Chapter 3
Civic Minor in Urban Youth and Communities:
A New Service–Learning Curriculum Disrupts Traditional Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

Service-learning is commonly employed in teacher preparation within the bounds of discipline-specific methods courses. This chapter presents an overview of the Civic Minor in Urban Youth and Communities program, which takes an interdisciplinary approach to service-learning as an ethos rather than a limited experience bounded by content area or grade level. In this three-course sequence, students examine the relationship between education and citizenship, design and implement their own service-learning projects, and learn how to implement service-learning in their future classrooms. This immersive experience provides students with a de-centering experience that promotes an asset-based, service-oriented approach to diverse communities.

INTRODUCTION

According to Campus Compact (2012), improving K-12 schools is the most commonly addressed social issue within higher education service-learning courses in the United States thus making service-learning a perfect companion to teacher education curriculum. Teacher preparation programs requiring a service-learning component often provide hours of much needed tutoring, mentoring, and afterschool support to youth attending schools where oftentimes, funding does not cover these services. For university students, the benefits of participating in a service-learning course include: development of cultural awareness (Banks, 2001), an understanding of systemic injustice (Eyler, 2001), and proficiency in discussing issues

of educational funding and policy (Freire, 2001), in addition to gaining an evolving knowledge of skills related to teaching such as writing lesson and unit plans, interacting with K-12 students, and navigating the gap between policy and practice (Buch & Harden, 2011). Yet, much of service-learning curriculum in teacher education occurs within discipline or age specific coursework, like a reading methods course or elementary teaching methods, where the discipline or age-specific pedagogy dominates dialogues of practice. Consequently, the service-learning approach is seen as a complement and marginalized, rather than primary and fundamental to all disciplines or ages (Butin, 2010). Redirecting the focus of teacher education away from discipline or age-specific curriculum requires a major disruption in the current model of teacher education, what Christensen (2011, 2008, 1997) labels disruptive innovation—disruption so extreme that it fundamentally alters the foundations of teacher education.

Theoretically, the concept of disruptive innovation developed by Christensen in management theory is an application of the capitalist economic theory of Schumpeter (1950) who fondly described capitalism's boom and bust cycles as "creative destruction." Creative disruption is not merely a management strategy to create change, but an empirical reality of living in a capitalistic society driven by supply and demand (Harden & Hartsell, 2014). While the concept of creative disruption is currently in vogue and popularly embraced in numerous fields, the disruptive nature of the outcomes of service-learning as pedagogy within the context of higher education has been studied for many years in educational research. What is less understood is how service-learning as a discipline disrupts the traditional discipline silos, like teacher education. Commonly, within traditional teacher education, pre-service teacher candidates are limited to highly structured programs with few course options outside of the education coursework. Furthermore, when students have service-learning projects in teacher education courses, their discipline dictates the type of project and often the settings and partners are limited to schools. What would a teacher education curriculum that focused on service-learning as the dominant discipline look like, and in what ways is this disruptive to traditional models of teacher education? To answer this question, we have developed a three-course sequence to prepare undergraduate pre-service teaching candidates minoring in a curriculum entitled *Urban Youth and Communities*. Disruptive elements in the curriculum of the minor are interdisciplinary coursework and classmates, projects and agendas driven by specific community needs rather than grounded within specific disciplines like Reading or Social Studies, and expansive definitions of educational settings to include non-profits, neighborhoods, and other community-based locales in addition to schools.

BACKGROUND

The Civic Minor in Urban Youth and Communities is a new interdisciplinary minor in its third year as an approved course of study at a large public university in the southeastern United States. The minor was developed in response to a program provided by the American Association of State Colleges and Universities funded through a *Learn & Serve* grant designed to infuse service-learning into urban education and teacher education programs. Our university was one of five universities selected in a competitive process to develop this program, which is housed in the College of Education at our university.

As a way of decentering traditional teacher education, a curriculum design team was recruited from faculty who engage in service-learning pedagogy from the disciplines of urban geography, psychology, literacy, and civic engagement, which manifested itself as a collaboration between the College of Education and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences as shown in Figure 1.

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