A BURST OF CREATIVITY: THE TEACHER EFFICACY THAT PRESERVICE TEACHERS MAKE WHEN WORKING IN SERVICE LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS WITH LITERACY CONNECTIONS

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Abstract

During a semester, preservice students enrolled in bilingual literacy classes, participated in service-learning projects. They participated in a reading or writing projects with students in two early childhood centers and an alternative juvenile education program for adolescents. Both centers were daycares that accepted families that were below the poverty level. One daycare also was associated with a local homeless shelter. While the parents were attending classes or looking for work, their children could go to this daycare. The alternative juvenile education program for adolescents was a county program that accepted students who were court-ordered to attend the school. They may have misbehaved at school so much that they were court-ordered to attend this school or they had committed a crime and ordered to attend this school. These centers provided opportunities for the teacher candidates to work with students who were from diverse backgrounds that were in various levels of distress. In this way, the teacher candidates became familiar with children who were hungry or worried about their parents for many reasons.

When the teacher candidates first began their service-learning project, they were worried and scared that they would not be able to offer much to the children. Often, they would say to me, “What am I supposed to do?” right before they were scheduled to walk into the classroom. I watched their faces show looks of concern, apprehension, and even fear. As the semester progressed, they grew in their confidence in their work as teachers. I measured their growth through pre/post Multicultural Efficacy Scale (MES), reflections, and Questionnaires. I also gathered data through reflective journals, student work, and observations.

The data analysis showed that the preservice teachers’ efficacy and confidence grew as they had opportunities to work with students in urban settings. They needed chances to work with various groups of students with support from teachers and professors. They also needed interventions such as the read aloud and writing projects in order to practice the strategies that they were learning in their course work.

The work of teaching and learning in urban schools holds many challenges. As preservice teachers tool on the work of becoming culturally responsive teachers, they also accepted the challenge of learning what it meant to teach students that were different from them. Often, that meant that they needed to work in school settings that are challenging. In this project, the teacher candidates had opportunities to work in challenging urban settings, with support from teachers and professors who could help them grow and become strong urban teachers. Through this service-learning project, the preservice teachers were able to become stronger in their journey of becoming urban teachers.

Keywords: Teacher Efficacy, Preservice Teachers, Service Learning, Teacher Confidence.