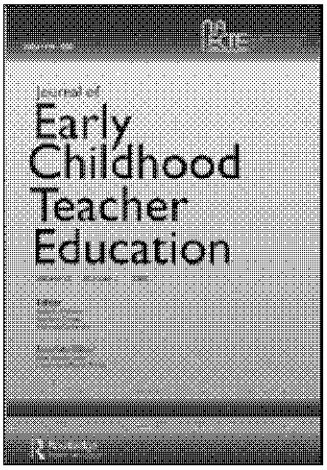

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Can Service Learning Reinforce Social and Cultural Bias? Exploring a Popular Model of Family Involvement for Early Childhood Teacher Candidates

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Service learning is often used in teacher education as a way to challenge social bias and provide teacher candidates with skills needed to work in partnership with diverse families. Although some literature suggests that service learning could reinforce cultural bias, there is little documentation. In a study of 21 early childhood teacher certification candidates, engaged in service learning experience with families living in deep poverty, 16 candidates appeared to confront their own biases and construct practical theories of poverty that were more complex than their original concepts. However, five candidates appeared to avoid confronting their own biases. Of those five, three appeared to have biases confirmed. Those three candidates were quite different from one another in age, experience, and attitude toward the project. More research is needed to examine the relationship between candidates' understanding of social relationships and their approach to service learning experiences.

Service learning opportunities are widely used in higher education to provide direct experience with concepts taught in a particular course or program. A vast research literature indicates that carefully constructed service learning experiences are successful in terms of their stated learning objectives in general education courses as well as upper division courses (see, for example, Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001; Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Everett, 1998). Many educators have reported success in challenging cultural and social bias through service learning (Baldwin et al.; Everett; Green, 2003; Lewis, 2004; Marullo, 1998; Sullivan-Catlin, 2002; Wade, Boyle-Baise, & O'Grady, 2001). However, a few of these researchers have suggested that service learning experiences could potentially strengthen or reinforce bias (Marullo; Sullivan-Catlin; Wade et al.). They recommend guided reflection, class discussion with confrontation of stereotypes by the instructor, or repeated service-learning experiences as methods to avoid confirming cultural bias (Marullo; Sullivan-Catlin; Wade et al.). Unfortunately, these reports neither provide examples of cultural bias being reinforced, nor evidence that the prescribed methods for avoiding it are effective. One recent account briefly acknowledged that two participants may have confirmed their cultural biases, but concludes that the service-learning experience was nevertheless successful (Baldwin et al.).

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Although reinforcement of cultural bias in a few students may be a minor concern for some fields, it is deeply troublesome in teacher education. In recommending a candidate for teacher certification, teacher educators must not only "certify" the knowledge and skill needed to teach, but also approve of the candidate's *disposition* to teach (www.ncate.org). A candidate with bias toward certain children and families would be, potentially at least, a harmful influence on some of the children that he or she was assigned to teach. Particularly in early childhood education, teachers work closely with families and make educational decisions that can influence a child's entire educational trajectory.

While early childhood educators have consistently promoted respect for diversity (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995), the candidates in most undergraduate teacher preparation programs for early childhood are predominantly White and female (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1999), and diversity in the early childhood teaching force appears to be decreasing (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 2004; Lim, Maxwell, Able-Boone, & Zimmer, 2009). For teacher candidates to learn how to work effectively with all families, they need to confront any unconscious biases around race, class, and family structure, and gain deep appreciation for family diversity. Service learning opportunities appear to be a promising method for confronting unconscious bias. However, the possibility of strengthening bias is also a serious concern. In this paper, I will examine a service learning experience in order to understand if and how social and cultural bias may be reinforced.

Conceptual Framework

The assumptions underlying this study are that 1) a wide variety of family structures and value schemes can be supportive of healthy child development and learning; 2) there is no "universal" developmental endpoint that is culture-neutral; and 3) the hegemony of the culture of more privileged classes serves to make alternative worldviews invisible, especially to members of privileged groups. These assumptions are in harmony with the "reconceptualizing" of early childhood education in critical theory (Cannella, 1997; Kessler & Swadener, 1992) and cross-cultural approaches to the study of child development (Rogoff, 2003).

Most early childhood teacher educators seek to challenge teacher candidates' unconscious biases in order to cultivate the disposition to "respect diversity in children, families, and colleagues" (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2005). One way that teacher education programs seek to raise candidates' awareness is through service in settings where the candidates will encounter diverse families. Teacher educators need to know whether or not cultural bias may be reinforced by service learning experiences, how this reinforcement might occur, how to recognize it, and ultimately, what can be done to avoid it.

Mode of Inquiry

The context for this exploratory study was an early childhood teacher preparation program offered through a large, public university in a medium-sized Midwestern town and its partnership center in a nearby urban area. The partnership center was established with funding from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to make the resources of the university accessible to residents of an economically disadvantaged community.

Participants

The participants were 21 graduate students, from a variety of undergraduate backgrounds, enrolled in a course on social learning in early childhood. Seventeen of the participants were seeking master's degrees in early childhood education with a public school teaching credential for children birth to grade 3. The remaining four were working toward other degrees or taking classes to further their professional development as teachers. Of the 17 early childhood degree candidates, 2 were less than a year from completion; 10 were about a year from completion; 5 were 2 or more years from completion.

Although there is insufficient information to provide specific data regarding the ethnic composition of the participant group, members of the group were from differing ethnic origins. All were female. There is no data regarding participant socioeconomic status. However, their journal entries and access to educational opportunities make it likely all were from middle- to upper middle-class backgrounds. Most of the participants were under 30 years old. Most are from small towns and rural areas near the university. The demographic composition of the study participants was fairly typical of the student body in the early childhood program that served as context for the study.

Institutional Context

The graduate program in which the study was situated is an open-entry, open-exit program in which students pace themselves. Courses are offered in the evenings on a regular rotation. Self-pacing results in classes that are composed of students at different stages in the program as described in the previous section. This structure has also attracted many part-time students who have multiple work and family obligations, so students bring varied professional and life experiences to their classes.

The course that served as context for this research study was "Social Learning in Early Childhood," a course that focuses on the social learning of young children in the home and community as well as in school. The first objective of the course is for students to be able to explain the relationship between culture, social experience, and social learning in the life of a young child. To achieve this objective, students need to be familiar with diverse family cultures, and understand how different sets of social experiences lead to different social understandings, each a coherent reflection of a cultural context. With knowledge and appreciation for a child's cultural context, a teacher is better able to interpret a child's social behavior and facilitate his or her continued social development.

Social Context

The focus of the investigation reported here is the service learning aspect of the course. Students participated in activities with children and families at a university partnership center in a housing complex, "Rolling Meadows." The complex was operated by the housing authority in a nearby urban area, and the partnership center was housed in two apartments within the complex. Most of the families residing in the complex were female-headed, African American families living in extreme poverty (less than half the official U.S. poverty income). Well over 200 of the 400 residents of Rolling Meadows at the time of the study were under 10 years of age.

The university partnership center offered classes to prepare for high school equivalency exams, transitional employment for women receiving Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), a small computer lab, informal mental health services, and a cooperative

child care room for children of adults using the services of the center. Parents using the child care services shared in its operation, usually by assisting with supervision of the children. Most of the paid partnership center staff members were students and the turnover was fairly frequent. For example, over 4 years the center had eight different teachers for the high school equivalency class. Participation of the residents was also sporadic, although there were definitely "regulars," women who came to the center 3–5 times per week. Men and older boys occasionally came to the computer lab, but all other center participants were women and young children. Except for a few older ones in the computer lab after school, the children who came to the center came with their mothers and left when their mothers left. Mothers frequently sat in the child care room, even when they were not officially responsible for supervision of the children, visiting with other mothers.

The students in the course had some choice of when and how they would participate, but all performed service at the same site. Nearly half the class participated in planning and hosting an outdoor "Peace Fair" at the Rolling Meadows complex on a Saturday. Games, crafts, food, and fun brought families out for a "peaceful day together" in a neighborhood that was disturbed frequently by physical fighting and occasionally by more extreme violence. The rest of the students formed small groups which attempted to visit families and organize play groups. Home visits were designed to create a relationship between a family and the partnership center. Play groups were to provide very young children with positive social experiences with peers and with learning opportunities. A graduate assistant was hired to facilitate scheduling and other tasks for participants. Unfortunately, the home visits and play groups did not draw much resident participation, as will be described later.

As students worked on their varied assignments, they kept a log of their activities and wrote reflective entries in a journal after each visit to Rolling Meadows. The students were instructed to use the log to document time spent on the project. In their journals, students were asked to reflect on what they were learning about themselves as social beings and about how children learn to navigate the social worlds in which they live. A portion of each class meeting was devoted to discussion of the service learning experience. As instructor for the course, I led the discussions during class, frequently accompanied the participants to the partnership center, and had regular e-mail conversations with participants about the project out of class.

Although I had taught the social learning class before, it was the first time that I added a service learning component and was somewhat nervous about implementation in spite of extensive preparation. I am White, female, and middle-aged. Although solidly in the middle class in terms of income and education at the time of the study, I spent my childhood and most of my adult life in poor and working-class neighborhoods. I taught for 9 years in diverse inner-city schools. All of these personal and situational factors influenced my participation and observation.

Primary data sources were papers and journals written by students and submitted as part of the course requirements. These included the log and journal described above, as well as a final reflective paper in which students attempted to connect what they had learned from the service learning experience with assigned course readings on children's social learning. Time on site varied for each student according to her particular role in the project, with most spending between 8 and 10 hours in direct contact with children and families. I spent about 20 hours on site with students, children, and families. My observations at the service-learning site, observations of class discussions, and anonymous course evaluations completed by students at the end of the course provided triangulation. My observations were recorded briefly in a notebook that also contained lesson plans, course

readings, and other teaching materials. At the time, these observations were meant to guide my decisions as an instructor.

I assembled all written data sources in a collective case study (Creswell, 1998). Data that could be identified with an individual participant were then sorted into individual case studies within the larger case. I removed individual identifying information and assigned each participant a number. Once the identifying information was removed, I provided a copy to the director of the University Partnership Center and asked her to provide any comments or reflections she had on her perceptions of events and people at the center, as compared to those of the participants. Meanwhile, I combed the data for themes of race, culture, and class. Emergent codes were used to create categories of response to the themes (for example, fears and concerns, connections between experience and course content, desire for recognition or gratitude, etc.). Then I compared students' reflective, evaluative statements with the desired outcome of the field assignment (appreciation and understanding of cultural diversity as a factor in children's social development). Finally anonymous course evaluations, my field observations, and the comments of the center director were compared to the primary data sources to discover the degree of verity in the signed data sources (course related writing). For example, course evaluations solicited comments on the relative value of various aspects of the course, and all those completing course evaluations added comments on what they had learned (if anything) from the service learning experience. Although a few facts related to specific events at the center were disputed (such as how and when the graduate assistant communicated play group times to students and participants), student perceptions recorded in course-related writing were consistent with the behaviors I and the center director observed, and with comments on anonymous course evaluations.

Results

Consistent with the literature on service learning, many students apparently learned a great deal from their work at the partnership center. On the other hand, this assignment also resulted in significant student resistance. Students frequently questioned whether or not the site was safe, even though no negative incidents were reported by either students or center personnel during the time of the project. Inconsistent participation by residents of Rolling Meadows and inconsistent staff presence at the center frustrated some students, who blamed it on "disorganization." A few reported intense anxiety about coming into the housing complex as a "White person." Most of these students were concerned that with their privilege and Whiteness, residents would perceive them as outsiders trying to exercise authority.

Most of the student journals contained evidence of learning related to family diversity. In particular, many students began to see poverty as a systemic social problem that had pervasive effects on family life. For example, students discovered through specific examples that social isolation was a major negative effect of poverty and served to keep families in poverty. Many reflected on the everyday difficulties of living with too little money and how that might lead to parental frustration and fatigue. A few journals contained evidence that unconscious biases had been very effectively challenged. For example, students who expressed concerns about "coming in as a White person," were increasing their awareness of their own privilege. Seeing themselves as "White" and thinking about how others viewed that "Whiteness" helped them situate themselves in a cultural mosaic rather than situating themselves as the norm. One of these students who was originally concerned about not being welcomed, later saw the residents as being the excluded ones. She wrote in one of her last journal entries,

> These impoverished families have been grouped and housed together on the periphery of [the city], so that no one is reminded they exist. . . . These families are distanced from potential jobs, stores, libraries, schools, and hospitals, and yet society is perplexed by the continued prevalence of impoverished families in America.

Another student planned her first play group experience with the express objective of "teaching the children some manners," only to find that they quickly picked up whatever she modeled. She concluded, "Overall, I really enjoyed our visit. It dispelled the myth that children living in poverty don't have manners. They do and they are constantly being developed." One of the students who expressed fear for her own safety in the housing complex, wrote, "I would say that I was surprised how quick the kids were to be affectionate with us." Another student wrote, "This experience gave me a new perspective on poverty. I realize now that the parents truly care for their children." Such comments were consistent in quantity and type with those on the anonymous course evaluations.

Unfortunately, there were also cases in which students' biases were strengthened. Of 21 participants, 5 appeared to have biases that went unchallenged. Three of those actually appeared to be more confirmed in their biases at the end of the service learning experience. All 3 were White females. The youngest, "Jamie," was in her 20s and just beginning the teacher education program. "Theresa" was in her 30s. The oldest, "Mary," was in her late 40s. Both Theresa and Mary were in their final semesters of coursework.

Jamie was part of the group that planned and hosted the Peace Fair for the residents of Rolling Meadows. She confided in her journal that she had tried hard to dress nicely and present herself well when she went out in person to local businesses to solicit donations for the needed materials, and she felt personally humiliated and hurt by the indifference of the business people to her requests. She was also deeply troubled by the disagreements and "negative remarks" among her group members. On the other hand, she expressed real enjoyment that she and her own mother had been able to work together making nine batches of playdough, describing it as a "bonding experience."

On the day of the Peace Fair, Jamie was surprised that children were standing outside waiting for the fair to start, even though it was raining. Some of the children wanted to help her set up her playdough activity, so she organized them into a small assembly line packaging the playdough, and observed in her journal later that they were "so happy to help" and "singing songs, whistling, talking nicely to each other . . . and dancing." She wrote,

> All that was going on in my mind was how can these children be this happy? Look how they are dressed, look where they live, look at their bare feet, look at the mounds of dirt beneath their nails, look at their torn clothes, and smell the body odor. Then I thought this is all these children know. I was definitely shocked at how little the children had. I told myself these children need you today so try to put all that aside and make a difference in a child's life today.

Jamie was distressed for much of the day, because of the conflicts that arose among the children. For example, instead of playing toss with water balloons, some of the children wanted to throw them at each other. She and another student decided to put the balloons away, "I know that a water balloon fight is fun to have but it was like these children were out for blood. The look in their eyes was scary. . ." She commented on other children arguing, throwing bean bags, and throwing ice. The children throwing ice received a harsh

reprimand from one of the residents who "whipped off her belt" to threaten them. Jamie wrote,

> I was wondering if these children felt angry that we were leaving because it was back to reality for them. Maybe they didn't want to go home because there wasn't anything but violence there. Or maybe no one was at home waiting for them. Maybe the family that is at home doesn't care about the child who is acting out in a violent way. When I got into my car to leave I wept . . . I wanted to take some of these children home to bathe, feed, and clothe them properly, but would this really help them? No, because they return back to their poor community . . . I guess I wasn't prepared for the rowdiness and violent acts that some of the children had on Saturday.

Jamie's observations of the Peace Fair were in contrast with other students' accounts and with my observations of the event. I observed the water balloon activity, which did begin in an organized way and gradually became more haphazard and aggressive. She and her fellow student agreed to put the balloons away. While Jamie saw it as too dangerous, the other student thought that it needed more supervision than they could provide while getting out refreshments. Conflicts between the participating children occurred, in the water balloon activity and elsewhere, but they were not unexpected or particularly frequent. We had discussed conflict resolution strategies and using those strategies with children had been the focus of the Peace Fair activity. Most student journals were focused on the relative success of various strategies. Jamie's emotional "shock" seemed to interfere with her perception of events and her ability to apply course content in this experience.

Jamie, who was sensitive to rejection from business owners and disturbed by disagreements in her working group, found the conflicts between children at the Peace Fair extremely disturbing. Seeing their poverty, she did not understand how they could be happy. Her impulse was to remove them from their homes and "care for them properly." If they were not being cared for "properly," they must not be cared for at all. She assumed that they were unloved and came from violent homes.

Theresa was concerned about whether or not the housing complex would be safe, but after finding out that she would be working with five other students, she felt safer. She and her group elected to supervise children's playgroups. As soon as they began to put their plan together, Theresa went shopping for playthings and wrote in her journal, "I get a warm fuzzy feeling knowing that a child or children will benefit from my efforts." This feeling faded quickly when visits had to be rescheduled or children did not show up for playgroup. In summing up her experience, Theresa wrote, "I feel as though [the instructor] and [center staff] and of course the students see the importance and benefits to us being there, but the families at Rolling Meadows were not on board. I was also very disappointed that [center staff] never came and said hello to us and acknowledged all we had done." Continuing on the theme of gratitude, Theresa concluded her journal, "A little appreciation for all of our work would have been nice. I do not feel that this was a success . . . I do feel like a better human being for at least trying to help."

Theresa felt that she had made great sacrifices to help others who were ungrateful. She was particularly bitter about the lack of recognition from center staff, but also felt that the children and their parents should have been more appreciative. My e-mail exchanges with Theresa were dominated by her complaints about center staff and frustration with the service learning project. Theresa had been very resistant to the experience from the beginning, but then began to have "warm, fuzzy" feelings about helping others. When that

wasn't matched by warm appreciation from those "helped," Theresa was frustrated. She never seemed to focus on understanding the situation of the people at Rolling Meadows, or if she did, her journal and her contributions to class discussions did not indicate it.

Mary opened her journal by saying that she was looking forward to the service-learning experience. Unlike Theresa, who was in the same working group, Mary was eager to start the playgroups and willing to take charge in order to see things move forward quickly. However, in reflecting on the first playgroup, Mary observed that the children had short attention spans, inability to make predictions in a story or answer questions, inability to make meaning out of oral language experiences, and unable to delay gratification. She found the experience frustrating for these and other reasons. Several parents backed out from sending their children at the last minute. The graduate assistant explained in class that the housing authority had started making surprise inspections that week and some of the parents were more distrustful of "outsiders" than they would ordinarily be. Mary felt this could have been cleared up by having a meeting with the parents, and did not understand why parents might not be interested in attending such a meeting.

During the next playgroup, which was better attended, Mary observed that the children had difficulty sharing some of the new playthings she brought. She wrote, "It did not appear that these children were familiar with conflict resolution strategies. It makes me wonder what happens in their home environment." She also observed that the children spoke "rudely" in their pretend play, for example, saying, "Eat this," instead of, "Would you like some ice cream?" She repeatedly described the children as "at risk."

In Mary's reflective summary, she wrote, "While we were there I observed many areas in which we could have provided assistance. However, in order to provide this help, the help needs to be wanted. I am not sure how accepting the families were of our help . . . . Some of the children did not seem to have good manners. This is something that in any cultural group really just needs to be modeled by adults continuously. . . . If a certain way of life is all someone has ever known, they just may not realize there is something better out there."

Mary seemed to think that the families at the housing complex needed to change and could change, as soon as they decided they wanted to change. She seemed to regard middle-class conventions and values (rhetoric of questions and answers, delayed gratification, suggestive rather than directive language, etc.) to be "something better," but then did not feel it was her responsibility to cultivate those conventions and values because they should be cultivated in the home. Despite her experience in child care, Mary attributed common developmental tasks of preschoolers as signs the children were "at risk."

On the other hand, Mary did want a more reciprocal relationship with the parents at the housing complex even if she was convinced that it wouldn't be a relationship between equals. As a White woman, she had been challenged to accept an Hispanic son-in-law. She had found that when she "listened" and got to know him, he was more willing to accept her guidance. She ended her journal by writing, "This is what I was thinking would be nice when I talked about meeting with the parents once a week so we could get to know them and form a friendship. Now that we know my son-in-law much better, he often asks for our help or opinions on various things." Interestingly, the mothers of the children in Mary's playgroup were in the partnership center during the playgroup time and frequently dropped into the child care room where the playgroups were held. I did not observe Mary attempting to interact with these women.

Jamie, Theresa, and Mary were not effectively engaged by the service-learning experience. Jamie's sensitivity, Theresa's desire to help, and Mary's enthusiasm for the project, were positive attributes that could have been the basis for a meaningful learning

experience. Instead, these three students left the course confirmed in their pity and disdain for families in poverty, unable to see the resilience and resourcefulness in the families of Rolling Meadows, never noticing the humor or liveliness or caring. Although many students had commented on the tenderness between siblings, the enthusiasm and imagination of the children, these three never seemed to notice these things. Furthermore, all three came away with an understanding of poverty that focused on individual or family failure, without noticing the social structures that played a role, such as social isolation, punitive surveillance in the community, or lack of access to some important public resources. In Mary's case, it was evident that she was making judgments about children's academic potential based on family background.

Jamie, Theresa, and Mary were not poor students. Although Theresa was initially resistant, she did not exhibit any more resistance than some of the other students who were more successful in terms of course objectives. Mary was actually enthusiastic about the assignment. The characteristic that united these three cases was a narrow focus on "helping." Jamie dealt with her shock at the children's material poverty by saying, "These children need you today." Theresa brought lots of playthings, snacks, and other materials to the center, and had "warm fuzzy" feelings about helping people in need. Mary wanted to persuade families to take her advice in the hopes of "something better." These three students faced the intractable problems of poverty and racism without seeing complexity or examining their own identities and assumptions. Jamie and Mary would probably agree with Theresa's conclusion, "I do not think this was a success."

Conclusions

For at least three study participants, service learning experience appeared to strengthen cultural and social biases. Rather than gaining a more sophisticated understanding of poverty and racism in society, or learning to see their own "Whiteness," these students saw deficits in children and families that could not be "helped." Close examination of these three examples suggests that both personal factors and structure of the project could have played a part in the strengthening of their social biases.

The learning opportunities embedded in the field experience, embraced by others in the class, did not seem to be accessible to Jamie, Theresa, and Mary. These three participants did not share similar histories in the teacher education program, were of different generations, and had seemingly different initial attitudes toward the project. All had perfect attendance, participating in class discussions in which I challenged biases and stereotypes of the Rolling Meadows children and families. Based on these particular examples, the recommended practices for challenging social bias appear to be incomplete (Marullo, 1998; Sullivan-Catlin, 2002; Wade et al., 2001).

Particularly in regard to confrontation with racial bias, personal factors may strongly influence outcomes (Derman-Sparks & Phillips, 1997; Helms, 1993). White people confronted with firsthand evidence of racism in society must also confront their own identities as people arbitrarily privileged, an uncomfortable realization requiring the formation of new beliefs about self and society. A confrontation may occur when a White person has intensive contact with African Americans for the first time, as was the case for some of the participants in the service-learning project reported here. While disintegration of old beliefs and formation of new beliefs could be in the direction of antiracism, there are other ways to reconcile disturbing experiences and reintegrate. One of those is to retreat as quickly as possible into White society where beliefs about White superiority will be reinforced.

I did not interview the participants or collect biographical data, but information provided voluntarily by Jamie and Mary indicated that they may have had limited experience with African American people and may have felt threatened by their associations with the people of Rolling Meadows. Jamie's apparent blindness to children's strengths and Mary's insistence that she knew a "better way," served to defend them from seeing that the families at Rolling Meadows may have been in their situations (at least partly) as a result of injustice.

The structuring and presentation of the project may have also influenced the outcome. Jamie, Theresa, and Mary appeared to be entirely focused on the "service" in "service learning." When we use the term "service," it may be understood differently by different students. Some will understand it as it is used in the phrase "life of service," or "public service." In other words, some will see their service learning assignments as aspects of normal civic engagement in community. Other students may interpret "service" as charity, gifts from the fortunate (and strong) to the unfortunate (and weak). This conception of "service" would not challenge a student's cultural bias, especially if that student already felt an obligation to "help those less fortunate." The student may see himself or herself as strong in relation to the weakness of the families served. With such a prior conception, the student would not seek to understand in the service learning experience and would be unlikely to see family strengths. Consequently, the framework of the strong helper and the unfortunate "helped" may persist unchallenged. Students can have close social contact with people of different cultural and social backgrounds while maintaining (even strengthening) their judgments and biases. Jamie, Theresa, and Mary all seemed to have such a conception of their role in the service learning experience.

My selection of an environment for the project may have exacerbated the understanding of service as charity, especially in terms of race. During the data collection period, all the paid staff members at Rolling Meadows were White with the exception of the graduate assistant hired to work on the service learning project. Of approximately 50 families from Rolling Meadows involved in the Peace Fair and playgroups, only one mother was White and her children were of mixed heritage. The families of Rolling Meadows were obviously coming to the partnership center for assistance. Jamie, Theresa, and Mary had a prior conception of families in poverty as "unfortunate" and "needing help," which easily encompassed all kinds of negative judgments about the ability of parents in those families to care for themselves and their children. There was little in the situation itself that disturbed their stereotypical perceptions of African Americans as needing assistance from Whites.

Many questions are still to be answered in regard to service learning as a method for increasing teacher candidates' appreciation for diverse families. The examples of Jamie, Theresa, and Mary are compelling evidence that service-learning experiences can indeed strengthen social bias. However, the evidence is limited. Future research in this area should include personal interviews or autobiographical narrative so that personal factors can be more rigorously explored. Similar research in a variety of field settings would also provide valuable information about the influence of the social environment in the field on student learning.

Educational Importance of the Study

Understanding the ways in which students learn from field experiences that are designed to challenge cultural assumptions and biases can inform the designers of teacher education programs and others in higher education settings. Teacher educators in particular should

be cautious about framing field experiences in terms of "service." Commonly perceived as a "helping profession," teaching may attract students who are indeed focused on "helping." That focus, narrowly understood, could interfere with learning in a service-learning experience by creating expectations about the needs of various social groups.

Students' autobiographical narratives, while providing valuable research data, could encourage students to examine their past experiences in relation to the experience of working in a new social environment. However, use of autobiographical material could also create barriers that make it difficult to challenge students' social biases. Teacher candidates are increasingly aware that their instructors are assessing their dispositions to teach and may hesitate to provide frank accounts of their struggles in diverse settings. Conversely, in assessing dispositions, teacher educators may have difficulty identifying covert social biases, such as those of Jamie, Theresa, and Mary. Continued research in the area of service learning could provide valuable information about how to design appropriate experiences that challenge cultural and social bias as it is constructed by a wide variety of students.

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