Chapter 3
Mentoring Dispositions for Pre-Service and Early Career Special Educators Through Service Learning

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ABSTRACT
Service learning projects were created and implemented by faculty in the special education unit at Molloy College for pre-service and early career special education teachers. The service learning projects provided an opportunity for faculty to mentor participants in the area of dispositions for teaching through a shared experience outside of the higher education classroom. The projects were conducted in/or with community schools serving the K-12 population and students with disabilities in inclusive settings. It was hypothesized that service learning opportunities would serve as a platform for participants to reflect and to evaluate their dispositions as they act and interact in environments which were multidimensional. The results indicated that this was the case and that participants gained insights into their dispositions when the statements of dispositions were related to an experience. Faculty concluded that a variety of service learning projects provided varied opportunities for participants to exercise beliefs and bring clarity to the term “dispositions for teaching.”

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INTRODUCTION

Mentoring in teacher education is an effective and necessary practice (Rowley, 1999; Fritz, 2006; Callahan, 2016). The main goal of mentoring is to prepare future teachers with the knowledge, skills and dispositions for teaching (Dempsey & Christenson-Foggett, 2011). One of the most common mentoring practices in teacher preparation programs is observing and Student teaching. Student teaching provides the Pre-service teacher clinical experience in the classroom under the mentorship of a Cooperating teacher (Clarke, Triggs & Nielson, 2014). In this model the Student teacher has an opportunity to learn effective classroom practices as the Cooperating teacher is observed. The research shows that Cooperating teachers as mentors can be very effective, especially when they modeled highly desired characteristics such as being student centered (Feinman-Nemser & Carver, 2012), passionate about teaching, collaborative and reflective (Boreen, Johnson, Niday & Potts, 2000). Mentor teachers can have a significant impact on Pre-service teachers by cultivating positive relationships as well as emotional support (Fairbanks, Freeman & Kahn, 2000; Clarke, 2006; Glenn, 2006).

However, in preparing pre-service teachers to have the knowledge, skills and dispositions for teaching, the student teaching experience has limitations and may not be enough to accomplish cultivating and developing the necessary requirements. Researchers concluded that Pre-service teachers were best served by receiving feedback from the mentor teacher that addressed the Pre-service teacher’s knowledge, skills and disposition. However, feedback from mentor teacher primarily focused on management of classroom routines and the Pre-service teacher’s knowledge of the curriculum (Chalies, Ria, Bertone, Trohel & Durand, 2005; Graham 2006; Valencia, Martin, Place & Grossman, 2009). Although these two areas are important, other skills and dispositions needed for effective teaching were unaddressed and perhaps underdeveloped (Hong & Schulte, 2009). In addition, researchers ascertained that mentor teachers would model a practice and then expect the student teachers to reenact the practice observed but not necessarily with any deep understanding or reflection (Rozelle & Wilson 2012).

To address some of these observations; that Pre-service teachers require clinically rich experiences, enhanced models of observing and Student teaching are evolving. For example, Kolman, Roegman, and Goodwin (2015) employed a “resident” style mentoring of Pre-service teachers that was learner centered. In a learner centered model, the Mentor teacher evaluates the individual and unique needs of the Pre-service teacher and is responsive to those needs. The clinical experience would then focus on the Pre-service teacher’s developmental progress instead of using preset expectation. The same evidenced based techniques were employed such as modeling, developing positive habits, working collaboratively and reflecting on practice (Clarke, Crasborn, Hennisseen, Brouwer, Korthagen & Bergen, 2011). These essential elements remained in the model and the goal was to enhance the clinical experience and transform it so that the Pre-Service teacher could gain greater insights, grow as a professional and become in a reflective practice with the assistance of a mentor.

Higher Education programs have been encouraged to offer clinically rich programs which will result in effective teaching practices (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010; New York State Department of Education, 2011, US Department of Education 2009; 2011) and a variety of opportunities should be offered (Donelly, Rosin, McSweeney, Fiona, 2011; Sayeski & Paulsen, 2012). As mentioned, the student teaching model has some limits and yet it is the most widely used required clinical experience in teacher education (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, 2010). Perhaps “clinically rich” means to offer varied experiences in the field so that pre-service teachers can have multiple opportunities to perfect skills, ability to reflect, and develop the professional habits and
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