Chapter 13
Connecting Pedagogy, Preparation, and Passion:
An Engaging Approach to Preparing Leadership and Advocacy Skills in Pre-Service Teacher Education

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ABSTRACT

This chapter will address an engaging pedagogical strategy to prepare pre-service teachers to work in diverse communities challenged by social issues such as poverty and food instability. The chapter presents a service-learning pedagogical approach that creates a collaborative partnership between faculty, students, the university, and the greater community. It demonstrates how stakeholders can work and learn together within a common service-learning project that positively impacts change in diverse communities. The chapter will benefit faculty at the secondary and post-secondary education levels who are interested in enhancing teaching and learning through service learning, collaboration and community engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher educators often stress the importance and value of non-instructional duties that PK-12 teachers undertake in order to reach and teach students successfully. Educators know that engaging in collaborative service partnerships with schools and communities affords teachers various opportunities to positively impact their PK-12 students. However, rarely do teacher educators explicitly teach pre-service teachers how to create and engage in collaborative service projects before entering the teaching profession.

Teacher educators must model the skills pre-service teachers need to build collaborative partnerships while simultaneously implementing service-learning projects that connect curriculum goals with community needs. Using a service-learning pedagogical approach can foster positive dispositions toward social justice, increase civic engagement, and help to develop leadership and collaboration skills for pre-service teachers. As a result, pre-service teachers will be better prepared to work with diverse populations and affect change in their communities. Consequently, it is important to engage pre-service teachers in service-learning projects to prepare them to affect change in culturally diverse communities and for working with diverse student populations to increase opportunities for academic success.

Collaborative approaches that reach outside or across disciplines are often overwhelming and time consuming for faculty to develop for their students. Additionally, many would like to expand learning opportunities for their students and create experiences for successful engagement; yet, they may not have the "know-how" to implement such projects (Greene-Clemons & Daniels, 2014). Moreover, many faculty feel service-learning projects are tedious and "add-ons" to an already full curriculum because they have not aligned projects to course learning outcomes.

This chapter provides details on how faculty can connect theory to practice while simultaneously modeling for social change through the discussion of the "Fill my BackPack 5K" race, a service-learning project that provided pre-service teachers the opportunity to build collaborative partnerships with neighboring public schools and community stakeholders, develop leadership skills, cultivate positive dispositions toward diversity and social justice, and make authentic connections between course curriculum and "real-world" issues impacting education. The goal of the "Fill My BackPack 5K," developed and organized using the PLACERS model (Greene-Clemons & Daniels, 2014), was multifaceted and endeavored to:

1. Provide pre-service teachers authentic opportunities to demonstrate leadership and collaboration skills;
2. Reinforce the Educator Preparation Program's (EPP) conceptual framework of culturally responsive teaching and course concepts;
3. Cultivate and reinforce a positive disposition toward social justice and cultural diversity; and
4. Raise funds and supplies for the Inter-faith Food Shuttle BackPack Buddies program.

These goals were accomplished through the use of a service-learning pedagogical approach because twenty-first century educators must prepare all students to be creative, innovative, and independent solution-finders who are equipped to deal with unforeseen challenges while working with people with diverse values, cultures, and experiences. They also must be able to find and effectively use resources that are available to them in their communities.

BACKGROUND

Pre-Service Teachers and Diverse Student Populations

Pre-service teachers are defined as students that are education majors completing coursework that will allow them to teach PK-12 students upon degree completion. Education majors include programs such as birth-kindergarten, elementary, middle school, secondary and specialty area subjects (e.g., art, music,

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