates also expressed an increase in their ability to make an impact on community problems as well as identifying strategies to implement initiatives that improve or support the community. Moreover, at the end of the semester, candidates effectively demonstrated their ability to design curriculum that integrated specific strategies used to implement initiatives that improve or support the community. Data from candidates' instructional units support the finding that candidates were successfully able to enact and assess service-learning into their instruction for elementary students.

Discussion

The results of this study indicate that by embedding service-learning into an instructional unit, teacher candidates elicited higher levels of student engagement and retention of information. Moreover, elementary students were engaged in social responsibility and civic engagement as a result of participating in service-learning projects within their classrooms. The clinical practice candidates found that embedded service-learning, contrary to their initial concerns, did not detract from, but rather enhanced students' higher order thinking skills and supported standards based instruction.

Furthermore, even the teacher candidates placed in early childhood settings (K-3) found that students were able to grasp concepts of fairness, community engagement, and social activism. This is in agreement with what Wade (2007) states,

> …service-learning for social justice should begin in the earliest years of schooling. If students are to develop a commitment to social justice ideals, this work should begin in the elementary years when children are concerned with "fairness" and when their empathy and perspective taking abilities are developing. (p. 158)

Findings also suggest that clinical practice candidates established competence in developing integrated curriculum that included critical engagement in civically and socially relevant concepts. Service-learning integration also prepares them for teaching in high needs communities where they can have an impact both academically and socially; such as dealing with issues of poverty, hunger, inadequate medical care, and lack of community resources. It potentially fosters a desire in candidates to teach in high-needs communities where they know that their efforts will have a positive impact.

Finally, document analysis of the clinical practice candidates' instructional units revealed several key findings. First their units displayed student-centered activities. For example, one candidate teaching in a rural community designed a unit about soil conservation and provided instruction on how the children could contribute to clean soil and a healthy environment. Another key finding was that these units provided authentic engagement, which is also associated with constructivism. One candidate provided instruction for fourth graders on the impact of bullying and invited a community social worker in as a guest lecturer about the impacts of bullying. A final key finding was the embedding of real world applications. One candidate provided instruction for second graders on the conservation efforts and the benefits of recycling. These interdisciplinary units embedded with service-learning efforts were received well by school administrators, parents, and students alike. The results of this study re-emphasized the positive impact that service-learning can have on both the teacher and the learner regarding attitudes related to social responsibility (Eyler, 2002).

Implications for Future Directions

The service-learning embedded interdisciplinary unit is now a requirement for all elementary clinical practice candidates moving forward in this teacher preparation program. Interdisciplinary units that embed service-learning can support meaningful civic engagement. In addition, students and educators will gain experience in such skills as activism, community building and the cooperative process. One future direction of this research can include quantitative measures of involvement in social activity that supports positive community change.

Conclusions

Service-learning in a variety of ways makes a lasting impact not only on future elementary teachers, but the students that they teach as well (Scott & Graham, 2015). This study demonstrated how through the simple act of embedding such methods into their instruction not only increases knowledge, but more importantly candidates' efficacy as well. If 'practice makes perfect' as the age old saying goes, then this experience will replicate itself as these teacher candidates enter into the teaching world prepped with strategies and the confidence to make a difference. Service-learning opportunities also have a great impact on the elementary students they serve as well according to Barton (2005),

> Advocacy in the classroom has several benefits. It provides opportunities for students to do primary and secondary research; engages them in a process of discovery; and enables them to select, develop, and publish electronic and textual documents for specific audiences in an authentic rhetorical context. (p. 79)

As a result, it is recommend that service-learning be embedded into the extent curriculum in elementary schools across America as well as globally. Encouraging both teachers and students to develop their voice on social issues and increase their confidence and beliefs that they can make a difference in society just might change the world one child, one classroom, one teacher, at a time.

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