Exploring Strategies for Increasing Preservice Teachers' Awareness of the Impact of Poverty on Students

Yoksulluğun Öğrenciler Üzerindeki Etkisine İlişkin Öğretmen Adaylarının Farkındalığını Artırma Stratejileri

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Abstract

This case study of preservice teachers in a foundational education course examined instructional strategies impacting understanding of the effects of poverty on students. Preservice teachers reflected on *The Freedom Writers Diary* through journaling; interviewed a student author from that book; participated in school practicum experiences; viewed a poverty documentary; and discussed poverty scenarios. For the final project, preservice teachers researched an external contextual factor with an effect on the learning environment such as: teen pregnancy, child abuse, delinquency, a disability, or homelessness. Preservice teachers' research included an interview with a professional who worked with students who were experiencing or had previously experienced the contextual factor. Students found interactions with people connected to poverty as most beneficial. Experiences in which preservice teachers worked closely with students living in poverty developed empathy. The authors suggest university-community partnerships incorporate service learning to provide preservice teachers meaningful experiences about the impact of poverty.

Keywords: Poverty, teacher preparation, preservice teacher attitudes, disadvantaged students.

Öz

Bir vakıf eğitim kurumunda öğrenim görmekte olan öğretmen adaylarının bir ders kapsamında katıldığı bu örnek olay araştırması, yoksulluğun öğrenciler üzerindeki etkilerini anlamayı etkileyen öğretim stratejilerini incelemiştir. Araştırmaya katılan öğretmen adayları günlük tutarak, *Özgürlük Yazarları Günlüğünde* fikirlerini ortaya koymuştur. Öğretmen adayları, bu kitapta yazar olan bir öğrenci ile görüşme yapmış; öğretmenlik uygulaması deneyimlerine katılmış; yoksulluk üzerine bir belgesel seyretmiş ve yoksulluk senaryoları tartışmıştır. Öğretmen adayları dönem sonu projesi olarak; genç yaşta hamilelik, çocuk istismarı, suçluluk, bedensel özür ya da evsizlik gibi öğrenmeyi etkileyen dış bağlamsal faktörleri araştırmıştır. Öğretmen adaylarının araştırması, bu dış bağlamsal faktörlerden birini daha önce deneyimlemiş veya hala deneyimlemekte olan öğrencilerle çalışmış bir uzmanla yapılan bir görüşmeyi de kapsamaktadır. Öğrenciler yoksulluk ile bir bağlantısı olan insanlarla olan etkileşimi çok faydalı bulmuştur. Yoksulluk çeken öğrencilerle çalışan öğretmen adaylarının bu deneyimleri, onların empati geliştirmelerine yardımcı olmuştur. Araştırmacılara göre üniversite-toplum ortaklığı, öğretmen adaylarına yoksulluğun etkisi hakkında anlamlı deneyimler sunabilmek için mesleğin (hizmetin) öğrenilmesini bütünleştirmektedir.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Yoksulluk, öğretmenlerin hazırlanması, öğretmen adaylarının tutumları, dezavantajlı öğrenciler.

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Introduction

According to the Current Population Survey (CPS), the official poverty rate for Americans in 2012 was at 15%. That equates to 46.5 million people in the United States living below the poverty line of $23,050 for a family of four. The poverty rate for children under the age of 18 is even more striking. There are over 16 million children, or one in every five Americans, living in homes affected by poverty (CPS, 2013; Felling, 2013). The number of students receiving free or reduced-cost lunch at school is 20 million with only 15% of these receiving federally funded meals during the summer (Felling, 2013). US Census data (Children's Defense Fund, 2014) indicate that children are the poorest age group in the country compared to adults, including the elderly. The United States has the highest poverty rate for children of wealthy nations (Rebell & Wolff, 2012).

Because of the prevalence of poverty among children, it is critical that educators become aware of the effects of poverty on school-age students. Children who experience poverty are more likely to be exposed to conditions that make learning in the classroom difficult, negatively impacting academic success (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). The issue of poverty is further complicated by the duration, timing, and extremity of poverty (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Children who live in poverty during the critical period of early childhood have a lower completion rate of school than teens living in poverty only in the adolescent years (Jensen, 2009).

In the early years, a child's vocabulary is greatly impacted by poverty. Children in low-income families are exposed to approximately 13 million words by the age of four in contrast to double that in middle-class families (Hart & Risley, 1995). A limited vocabulary prevents a child from knowing and understanding words the teacher uses during instruction. This unfamiliarity can lead to a lack of interest in reading or negative attitude toward school. Furthermore, to avoid embarrassment in front of peers, many children with underdeveloped vocabularies refrain from class participation (Jensen, 2009).

Nutrition also plays a factor in a child's ability to function effectively in the classroom. When students have limited access to a healthy diet, it is more difficult for them to listen to the teacher, concentrate on their work, and learn content (Jensen, 2013). More cooperative behavior and better academic achievement result when children have access to nutritious food (Felling, 2013). 'Share Our Strength,' an organization committed to raising awareness of and alleviating American hunger, surveyed over a thousand teachers in K-8 classrooms regarding student hunger. Across rural, suburban, and urban settings, teachers reported childhood hunger as a significant obstacle to learning (Felling, 2013). Children who are hungry concentrate less on schoolwork and more on the time lunch will be available. The effects of hunger, including irritability and lethargy, can lead to more school nurse visits, resulting in missed instruction time, which impacts test scores (Felling, 2013).

All of the previously mentioned factors combine to affect the school achievement of students with poverty backgrounds. A study analyzing academic achievement and demographic data from the Louisiana Graduation Exit Examination (Caldas & Bankston, 1997) found that the combination of the socio-economic status (SES) of

peers' families and one's own family had a powerful influence on academic achievement. Students who live in poverty and attend schools with peers of similar backgrounds did not achieve academically at the levels of middle-class students. The 'British National Child Development Survey' (Currie & Thomas, 2001) also examined interactions between socio-economic status and test scores, finding that students experiencing poverty scored lower during their school years, leading to lower wages at middle age.

The Disconnect between Preservice Teachers and Low Socio-economic Schools

Most public school teachers in the United States were raised in white middle class households and are not prepared to teach diverse populations of students (Gay et al., 2003; Hodgkinson, 2002). Many preservice teachers have little to no personal experience or understanding of poverty until they enter a classroom (Bennett, 2008). A majority of people in the United States, including teachers, hold the belief that poor people are poor, not because of opportunity inequalities, but rather because of their own deficiencies (Rank et al., 2003). Adding to this problem is the fact that few teacher education programs address socio-economic differences; rather, race/ethnicity, special needs, and language diversity are emphasized (Hughes, 2010; Jennings, 2007). Some environmental or community factors influence a student's learning at school. These contextual factors are conditions that are part of the educational process, but external to the school (Yastrebov et al., 2015) such as teen pregnancy, drug/alcohol abuse, child abuse, delinquency, a disability of any type, homelessness, family structure such as single-parenting or foster-parenting, and gang violence.

Teachers working with students impacted by poverty are successful when they have the following three characteristics (Gehrke, 2005): (1) knowledge of their own belief systems and assumptions, (2) familiarity with the school community and environment, and (3) high student expectations. These traits are also recognized components of culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2000). Regarding the first characteristic, reflection through journaling and class discussion allows preservice teachers to examine their own social and cultural identities, leading to greater understanding of the perspectives and situations of their students (Gehrke, 2005). However, the study of poverty in the university classroom is often not experiential and instead centers on facts and figures, leaving most preservice teachers unable to empathize with students who live in poverty (Bennett, 2008, p. 253). Practical experiences, an important support for the second characteristic in which preservice teachers interact purposely with those living in poverty are therefore needed to develop compassionate attitudes and resiliency. Finally, maintaining high expectations involves recognizing the funds of knowledge of students living in poverty (Gonzalez et al., 2005) and counteracting the negative consequences of their socially disadvantaged status (Hughes, 2010).

A variety of approaches has been used to provide preservice teachers exposure to students experiencing poverty. One university required preservice teachers to participate in a driving tour during which they traveled through neighborhoods of their potential students (Bennett, 2008), while other institutions have offered international

practica (Malewski & Phillion, 2009; Menard-Warwick & Palmer, 2012). Additional example projects (Sleeter, 2001) involved students collecting ethnographic research data from an urban community, tutoring students, and having field experiences at low socio-economic schools.

Many public schools, as well as education programs at the university level, have used Ruby Payne's book (2001) to teach middle class teachers about poverty. However, Gorski (2008) noted that Payne's work places blame on those living in poverty, reinforcing stereotypes. In a study examining the views of preservice teachers utilizing Payne's work to learn about working with urban populations of students, Smiley and Helfenbein (2011) found that preservice teachers began to view poverty as a lifestyle choice, leading to deficit thinking.

Research Question

Most teacher preparation programs are only beginning to explore ways to prepare teachers to successfully teach and assist students experiencing poverty; therefore, a research investigation was conducted to determine the relative efficacy of a variety of instructional strategies introducing preservice teachers to the effects of poverty on students. The following research question was addressed: Which education experiences and teaching strategies assist preservice teachers in gaining better understandings of the effects of poverty on children at school?

Method

Research Design

The objective of this research project was to determine the most effective strategies for increasing preservice teachers' awareness and understanding of poverty's effects at school through a case study of 21 preservice teachers. According to Creswell (2002, p. 485) "a case study is an in-depth exploration… …of a bounded system based on extensive data collection" The boundaries of the current case are 21 preservice teachers enrolled in their first foundational education course at a small university in the Midwestern United States. The study was conducted with preservice teachers of two sections of a foundational education course taken before admission to the university's teacher education program. Several course activities were compared to determine efficacy in assisting preservice teachers in understanding the impact of poverty on students. The research project was undertaken by four faculty members concerned about addressing poverty in teacher preparation: two novice researchers teaching the foundational courses, and two colleagues from another institution who were more experienced in research and who provided additional insights for data analysis and interpretation.

Participants and Setting

Study participants were 21 preservice teachers (14 female, 7 male) ranging from 18-56 years with a mean age of 28.3 years. This sample was representative of the larger university population at this location, which averaged age 31 with a little more than two female students for each male student. The study was approved by the over-

seeing university's human subjects committee with all participants providing written consent. The study took place during two sections of the eight-week course titled, 'Foundations of American Education' at a small, rural, Midwestern private university in the United States, taught by different instructors. Field placements for the practicum component of the course were in kindergarten through twelfth grade schools near mid-sized cities or in rural settings. Not all placements were equal with regard to the number of school age students experiencing poverty. See Table 1 for details.

Table 1. Participation in various activities according to course section

Activity	Section 1	Section 2
Internet-facilitated live Interview with a Freedom Writer	no	yes
Poor Kids Documentary	yes	no
Reading and Reflecting on the Book, *The Freedom Writers Diary*	yes	yes
Final Project	yes	yes
Practicum	yes	yes
Scenarios from Ruby Payne's Book	yes	no

Pretest-posttest

Among other Foundations of American Education topics, preservice teachers in both sections participated in the following activities: (1) reading and reflecting through journal entries on the book, *The Freedom Writers Diary* (Gruwell, 2009); (2) participating in a 20-hour practicum experience at a school; and (3) creating and delivering a poster presentation and final project on an assigned contextual factor experienced and written about by teenage high school students in *The Freedom Writers Diary* book. *The Freedom Writers Diary* is a compilation of journal entries by low socio-economic students in Long Beach, California who document their experiences of child abuse, homelessness, delinquency, drug abuse, and other factors that affected their attitudes and performance at school. The book is narrated by an idealistic English Composition teacher who used literature and writing to empower her students with hope, an understanding of intolerance, and the skills to become resilient activists changing their world. Preservice teachers in one section connected live to a freedom writer using Internet technology for the interview. Preservice teachers in the other section viewed and wrote a response paper about the PBS documentary video titled, *Poor Kids* (Neumann, 2012). They also read scenarios from Ruby Payne's book, *A Framework for Understanding Poverty* (Payne, 2005). After doing so, preservice teachers analyzed resources available to the families and children in those scenarios.

All preservice teachers in the course completed weekly journal entries that were at least 10 sentences long. These were collected a few days before the final exam and photocopied for later analysis. A pretest-posttest questionnaire was administered. The questions follow:

    1. Do you have prior experiences working or volunteering in a preK-12 setting? If you do have prior experience, please describe and tell how long each experience lasted.

2. Do you have any personal experience with poverty? Please explain.

3. State and then explain your definition of poverty.

4. Do you think poverty impacts students at school? If not, why not; if so, explain how.

5. What do you believe are signs of poverty in children at school? List at least three examples.

6. How do teachers need to respond to having students from poverty backgrounds in the classroom?

7. What recommendations would you give to a teacher working with students experiencing poverty? Give at least three recommendations.

Posttest Only: 8. What insights do you have about the issue of poverty as a result of your experiences from this course?

Posttest Only: 9. Rate each of the following course activities for efficacy in helping you understand poverty's effect on school-age students on a scale of 1 to 10 with '1' being ineffective and '10' being very effective: The Public Broadcast System (PBS) video *Poor Kids*; reading, journaling about, and discussing the book titled, The *Freedom Writers Diary*; the poster presentation project focused on a contextual factor (e.g., drug/alcohol abuse, child abuse, homelessness, gang violence, etc.); the practicum experience; the scenarios from Ruby Payne's book; and the Internet-facilitated live interview with a freedom writer. Please give comments to explain your ratings.

Data Analysis

Data from the pretest and posttest responses were entered onto a spreadsheet for analysis. The constant comparison method was used in which similar responses to each of the questions were grouped into categories while simultaneously comparing all the responses to the given question. The categories were continually refined as additional responses were read, shifting the category labels and defining new relationships (Dye et al., 2000).

The investigators read the journals written about the *Freedom Writers* book by preservice teachers. Preservice teachers wrote a page-long journal entry seven times during the course. The researchers divided these page-long entries into passages of one to five sentences expressing the same theme. Two hundred twenty-eight passages from all journal entries of a randomly selected half of the participating group of preservice teachers (11 of the 21 preservice teachers) were entered onto a spreadsheet and sorted into categories that reflected the main idea of each of the passages. Researchers used the constant comparison method, as noted above, for this purpose. Additionally, excerpts from the journals were selected to triangulate findings with the pretest-posttest data.

Results

Previous Experiences of Preservice Teachers upon Entering the Course

On the pretest, 20 out of the 21 preservice teachers reported prior experience with pre-kindergarten through high school students. About half of these preservice teacher study participants had tutored younger students while they were in high school and the rest were involved in before-or after-school programs or worked in some capacity teacher aides. Additionally, several preservice teachers volunteered in various settings to gain experience while serving their community.

On the pretest, 10 preservice teachers reported prior experience with poverty, eight said that they had no prior experience with poverty, and three said they were unsure if their experiences would be classified as poverty-related or not. Many preservice teacher participants who reported experiences related to poverty gained them through working at high-poverty schools or volunteering at "soup kitchens" – charities serving meals to the poor. Others stated they personally experienced poverty through their family (not enough food, bill collectors, homeless for a few months) or through interactions with others who lived in poverty in their community. One preservice teacher,who was a single mother living paycheck to paycheck wrote, *'My daughter summed it up well when she was five: I asked her if she felt we were poor, she said, "Poor! We're not poor. We have fun all the time."'* This statement indicates that perceptions of what being poor 'looks like' may differ significantly among individuals.

Changes from Pretest to Posttest

Table 2 shows preservice teacher participants' definitions of poverty at the time of the pretest and posttest. Poverty has many aspects that affect people in various ways. On the pretest, most preservice teachers recognized the basic features of poverty: lack of necessities and lack of adequate income. On the posttest, new insights of the broader prevalence of poverty and its emotional impact of people surfaced.

Table 2. Pretest and posttest definitions of poverty

Frequency		Components of Reported Definition of Poverty
Pretest	Posttest	
15	13	Cannot meet daily necessities
11	8	Income is inadequate; below federal poverty income guide-line
3	1	Struggling to find and maintain a job
3	2	Trapped in poverty with no way to improve status
2	2	Few resources or unaware of resources
2	3	Lack of certainly that one will have the money for things
2	0	May not own a car or home
2	1	Ranges from being homeless to receiving free lunch at school
1	0	Feeling of hopelessness in being stuck in poverty
1	0	Living in poor conditions
0	2	Stress related to lack of security and safety
0	2	Poverty is broader and more prevalent than I realized
0	1	Making difficult choices of how to spend limited money
0	1	Many children living in poverty experience abuse
0	1	The poor are often stereotyped
0	1	Trapping agents are gangs, drug use, limited access to education

Preservice teacher participants' pretest and posttest responses to the question, *'Do you think poverty impacts students at school? If so, how?'* are shown in Table 3. On the posttest, preservice teachers evidenced a greater awareness of social and emotional issues and of how lack of resources creates a barrier to academic success at school. At the end of the course, preservice teachers realized that poverty does not have positive effects, as two participants had expressed previously. Preservice teacher participants also noted that school-age students may be quick to anger, show a lack of value for school, or become involved in criminal activities.

Preservice teachers' responses to what they believed to be signs of poverty in school-age students in the school setting on the pretest and posttest are shown in Table 4. On the posttest, preservice teachers demonstrated greater understanding of the lack of resources available to poor school-age students including limited clothing options, lack of appropriate clothing for weather (especially winter), regular meals, and good hygiene. In addition, participants' recognition of the factor of fatigue and the impact it has on school functioning was more frequently noted at the end of the course. Preservice teachers recognized how factors at home might cause other issues such as poor mental focus, lack of social skills, inability to participate in extracurricular activities, and low achievement.

Table 3. Participant reported impacts of poverty at school

Frequency		Components of Reported Impact of Poverty at School
Pretest	Posttest	
6	6	Students worry about basic necessities being met such as food, clothing, cleanliness, shelter
5	7	Social effects: judged by other students who are not living in poverty; labeled and treated differently; students are envious of others not living in poverty; low self-esteem
4	1	Lack of middle to upper class 'extra things' such as spending money, fashionable clothing, extracurricular activities, trips
3	3	Inadequate or irregular availability of meals affecting health
3	6	Lack of focus or concentration due to hunger/improper care
3	4	Emotional issues: Uncertainty at home, stress, and lack of emotional control
3	4	Lack of resources at home/school to promote academic success such as books, computers, art supplies
2	3	Impacts whole child in every area of life
2	1	Inadequate supervision by parents/appropriate role models
2	1	No response
2	0	Positive effect of poverty is that students see education as a way out and therefore are motivated to study
2	1	Supporting family is a priority over school such as staying home to care for siblings
1	5	Academic achievement is affected
1	3	Limited clothing options/appropriate clothing for weather
1	2	Lack if value for education; may not stay in school; dropouts
0	2	Trouble with the law

Insights Into Poverty's Impact on Students After Course Activities

Table 5 shows pretest and posttest responses to, *'What recommendations do you have for teachers working with students in poverty?'* On the posttest, preservice teacher participants demonstrated a much greater awareness of the need to be understanding, supportive, sensitive, and willing to help. In addition, being compassionate, patient, and showing empathy towards these school-age students were identified as important. Preservice teachers noted they were cognizant of the fact that knowing about contextual factors and understanding how they relate to classroom performance is necessary when working with students experiencing poverty. Preservice teachers were more aware of the need to make accommodations for the lack of technology and other resources in the home when assigning homework and projects. Although it is important to be aware of the background and history of students living in poverty, preservice teachers acknowledged that teachers should avoid negatively labeling or judging school-age students because of their situations.

Table 4. Participant responses to"What do you believe are signs of poverty of children in school?"

Frequency		Reported Signs of Poverty
Pretest	Posttest	
11	18	Limited clothing options/lack of proper clothing
9	13	Hunger
8	12	Lack of good hygiene
3	2	Undesirable behavior
3	6	Fatigue
3	1	Lack of school supplies
2	2	Absenteeism
2	1	Abuse
2	3	Lack of focus
2	1	Little to no parental involvement
2	3	Moves a lot
2	4	Quiet/lack of social skills
2	1	Receives free or reduced lunches/ breakfast at school
1	0	Difficulty maintaining friendships
1	0	Difficulty with standardized tests
1	1	Feelings of hopelessness
1	3	Inability to participate in extracurricular activities
1	0	Independent
1	2	Emotional issues
1	2	Look unhealthy
1	3	Low academic achievement/test scores
1	0	Low self esteem
1	0	Tells tall tales
0	1	Arrive early; stay late
0	1	Disinterest in education
0	1	Trouble with the law

Table 5. Participant recommendations for working with students experiencing poverty

Frequency		Reported Recommendations
Pretest	Posttest	
12	22	Be understanding, supportive, empathizing, compassionate, patient, sensitive to their needs, willing to help
8	5	Extra attention and academic assistance
6	7	Recognize and work with contextual factors of understanding student situations; relate to students; Understand how poverty impacts the school environment
4	3	Treat them the same as other students
2	6	Accommodate for lack of technology/resources at home
2	0	Keep documentation
2	9	Don't judge or label
2	2	Ensure access to meals and snacks, if needed
2	4	Know/share resources with families
2	3	Have high expectations; be open minded
1	3	Give hope/Encourage pursuit of higher education
0	1	Make the classroom safe and fun
0	1	Help them get involved with extracurricular activities

Table 6 shows preservice teachers' insights about poverty after taking the course. Preservice teacher participants reported realizing that poverty affects more individuals than they had previously thought. They acknowledged that poverty exists almost everywhere and that it was more of problem than previously realized. Preservice teachers also expressed a desire to work with and help those living in poverty. Preservice teachers reported gaining knowledge of the indicators of poverty and how these factors impact students in the classroom.

Table 6. Preservice teacher insights about poverty after participating in the eight-week course

Frequency	Reported Insights
10	Affects more individuals in more areas than previously thought
4	Desire to help those in poverty/take action in own community
4	Understanding of how to relate to and help students in poverty be successful
3	Greater awareness of indicators of poverty in the classroom
3	Poverty looks different; might not always be obvious
2	Children in poverty are the same as other children
2	Important not to judge those living in poverty
2	Increase in knowledge of how poverty affects student learning
2	Stronger feelings regarding issue of poverty
1	No response
1	Poverty may result in involvement in gangs, drugs, lack of education, and generations of poverty for families

Efficacy of Presented Activities

Table 7 shows the poverty-related activities in which preservice teachers participated during the course. On the posttest, preservice teachers were asked the following question, *'What course activities had the greatest effect on increasing your knowledge of poverty and its effect on students in school?* Rate each of the following course aspects by circling a number and then explain your rating.' A '1' indicated the least effect while '10' indicated the greatest effect. The data collected is reflective of two different course sections and therefore, the number of raters differs depending on which students actually participated in the course activities. It is also important to note that not all preservice teacher participants responded to all of the questions.

Table 7. Participant mean ratings of different course activities

Activity	Mean Rating	Number of Respondents
Internet-facilitated live Interview with a Freedom Writer	10.0	9
Poor Kids Documentary	8.7	11
Reading and Reflecting on the Book, *The Freedom Writers Diary*	8.4	21
Final Project	8.0	20
Practicum	7.4	20
Scenarios from Ruby Payne's Book	7.4	7

Video Documentary

The documentary *'Poor Kids'* provided participants with insight into the lives of real students living in poverty in their own state. Preservice teacher participants reported that the video provided an opportunity for them to more fully understand the daily struggles of those students living in poverty and how these problems can potentially affect their behavior in the classroom. Some preservice teachers reported they were able to envision ways in which to help students living in poverty. Preservice teachers also remarked that the video gave a face and a voice to poverty along with awareness that poverty is everywhere, even in small towns.

Reading, Journaling, and Book Discussion

After reading the book titled, *The Freedom Writers Diary*, and then reflecting on it section by section through journal entries, preservice teachers found that the book, journaling, and group discussion assisted them understand the lives and situations of students. One preservice teacher wrote in her journal, *'Sometimes what these kids have been through is so shocking that I can hardly read it.'* This activity also increased awareness of how poverty affects school-age students and ways in which teachers can respond or help. Referring to the high school English teacher in the book, Mrs. Gruwell, one preservice teacher commented in a journal entry, *'The growth (of the students) is incredible. We should all be so lucky to contribute to a student's life someday in some way.'* Another preservice teacher discussed Mrs. Gruwell's struggle with being labeled and stereotyped because she was a minority at her school. *'Mrs.*

Gruwell didn't like being labeled and from that she was a better teacher. She didn't like being stereotyped and therefore, she could understand the students better.' One preservice teacher reported that the book was proof that students in poverty can beat the odds. However, some preservice teachers thought that the book had little effect on their understanding of poverty with one person commenting that the book made it appear as though everyone was "good," resulting in less focus on the issue of poverty.

The themes derived from initial analysis of the journal entries appear in Table 8. Most students wrote about their reactions to reading sections of the *Freedom Writers' Diary* book, applying the events in the book to the career upon which they were embarking. The most frequently occurring theme was the recognition of growth and healing in the Freedom Writer students. This insight allowed preservice teachers to acknowledge the power of a teacher to assist students in their positive transformation. This is the dream of most preservice and practicing teachers, to make a useful difference in their students' lives. For example, a study by Hong (2010) of recent teacher education graduates noted that the 25 interviewees from their study "…talked about the importance of becoming a good teacher in order to make a difference in the lives of students" (p. 1536). It is not surprising that the second-most frequent theme was admiration for the teacher who was able to accomplish this goal under challenging conditions. Preservice teachers also noted the strategies used by the teacher in the third theme so that they might implement these ideas themselves. Another positive teacher characteristic, caring for students, appeared as the fourth theme. The fifth most frequent theme showed them implementing this emotion in having empathy for the Freedom Writer students in their tough or abusive situations. Preservice teachers noted their shock in reading about the horrific events that happened to the Freedom Writers. Despite many differences, preservice teachers found they could connect many of the experiences of the teacher and the Freedom Writer students to events in their own lives. Preservice teachers wrote that the persistence of the teacher and of the students inspired them and they had learned a lot about poverty with accompanying contextual factors by reading the book.

Poster Presentation Project Focused on a Contextual Factor

For the final project related to *The Freedom Writers Diary*, preservice teacher participants were assigned one contextual factor referenced in the book to research and present to their peers via a poster presentation. Given topics included: teen pregnancy, drug/alcohol abuse, child abuse, delinquency, a disability of any type, homelessness, family structure such as single-parenting or foster-parenting, and gang violence. The poster presentation included the definition of the contextual factor, statistics of school-aged students affected by that contextual factor, an interview with a teacher who was working with students experiencing the contextual factor or a first-person perspective from someone who had experienced the contextual factor personally, and a list of implications for future teachers with regard to the assigned contextual factor. Researching and presenting on a specific contextual factor from *The Freedom Writers Diary* provided preservice teachers with an increased awareness of the issues that school-age students may potentially face. Preservice teachers reported that learning occurred during personal research and also while peers shared the information via their poster

presentations. Preservice teacher participants also commented that the poster presentations allowed them to make connections between the real world and the book, *The Freedom Writers Diary*.

Table 8. Themes from an analysis of journal entries

Theme from Journal Entry	Frequency
Recognition of growth/healing/transformation in students	33
Admiration for the teacher (Ms. Gruwell)	24
Teacher's effective teaching strategy makes connections to her students	23
Empathy for students and others having it tough	20
Difficulty understanding the shocking and horrific live of Freedom Writers	17
Connection of experiences in the book to own life experiences	16
Inspired by persistence and determination of teacher and students	15
Eyes opened by life of Freedom Writer with understanding of poverty and diversity improved	14
Desire to help students and others	12
Realization of advantages in own life	11
Prejudice, fear, and stereotyping lead to a cycle of hate; wish for peace among people	10
Ms Gruwell's compassion and care for students	6
Conveying general understanding of book in own words	5
Doubt that the preservice teacher could do what the teacher did	5
Rough experiences shape attitudes and toughen students	4
Hope and the power to help others	3
Critical thinking needed in schooling	2
Introspection on own biases	2
Mentors are important	2
Poverty in America is a much bigger problem than realized	2
FW project enhanced understanding of content	1
Movie helped her connect with characters in book	1

Although the interview component of the final project was only one small aspect of the overall assignment, conducting the interviews gave preservice teachers an opportunity to further investigate how these topics from *The Freedom Writers Diary* were relevant and applicable in their communities. One preservice teacher stated, *'I learned the most about poverty from peer reports and presentations.'* For one preservice teacher, the interview had the most impact. Another preservice teacher used the words 'informative' and 'genuine' to describe the interview component of the assignment. While the poster project, in general, supported preservice teachers' learning about poverty, the interviews provided preservice teachers with an authentic, local connection to the course content. For example, information gathered from an elementary teacher pointed out that consistency is key because students thrive on the routine school provides. The importance of daily one-on-one interaction with each school-age student was also emphasized. An elementary-middle school principal also stated that the most important thing teachers can do for school age students is to build relation-

ships and in doing so, convey to them that school is a safe place with trusted adults in the school environment on whom they can rely.

Practicum Experience

Preservice teachers were assigned to a classroom to observe a cooperating teacher and interact with students for 20 hours as part of course requirements. Preservice teachers were pleased to work with real students; they were eager to learn about students' individual situations. They reported that the practicum was beneficial because it allowed them to apply what they had learned while observing the classroom teacher. Those preservice teachers who gave a low rating to this activity on the posttest did so because the students in their particular practicum placement were not living in poverty.

Internet-facilitated Live Interview with Freedom Writer

Preservice teacher participants reported that the opportunity to interview an actual Freedom Writer via an Internet connection was a powerful experience. Two of the original Freedom Writers, Tiffony and Sue Ellen, spoke to preservice teachers to explain the strategies their teacher (the author and narrator of the book) used to connect with them and prevent them from dropping out of school. Each Freedom Writer shared a personal story of a contextual that placed them at risk. Tiffony's dad was very abusive to her. Sue Ellen also came from an abusive home, was temporarily homeless, and lost her brother to sickness.

This activity made the book come to life for many participants with some noting that they now wanted to be teachers who are good role models and supportive of students. One preservice teacher reported that it made the job of teaching seem even more important. Some preservice teachers reported that class discussion and hearing about peer experiences was very beneficial to gaining more insight into the issue of poverty. Students commented that they had now made stronger connections to the ideas in the book because of the personal interviews.

Poverty Scenarios

Among the two lowest-rated course activities for assisting preservice teachers in understanding poverty were the scenarios from Payne's book (2001). Students read a variety of scenarios and determined the resources available to the school-age student and family members involved. The intended outcomes were for preservice teachers to notice how poverty affects families differently and that the typical social rules and decision-making reasoning of the middle class differ from many behaviors and motivations of persons living in poverty. Preservice teachers expressed in class discussions that the scenarios allowed them to see how quickly life may change and that all poverty situations are different. However, the activity may have promoted stereotypes by leading some preservice teachers to surmise that all individuals in poverty handle situations in the same way, based on the 'rules of poverty.' Additionally, one preservice teacher commented that reading and discussing the *Freedom Writers Diary* was much more powerful because it was nonfiction rather than hypothetical. This remark supports the idea that real experiences with those living in poverty, particularly those

of school-age students, have a greater impact on preservice teachers and their understanding of poverty.

Discussion of Findings

Preservice teachers found that all of the course activities had some positive benefit for informing them about poverty's impact on school-age students; all course activities received a rating of 7.4 or higher on a scale of 1 to10. On the posttest, preservice teachers expressed greater awareness of the social-emotional issues and contextual factors (e.g. gang activity, homelessness) associated with lack of resources and how this forms a barrier to achievement and success in the school setting (Rebell & Wolff, 2012; Yastrebov et al, 2015). At the end of the course, preservice teachers were better able to recognize poverty indicators and to have successful dispositions and strategies for assisting students (Gehrke, 2005; Gonzalez et al., 2005).

Empathy for students in poverty, identified as important by Bennett (2008), was enhanced by several activities that emotionally impacted preservice teachers. The *Freedom Writers* book presented true stories written by high school students growing up in poverty. These narratives of abuse, neglect, lack of basic necessities, or the ignorance of others assisted preservice teachers in seeing poverty's negative effects (Jensen, 2009; Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Later conversations with one of these authors via Internet video connection were regarded as particularly effective by preservice teachers. The *Poor Kids* video had a strong impact on preservice teachers because the families featured were from the same state as the preservice teachers, allowing them to see how poverty affects people geographically close to them and causing greater awareness of the high poverty rate in the United States (CPS, 2013; Felling, 2013; Rebell & Wolff, 2012). The final project in which preservice teachers interviewed school professionals working directly with school-age students from low socioeconomic backgrounds or others involved with a contextual factor and in which they researched facts about the prevalence of poverty in the United States was also regarded as useful. Providing experiences with a strong emotional impact coupled with factual information about the serious, widespread nature of poverty helped preservice teachers develop a stance for taking action (Bennett 2008).

The wide variety of course-related activities was necessary to show preservice teachers the effects of poverty in different contexts and to prepare them to help students. Just focusing on one source of information, though it may be an excellent way to illustrate poverty, does not provide the network of impacts necessary to allow preservice teachers to recognize how poverty permeates so many aspects of students' lives. Overall, preservice teachers were most affected by seeing and talking to 'real' individuals who were living in poverty or who had lived in poverty allowing them to see the need for a community approach as suggested Gehrke (2005). Those experiences were rated higher compared to simply reading scenarios because they made poverty more tangible to preservice teachers. Interview opportunities and practicum experiences in which preservice teachers worked closely with students living in poverty were judged by preservice teachers as necessary to developing a respectful, empathetic approach as an educator (Bennett, 2008).

Most teacher education programs emphasize finding a balance between coursework (content and theory) and field experiences (practice) (e.g., Allen & Wright, 2014). Findings from this study suggest that when teaching about the complex issue of poverty and its impact on students, teacher educators must employ a third approach of structured dialogue about social issues. In the current study, the activities with the greatest effect involved structured learning from a book, teacher-led discussion of a documentary video, and, most importantly, dialogue with people directly experiencing poverty or those working with school-age students from low socio-economic backgrounds. Involvement in a field-based practicum, even in settings that included students experiencing poverty, was not considered by preservice teachers to strongly impact their learning. Instead, the educational strategies that forced students to verbalize their personal thoughts about the realities and implications of poverty were rated as causing the greatest positive changes in understanding (Gehrke, 2005).

Field experiences are an important part of teacher education; however, preservice teachers often struggle to comprehend the complex nuances of events they observe in a classroom. Research has shown that preservice teachers simply do not know where to focus attention or how to make sense of all the happenings (Fadde & Sullivan, 2013; Parker, 2003). Interaction with school-age students in a school that serves large numbers of low income families is valuable, but preservice teachers may not notice the impact of poverty, instead concentrating on instructional methods or classroom management strategies. Rather, preservice teachers need structured dialogue with those with experience in poverty, or with those working with school-age students from low socio-economic backgrounds, to obtain a more informed perspective. It is through targeted dialogue, required verbalization, and shared reflections about the realities and effects of poverty that preservice teachers may develop a more complex and empathetic understanding of the effects of poverty on school-age students. It is through these targeted, dialogic experiences that preservice teachers better understand the school community (Gehrke, 2005) and funds of knowledge (Gonzalez et al., 2005) students bring to the classroom.

Most preservice teachers grow up in middle class homes with little knowledge of the homes and lives of those living in poverty (Gay et al., 2003; Hodgkinson, 2002). As one participant expressed, 'So many times when we don't see it, we forget about it.' While journaling about the book, *The Freedom Writers Diary,* one student wrote, 'I cannot relate to being at such a diverse school. The high school I went to was not diverse at all. It was and still is mainly white. I was the only black girl for all 12 years.' Another student shared,

> *"I wonder what I would do if I walked into that class as a teacher. I don't think I could have changed any of those students (the Freedom Writers), much less 150 of them. It amazes me! I want to make a difference, but I have no clue how. I was raised in a conservative family in the middle of nowhere Iowa. Most of my classmates were raised on farms".*

Therefore, preservice teachers need structured experiences to connect the facts and statistics they hear about poverty with real people, especially those living in their

local community.   Developing a more personal understanding of poverty through teacher preparation course experiences, for instance, through watching/reflecting upon videos, reading/discussing accounts of poverty in their local area and beyond or participating in service learning opportunities in the surrounding community, can promote preservice teachers seeing the specific, social-emotional impacts of poverty, as opposed to a collective categorization of the poor (Gorski, 2008; Smiley & Helfenbein, 2011). One student commented in her journal, 'This whole book (*The Freedom Writers Diary)* has made a huge difference in the way I think. I will give everyone a chance no matter what.' Another student used a journal entry to discuss his experiences with homelessness. He wrote,

> *"I have experienced homelessness myself on a very small scale but what these kids (the Freedom Writers) face each day gives me a wakeup call on the whole picture of economics and poverty in America, which is a much bigger problem than people think it is. Coming from communities that relatively have very little poverty and small percentages of financial worries, it has to be understood that it is a problem we all need to understand and maybe realize we all need to make sure that we are active in being a solution to the problem and being more caring and understanding".*

In this study, preservice teachers expressed that they had gained the most insight from genuine experiences with people. However, it is difficult for university professors to set up student interactions with persons experiencing poverty in a compassionate way without trivializing or sensationalizing their experiences. For example, it would not be kind for a class of preservice teachers to enter a soup kitchen to observe the poor as this dramatizes their situation without benefitting them. Similarly, an approach used with secondary preservice teachers in Georgia (Bennett, 2008), who were asked to form small carpools to drive around poor neighborhoods to see how people live can reinforce stereotypes and contribute to a voyeuristic perspective. Examples of appropriate activities are discussed in the next section.

Conclusion and Implications
Summary and Findings
The current study provides a starting point for determining how diverse resources and experiences can be utilized to support preservice teachers developing a better understanding of poverty. The diverse views of poverty afforded by the various course activities provided a broad foundation for preservice teachers to begin to understand the effects of poverty on students. Preservice teachers acknowledged the positive benefits from all of the course activities, but recognized that those allowing them personal contact with professionals working with those in poverty or contact directly with students experiencing poverty were most enlightening.

Implications for Teacher Preparation

Ideas for providing preservice teachers with respectful, meaningful experiences related to poverty may include expanding upon the local interviews students conducted in this course. Instead of these interviews being a small aspect of a project, perhaps the interviews could be an extended, stand-alone assignment. Students could interview professionals who work with persons living in poverty to identify effective strategies for supporting students and their families. Developing a more protracted conversation with local professionals could focus on connecting families with community resources, as well as practical suggestions for promoting resiliency among those living in or working with those of poverty circumstances.

Such interviews may become a first step in developing university–community partnerships to meet school-age student needs through service-learning as an alternative or supplement to traditional school-based field placements. In working with community partners at places such as a food pantry, public library, homeless shelter, afterschool program, or charity organization, preservice teachers may experience a more nuanced approach to helping those living in poverty, as well as adopting strategies of professionals who work with families living in poverty. Service learning may allow preservice teachers to take action to address needs in their community, while simultaneously applying course content in an experiential way. Tangible outcomes could include developing public service announcements about an organization's needs or resources, facilitating a product drive, co-authoring books for dual language learners unable to purchase these resources, or making educational materials. These activities offer students an opportunity to become civically engaged in light of the emotions stirred by learning about the challenges others face and provide personal and professional benefits. Diverse, personal, and meaningful experiences afforded to preservice teachers increase the likelihood of them being prepared to enter their future classrooms with knowledge of poverty's impact and effective strategies to counter its effects in the classroom.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

The current case study had limitations. Only 21 preservice teachers participated in the study for eight weeks. Because of the small sample size and the short duration of the course, broad generalizations are not possible. However, comments from preservice teachers and observations of limited growth on the pretest-posttest indicate that preservice teacher awareness of the effects of poverty on students increased as a result of the interventions.

Future research might address larger populations of preservice teachers across a program with strategic mapping of outcomes met by activities, interventions, field experiences, and service learning. Such longitudinal information may better determine the most effective strategies for educating preservice teachers about the impact of poverty on students.

Faculty Changes to Teaching after Reflection on the Study Findings

The four faculty members involved in this project reflected on planned teaching changes resulting from this research project. Those teaching the foundational courses

have decided to omit the Ruby Payne scenarios because students found these least effective in assisting them in understanding poverty. All four faculty members have decided to implement or increase their students' involvement in service learning projects. They have also begun discussing the positive effects of service learning projects with other colleagues to further enhance their teacher preparation programs and better prepare middle class preservice teachers for socioeconomic diversity.

Özet

Giriş

Amerika Birleşik Devletleri'nde yoksulluktan etkilenmiş evlerde yaşayan 16 milyondan fazla çocuk vardır ya da her beş Amerikalıdan biri bu şartlarda yaşamaktadır (CPS, 2013; Felling, 2013). Okulda bedava ya da düşük maliyetli öğle yemeği alan öğrencilerin sayısı 20 milyondur; bu sayının sadece %15'i yaz aylarında federal hükümet tarafından finanse edilen yemeklerden yararlanmaktadır (Felling, 2013). Birleşik Devletler Nüfus verileri (Çocukları Savunma Fonu, 2014), çocukların, yetişkinlere göre ülkedeki en yoksul grup olduklarını ve zengin devletler içinde Birleşik Devletler'in çocuklar açısından en yüksek yoksulluk seviyesine sahip olduğunu göstermektedir (Rebell & Wolff, 2012).

Yoksulluk çeken çocuklar, sınıfta öğrenmelerini zorlaştıran şartlara daha fazla maruz kalmaktadırlar, bu da akademik başarılarını olumsuz yönde etkilemektedir (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). Yoksulluk sorunu süre, zamanlama ve aşırı yoksulluk ile daha da karmaşık bir hal almaktadır (Rebell & Wolff, 2012). İlk çocukluk yıllarının kritik dönemlerinde yoksulluk içinde olan çocuklar, sadece ergenlik döneminde yoksulluk çeken çocuklara göre daha düşük okul bitirme oranlarına sahiptir (Jensen, 2009). Ayrıca, düşük gelirli aile çocukları dört yaşına kadar yaklaşık 13 milyon kelimeye maruz kalırlarken, orta gelirli aile çocukları, onlara göre bu rakamın iki katına maruz kalmaktadırlar (Hart & Risley, 1995), bu da birçok çocuğun gelişmemiş kelime hazneleri dolayısıyla derse katılımlarını engellemektedir (Jensen, 2009).

Bir çocuğun sınıfta etkin olma becerisinde beslenmenin de payı vardır. Öğrenciler sağlıklı beslenemeyince öğretmenlerini dinlemeleri, ödevlerine odaklanmaları ve dersin içeriğini öğrenmeleri zorlaşır (Jensen, 2013). Çocuklar iyi beslenirlerse, daha çok işbirliği yapar ve daha iyi akademik başarı elde ederler (Felling, 2013). Felling'e göre (2013) öğretmenler, çocukların aç olduklarında öğrenemediklerini bildirmişlerdir.

Louisiana Mezuniyet Çıkış Sınavının (Caldas & Bankston, 1997) akademik başarı ve demografik verilerini inceleyen bir çalışmada, öğrencilerin arkadaşlarının ailelerinin ve kendi ailelerinin sosyoekonomik durumlarının (SED) akademik başarıları üzerinde çok büyük bir etkiye sahip olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. Yoksul olan ve benzer geçmişe sahip olan öğrencilerle okula giden öğrenciler, orta sınıf öğrencilerinin seviyelerinde bir akademik başarı elde edememişlerdir; bu da 'İngiliz Milli Çocuk Gelişim Araştırması' sonuçlarını desteklemektedir (Currie & Thomas, 2001).

Aday Öğretmenler ve Düşük Sosyoekonomik Seviyeye Sahip Okullar Arasındaki Kopukluk

Birleşik Devletler'de devlet okullarındaki öğretmenlerin çoğu Beyaz orta sınıf aile ortamında yetiştirilmişlerdir ve farklı öğrenci gruplarına öğretmenlik yapmak için hazır değillerdir (Gay ve ark., 2003; Hodgkinson, 2002). Aday öğretmenlerin çoğunun, sınıfa girene kadar yoksulluğun ne olduğuyla ilgili ya hiç bilgi ve algıları yoktur ya da bu konudaki bilgileri çok azdır (Bennett, 2008). Öğretmenler dâhil Amerika'daki insanların büyük bir çoğunluğu, fakirlerin fırsat eşitsizliği yüzünden değil, kendi eksiklikleri yüzünden fakir oldukları düşüncesine sahiptirler (Rank, Yoon, & Hirschl, 2003). Bu soruna ilave olarak, sınırlı sayıda öğretmen yetiştirme programı sosyoekonomik farklara eğilmektedir; bunun yerine programlarda ırk/etnik yapı, özel ihtiyaçlar ve dil çeşitliliği daha fazla vurgulanmaktadır (Hughes, 2010; Jennings, 2007). Bazı çevresel ya da toplumsal etmenler bir öğrencinin okuldaki öğrenmesini etkilemektedir. Aynı zamanda bu bağlamsal etmenler, okul dışı şartların eğitim sürecinin bir parçası olduğunu göstermektedir (Yastrebov ve ark., 2015).

Yoksulluktan etkilenmiş öğrencilerle çalışan öğretmenler, aşağıdaki üç özelliğe sahip oldukları zaman başarılı olmaktadırlar (Gehrke, 2005): (1) Kendi inanç sistemleri ve varsayımlarının farkında olma (2) Okulu, toplumu ve çevresini tanıma (3) Yüksek öğrenci beklentileri. Bu özellikler kültürel olarak duyarlı öğretim bileşenleri olarak kabul edilmektedir (Gay, 2000). Ancak, üniversite dersliklerinde yoksulluk çalışması çoğunlukla deneysel değildir ve bunun yerine gerçeklere ve sayılara odaklanmaktadır. Bu durum da çoğu aday öğretmenin yoksulluk içinde yaşayan öğrencilerin durumlarını anlamalarına imkân vermemektedir (Bennett, 2008, p. 253). Eğitimciler yoksulluk içinde yaşayan öğrencilerin bilgi kaynaklarını tanıyarak (Gonzalez ve ark., 2005) ve sosyal dezavantajlı durumlarının olumsuz sonuçlarına karşı savaşarak eğitimde yüksek beklentileri sağlayabilir (Hughes, 2010).

Araştırma sürecinde öğretmen adaylarını fakirlik yaşayan öğrencilerle etkileşimde bulundurmak için fakir semtlere geziler düzenleme, uluslararası uygulamaları inceleme ya da düşük sosyo-ekonomik okullarda etnik kökenle ilgili araştırma ve deneyimlerden yararlanma gibi çeşitli çalışmalar yapıldı.

Üniversite seviyesindeki eğitim programlarında ve birçok devlet okulunda orta sınıftan gelen öğretmenlere yoksulluğu öğretmek için Ruby Payne'in kitabı okutulmuştur (2001). Ancak Gorski (2008) ve Smiley ve Helfenbein (2011), bu kitabın klişeleri güçlendirip ve eksiklik düşüncesini yaydığını ve kabahati yoksulluk içinde yaşayanlara yüklediğini belirtmişlerdir.

Araştırma Soruları
Bu araştırma aday öğretmenlere yoksulluğun öğrenciler üzerindeki etkisini göstermek amacıyla, çeşitli öğretim stratejilerinin göreceli etkisini belirlemek adına gerçekleştirilmiş ve yoksulluğun öğrenciler üzerindeki etkilerini daha iyi anlamak için aday öğretmenlere hangi eğitimsel tecrübeler ve eğitim stratejileri yardımcı olmaktadır? Sorusuna odaklanılmıştır.

Yöntem

Bu çalışma örnek olay incelemesi olarak görülebilir. "Bir örnek olay incelemesi bir durumun kapsamlı veri toplamaya dayalı derinlemesine araştırılmasıdır." (Creswell, 2002, p. 485). Çalışmaya dâhil olan katılımcıların yaş ortalaması 28.3'tür. Katılımcıların yaşları 18-56 arasında değişmektedir. Toplam 21 aday öğretmenle çalışılmıştır. Çalışma Amerika'da küçük ve kırsal özel bir Orta Batı üniversitesinde "Amerikan Eğitiminin Temelleri" adlı dersin iki ayrı oturumunda gerçekleştirilmiştir.

Amerikan Eğitiminin Temelleri dersinin diğer konuları arasında, aday öğretmenler dersin her iki ayrı oturumunda aşağıdaki faaliyetlere katılmışlardır: (1) *Özgür Yazarlar Günlüğü* kitabından okuma yapma ve kendi düşüncelerini günlük aracılığıyla paylaşma (Gruwell, 2009); (2) bir okulda 20 saatlik staja katılma ve (3) bir poster sunumu hazırlama ve bunu sunma, *Özgür Yazarlar Günlüğü* kitabındaki genç lise öğrencileri tarafından içerikle ilgili yazılan bir dönem sonu projesi hazırlama. *Özgür Yazarlar Günlüğü* Long Beach, California'daki düşük sosyoekonomik seviyedeki öğrencilerin dermele günlük girişlerinden oluşmaktadır. Bir oturumda aday öğretmenler, internet teknolojisi yardımıyla mülakat yapmak için canlı bağlantı kurmuşladır. Diğer oturumdaki aday öğretmenler, PBS *Fakir Çocuklar* adlı belgeseli seyredip onun hakkında bir makale yazmışlardır (Neumann, 2012). Öğretmenler ayrıca Ruby Payne'in kitabından *Yoksulluğu Anlamak İçin Bir Çerçeve* adındaki senaryoları okumuştur (Payne, 2005).

Dersi alan bütün aday öğretmenler en az 10 cümleden oluşan günlük girişlerini tamamlamışlar daha sonra bu günlükler içerikleri açısından analiz edilmiştir. Öğretmen adayları yoksullukla ilgili görüş ve deneyimlerinin, yoksulluğun çocukları okulda nasıl etkilediği konusundaki düşüncelerinin, öğretmenlerin yoksulluğa karşı uygun ya da etkili tepkilerinin ne olabileceğinin sorulduğu bir ön-test-son-test anket çalışmasına katılmışlardır. Daha sonra aday öğretmenlere yoksulluğun öğrenciler üzerindeki etkisini anlamalarına yardımcı olacak farklı ders faaliyetlerinin etkililiğini değerlendirmelerini isteyen bir son-test uygulanmıştır.

Benzer katılımcı yanıtlarının kategorilere ayrılmış ve sürekli karşılaştırma yöntemi kullanılmış ve ilave yanıtlar okundukça bu kategoriler düzeltilmiştir (Dye ve ark., 2000).

Sonuçlar

Araştırmanın sonuçları aday öğretmenlerin yoksulluğa geniş bir bakış açısı ve duygusallıkla baktıklarını ortaya koymuş, öğretmenlerin bu konuda bilgi ve tecrübe edindiklerini göstermiştir. Sonuçlar yoksulluk ile ilgili daha fazla sosyal ve duygusal duyarlılık oluştuğunu ve kaynak yetersizliğinin okuldaki akademik başarısızlığa sebep olduğunu kanıtlamıştır. Aday öğretmenler yoksulluk yaşayan öğrencilere karşı anlayışlı davranmış, onları destekleyici tavırlar sergilemiş ve onların durumlarını anlamaya yönelik büyük bir duyarlılık göstermişlerdir. Öğrenciler aynı zamanda öğretmenlerin, öğrencilerin hayatlarında bir fark yaratabilme becerisini kavramışlardır ve bu sonuç Hong'un (2010) çalışmasını da destekler niteliktedir. Dersteki bütün faaliyetler aday öğretmenler tarafından "faydalı" olarak değerlendirilirken, öğretmenler aynı zamanda yoksullukla ilgilenen insanlarla ve yoksulluk içinde yaşayan öğrencilerle etkileşim halinde olmayı çok etkili bulmuşlardır.

Ders ile ilgili gerçekleştirilen bu faaliyetler, aday öğretmenlere farklı bağlamlarda yoksulluğun etkilerini göstermek ve onları öğrencilere yardım etmeye hazırlamak için gerekliydi. Tek bir bilgi kaynağına odaklanmak, yoksulluğu göstermek için mükemmel bir yol olsa da, yoksulluğun öğrencilerin hayatlarını farklı yönlerden nasıl etkilediğini aday öğretmenlerin anlamaları için yeterli değildir. Genel olarak, aday öğretmenler yoksulluk içinde yaşayan ya da yaşamış olan 'gerçek' insanları görmekten ve onlarla konuşmaktan çok etkilendiler. Bu deneyimler senaryo okumaya göre çok daha değerli bulundu çünkü bu deneyimler yoksulluğu aday öğretmenler için somutlaştırdı. Aday öğretmenlerin yoksulluk içinde yaşayan öğrencilerle yakın bir şekilde çalışmaları, onlarla mülakat yapmaları ve yoksul öğrencilerin arasında staj fırsatları elde etmeleri, öğretmenler tarafından saygıya layık ve empatik bir yaklaşım olarak değerlendirildi.

Öğretmen yetiştirme programlarının çoğunda teori ve uygulama çalışmaları arasında bir denge olmasının önemi belirtilmektedir (ör. Allen & Wright, 2014). Yapılan bu çalışma, uygulama çalışmaları güçlü olsa da aday öğretmenlerin dikkatlerini nereye vereceklerini ve bütün olanlardan ne anlam çıkaracaklarını hiç bilmediklerini gösterdi. (Fadde & Sullivan, 2013; Parker, 2003). Bu araştırmanın sonuçları, daha bilinçli bir bakış açısı yaratmak için hizmet içi öğretmenlerin yoksullukla ilgili tecrübesi olan kişilerle ya da düşük sosyoekonomik çevrelerden gelen okul çağındaki çocuklarla çalışan kişilerle yapılandırılmış diyaloglara ihtiyacı olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Aday öğretmenler okulu oluşturan toplumu (Gehrke, 2005) ve öğrencilerin sınıfa getirdiği zengin bilgi kaynaklarını (Gonzalez ve ark., 2005) işte bu hedeflenmiş diyaloğa dayalı tecrübeler aracılığıyla daha iyi anlarlar.

Aday öğretmenlerin çoğu orta sınıf aile çevrelerinden geldikleri için yoksulluk içinde yaşayanların evleri ve hayatlarıyla ilgili çok az bilgi sahibi olarak büyümüşlerdir (Gay ve ark., 2003; Hodgkinson, 2002). Bu nedenle, aday öğretmenlerin yoksullukla ilgili duydukları gerçekleri ve istatistikleri gerçek insanlarla, özellikle de kendi yerel çevrelerinde yaşayanlarla ilişkilendirecek yapısal deneyimlere ihtiyacı vardır.

Öneriler
Aday öğretmenlere yoksullukla ilgili tecrübe kazandırmak için bazı ilave fikirlere ihtiyaç vardır. Bu dersin kapsamında gerçekleştirilen mülakatlar daha da geliştirilerek dersin içeriğine dâhil edilebilir. Bu tür mülakatlar, geleneksel okul tabanı olan yerleşimlerde, bir alternatif eğitim aracı olarak, okul çağındaki çocukların ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak ve üniversite-toplum ortaklığını geliştirmek için gerçekleştirilebilir. Bu sayede aday öğretmenler, toplum içindeki ortaklarıyla çalışarak yoksulluk içinde yaşayanlara yardım etmek ve yoksulluk içinde yaşayan aileler ile çalışan profesyonellerin stratejilerini benimsemek için daha incelikli bir yaklaşımı tecrübe edebilirler.

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