Chapter 24
Fostering the Disposition to Serve:
The Value of First Year Service-Learning Experiences for Pre-Service Teachers

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ABSTRACT
Many teacher candidates enter teacher preparation programs with the desire to serve or to change the lives of others. Teacher education programs are uniquely positioned to leverage this desire to serve through intentional service-learning field placements. Service-learning, particularly early in the preparation program, can play a critical role in building the disposition to serve. This chapter explores one way teacher preparation programs can cultivate the orientation to serve high-need schools. Candidates enrolled in the Village Project serve in high-need schools, address a real community and educational need, and are provided reflection opportunities to connect the experience to their developing knowledge of learning and motivation. Ultimately, the goal the Village Project as an early service-learning field experience is to help teacher candidates develop a professional identity that increases the personal desire to work in educational communities that have a need.

INTRODUCTION
Every classroom in the United States should be led by a knowledgeable, skilled, and dedicated teaching professional. Unfortunately, there is a shortage of teachers nationally (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). According to Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond (2016), teacher shortages are a result “declines in entrants to teaching and high rates of teacher attrition, especially in low-income schools.” The shortage has been the greatest in urban and remote rural elementary and secondary schools. In addition, teacher preparation programs find it difficult to supply the number of teachers in content areas such as math and science. Also, candidates tend to be White-middle class women.

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One explanation for teacher shortages may be a result of where teachers choose to teach. Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff (2005) posit that choice of where to teach is impacted by a range of factors including geographic location, social networks (Cannata, 2011), and compensation (Sutcher, Darling-Hammond, & Carver-Thomas, 2016). Given these trends and the political climate around teacher development, recruitment of teacher candidates has become a priority for many teacher preparation programs.

Teacher preparation programs have the capacity to create the conditions to help new teachers pursue initial jobs in communities where they are most needed (Maier & Youngs, 2009). Despite the paucity of research on teachers’ initial job choice, Boyd, Lankford, Loeb, & Wyckoff (2005) in an analysis of initial job choice in New York state, found that “most public-school teachers take their first public school teaching job very close to their hometowns or where they attended college” (p. 117). Due to social networks which are often tied to where teachers grew up and went to school, this approach may perpetuate teachers’ choice to teach in environments similar to the ones they know and experienced as students (Maier & Youngs, 2009).

Teacher candidates come to teacher preparation programs with preconceived notions of teaching and learning based on their prior experience (Farnsworth, 2010). These “personal theories,” affect how they understand issues related to teaching and learning, and ultimately shape their professional identity. Service-learning components embedded in teacher education coursework is one way to provide authentic learning opportunities to create a professional identity. Service-learning projects and field experiences support the understanding of key concepts while fostering critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Rodgers & Scott 2008; Sulentic Dowell & Meidl, 2016). Service Learning (SL) serves as a conduit for reframing one’s professional identity and may draw candidates to educational communities different from the one they grew up.

BACKGROUND

Poverty and race are highly correlated in the United States (Lin, & Harris, 2009). According to the Children’s Defense Fund, 14.7 million children live in poverty in the United States and a disproportionate number are children of color (Children’s Defense Fund, 2015). Poverty has a significant impact on children’s learning (Hair, Hanson, Wolfe, & Pollak, 2015). Children who grow up in poverty tend to come to school with cognitive and social-emotional deficits. Consequently, students living in poverty may struggle with traditional measures of academic achievement as measured by state assessment (Sylva, 2014), due to limited experiences. Scholars, like Darling-Hammond (2010), identify this gap as the “opportunity gap.”

Research into the causes of gaps in student is not new (Ikpa, 2003). There has been recognition that school-related, home and community-related factors which impacts the academic achievement of students (Snell, 2003). The single most impactful variable in supporting student success is the teacher, but more importantly “…the broad consensus is that ‘teacher quality’ is the single most important variable influencing student achievement” (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2005, p. 2). Consequently, one of the most powerful strategies for addressing the opportunity gap is to attract highly qualified teachers to teach in the schools with the highest needs (Wisconsin Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2016). Efforts to attract teachers to work in high need schools have met with limited success (Petty, Fitchett, & O’Connor, 2012). Accelerated preparation programs often recruit academically successful college graduates but provide very limited pedagogical preparation (Ingersoll,