Teaching and Teacher Education 26 (2010) 1170–1177

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Teaching and Teacher Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/tate

Learning to unlearn: How a service-learning project can help teacher candidates to reframe urban students

Jerusha O. Conner*

Villanova University, Education and Human Services, 302 St. Augustine Center, 800 Lancaster Ave., Villanova, PA 19085, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 30 July 2009
Received in revised form
26 January 2010
Accepted 1 February 2010

Keywords:
Service learning
Teacher preparation
Unlearning
Student voice

ABSTRACT

Teachers' views and expectations of students directly impact student learning, and unless they are challenged during the preparation period, these views are unlikely to change. This study investigated how a group of prospective teachers explained the shift in their perspectives of low-income, urban youth as a result of participating in a service-learning project that explicitly attended to issues of status and processes of unlearning. The findings indicate that when fused with student voice work, service learning can help prospective teachers to uncover, examine, and revise their assumptions about students, particularly those whose backgrounds differ from their own.

"*Before I began taking trips to Sun Valley High School, my perception of urban youth was somewhat pessimistic. Coming from a suburban area, I did not have any prior experience with urban youth. As a result, I found myself simply embracing the stereotype—I believed that urban youth success rates were low due to factors such as low motivation and lack of intelligence.*"

1. Introduction

Like the prospective teacher quoted above, many American pre-service educators have had little personal experience with urban youth or youth whose backgrounds differ from their own prior to entering the classroom full-time. Furthermore, research shows that in the United States most of the predominantly white, middle-class, female teaching pool aspires to "work in a suburban setting teaching white, middle-class youths" (Nieto, 2000, p. 181). Limited experience with diverse school settings and students causes some prospective educators to "enter teacher education believing that cultural diversity is a problem to overcome and that students of color are deficient in some fundamental way" (Villegas, 2007, p. 374). Their understandings of urban, low-income, minority youth derive largely from media depictions and common social stereotypes.

These challenges in teacher preparation are not confined to the United States. Teacher educators in countries such as Australia, China, Canada, Ireland, and South Africa also recognize the importance and difficulty of preparing future teachers to work effectively with diverse, low-income, and ethnic minority students (see Boland, Keane, & McGinley, 2009; Forlin, Loreman, Sharma, & Earle, 2009; de Freitas & McAuley, 2008; Mills, 2009; Pennefather, 2008).

Increasingly around the world, service-learning and community-based experiences have been seen as an effective vehicle for changing prospective teachers' attitudes and beliefs, particularly with regard to disadvantaged populations (Baldwin, Buchanan, & Rudisill, 2007; Boland et al., 2009; Carrington & Saggers, 2008; Castle, Osman, & Henstock, 2003; Cooper, 2007; Kwalula, von Hahmann, & Collins, 2009; O'Grady, 1998, 2000; Root, Callahan, & Sepanski, 2002; Villardon, 2009). A growing body of research indicates that service-learning experiences can lead white college students who interact with a stigmatized social group to overcome preconceived notions (Baldwin et al., 2007; Barton, 2000; Theriot, 2006), reject social stereotypes (Cooper, 2007; Eyler, Giles, & Braxton, 1997; Hale, 2008), move away from racist views (Myers-Lipton, 1996), and develop greater empathy and sensitivity (Cooper, 2007; Jones & Hill, 2001). Some pre-service teachers who have participated in service-learning courses that engage issues of equality and human rights have been found to develop a stronger orientation towards social justice over the course of their experiences (Baldwin et al., 2007; Carrington & Saggers, 2008; Stamopoulos, 2006).

Despite these promising findings, some cautions apply. Erickson (2009) contends that poorly designed and implemented service-learning experiences may result in "a *worsening* of student attitudes

* Tel.: +1 610 519 3083; fax: +1 610 519 4623.
E-mail address: Jerusha.conner@villanova.edu

0742-051X/$ – see front matter © 2010 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.
doi:10.1016/j.tate.2010.02.001

in the very domains in which we want to have impact" (p. 115). When the service experience is short-lived, when the community context is not addressed, or when the classroom experience does not incorporate pedagogical activities that support attitude change, service learning runs the risk of confirming students' initial stereotypes and prejudices (Baldwin et al., 2007; Chesler & Vasques Scalera, 2000; Coles, 1999; Erickson & O'Connor, 2000; Petersen, 2007). It may exacerbate misunderstandings, heighten mistrust, and further discourage prospective educators from working in urban contexts (Sperling, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effects of a community-based educational experience on pre-service teachers' attitudes towards secondary school students, particularly low-income, urban youth. I asked: How do teacher candidates' views and understandings of urban youth shift as they engage in sustained, one-on-one "service-learning" work with urban youth over the course of a semester? Because teachers' attitudes and expectations significantly influence the quality of the learning opportunities they create for their students (Banks et al., 2005) and because their views of students are unlikely to change once they enter the profession (Nieto, 2000; Villegas, 2007), it is necessary to examine how pre-service experiences can impact prospective educators' attitudes and beliefs about the students whom they may one day be teaching. Though conducted in a mid-Atlantic city in the United States, my research has broad-ranging implications for teacher preparation programs around the world, as international interest in integrating service learning into teacher education continues to grow.

2. Theoretical perspective

Two theoretical lenses focus this study. Contact theory, introduced by Gordon Allport (1954) in *The Nature of Prejudice*, identifies five conditions necessary for attitude change. These conditions include 1) equal-status contact; 2) the pursuit of common goals; 3) intergroup cooperation; 4) support of authorities, custom or law; and 5) long-term contact. More recent research has confirmed the enduring necessity of these five factors as the bedrock of attitudinal changes (Dovidio, Glick, & Rudman, 2005). Without them, attitudes will either remain unchanged or become more negative (Erickson, 2009).

Although designing service experiences that meet each of the five conditions of contact theory can be challenging, creating opportunities for equal-status contact between the service provider and the service recipient can be especially difficult given what Hillman (1999) refers to as the provider–recipient split. Most service-learning arrangements, and particularly those that involve white college students, are based on the premise that the service provider possesses certain knowledge, skills, and resources that would benefit the service recipient (Hillman, 1999; Sperling, 2007). In these arrangements, the service opportunity frames the recipient not only as a beneficiary of the service providers' actions, but also as deficient or disadvantaged in particular ways. Meanwhile, the service provider is vaulted to a position of higher status vis a vis the service recipient (Donahue, Bowyer, & Rosenberg, 2003; Hillman, 1999; Sperling, 2007). As described in more detail below, the community-based service experience examined in this study was structured to disrupt this norm of service learning and to level group status, thereby making positive attitude change among the prospective educators more likely.

This study also draws on the theory of unlearning, coined by Herbert Kohl (1994) in his seminal essay "I Won't Learn from You." Kohl describes how a young black man and a female college student each taught him to unlearn traditional habits of reading, writing, and speaking that mask and therefore tacitly endorse racism and sexism. For example, he had to unlearn his reliance on the use of the pronoun "he" to refer to a generic human being, because such language inadvertently excluded females. Kohl describes unlearning as a "central technique that supports changes of consciousness and helps people to develop positive ways of thinking and speaking in opposition to dominant forms of oppression" (p. 23). A key piece of unlearning is becoming keenly aware of some common understanding or way of acting that had previously gone unquestioned.

Kohl's theory and his personal accounts of unlearning can be used in teacher preparation programs to encourage prospective educators to examine their preconceived notions about students, teaching, and themselves. Unlearning can help them to understand how the language they use and the practices they support can be exclusionary to certain oppressed groups. Such self-examination is critical in teacher preparation geared towards social justice (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Nieto, 2000).

Likewise, service learning in teacher education has been credited with helping to dispel prospective teachers' preconceived notions and stereotypes of students whose backgrounds differ from their own. Unlearning, then, becomes a useful lens for viewing aspiring teachers' service-learning experiences because it not only requires prospective teachers to confront their prior assumptions about the service recipient, but also trains them to constantly monitor their thoughts and behavior, until sensitivity to the service recipients' experience becomes second nature. To this end, service learning in teacher education can serve as a case study of unlearning.

When he wrote his essay on unlearning, Kohl did not operationalize the phenomenon so that it could be empirically tested; rather, he used it to develop a social critique. Nonetheless, his own account of unlearning offers a model, which prospective teachers may emulate when they reflect on their own processes of rethinking prior assumptions, understandings, and modes of behavior. In this analysis, I define "unlearning" as any time when prospective teachers describe instances or ways in which they come to recognize and rethink previously held views and attitudes.

3. Methods

3.1. The service-learning experience

The service-learning experience that this study investigates was embedded in a course called Diversity and Inclusion. Diversity and Inclusion is a required course for all education majors at Villanova University, a mid-sized university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The primary objective of the course is to promote students' understanding of and appreciation for differences among learners, and to help them identify instructional techniques that are adapted to diverse learners. The course also encourages prospective teachers to explore ways in which they could effect positive social change through their teaching and create classrooms that promote social justice.

Each week, students in the course traveled 10.5 miles, leaving behind their lush suburban campus to enter a dilapidated, distressed section of Philadelphia, home to Sun Valley High School.[1] At Sun Valley, the prospective teachers worked one-on-one with a 12th grade student, who had been assigned to him or her for the semester. Although the Villanova students came at an agreed-upon time each week, the Sun Valley students were often pulled out of class to work with their partners. The pairs met in an empty classroom and occasionally in the school library.

The primary responsibility of the Villanova teacher candidates was to work with their high school partner on his or her senior

[1] Sun Valley is a pseudonym.

project. In 1999, the state of Pennsylvania made high school graduation contingent upon the completion of a senior project (22 Pennsylvania code, § 4.24 1999, amended 2002). At Sun Valley and other high schools in the Philadelphia School District, the senior project includes four components: a 10 page research paper; 15 h of field work connected to the selected topic; a formal oral presentation delivered in front of a panel of adult judges; and a portfolio demonstrating the "learning journey" (RMC, 2008, p. 1). Students can choose their own topics, and Sun Valley students' topic choices ranged from corruption in the local city police force to a comparison of federal foreign aid policies. The Villanova teacher candidates mainly worked with their high school partners on their research papers. They spent time helping their partners to identify a topic, conduct research, define a thesis, develop a structure for the paper, and edit and revise drafts.

In addition to helping their partners to complete the research paper piece of the senior project, the Villanova teacher candidates were also expected to learn from the high school students with whom they worked and to draw connections between what they were experiencing at Sun Valley and the course readings and lectures. They depended on the high school students to help them complete three major course assignments, each of which was designed to help them to learn how to learn about students, about teaching, or about themselves. The first, due at the mid-term, was a portrait or case study of their high school partner's school experiences. This assignment engaged the prospective teachers in learning about and from students. Following the mid-term, the pre-service educators were required to ask their high school partners a "core question" each week and to bring the Sun Valley students' answers to class with them (see Appendix). The core questions were connected to the themes studied in the Diversity and Inclusion course. For example, during the week that the course tackled differentiated instruction, the core questions were: "What kinds of learning activities do you like best and why?" and "How can a teacher meet the different learning styles and needs of students in his/her class?" When the topic was detracking, the Villanova students asked their partners, "How is your learning affected by the particular classmates you may have in a class?" and "Do you prefer to be in a classroom with students of the same or different backgrounds and academic interests as you? Why or why not?" The Sun Valley students' responses became a text the prospective teachers analyzed alongside the assigned readings on theory and research. The final assignment for which the Villanova students depended on the high school students was a culminating essay, in which they reflected on what they had learned during their time at Sun Valley and discussed how these lessons would inform their approach to teaching. For this final essay, students were encouraged to examine how their understandings of students, school contexts, teaching, and/or themselves were challenged or confirmed over the course of the semester. In addition to this final essay, class discussion and informal assignments, including in-class free-writes throughout the semester, also required the prospective teachers to reflect on and find meaning in their experiences with the Sun Valley seniors.

The design of the course and the terminology I used were deliberately chosen to minimize and even challenge traditional status differentials between teacher and student, older and younger, white and black. For example, the core question and case study assignments were purposefully structured to require that the prospective teachers spent time listening to and learning from their high school partners. In other words, I emphasized to the prospective teachers that the learning and teaching were bi-directional, flowing equally between them and the high school students. The idea that the high school students had something valuable to teach the prospective teachers helped to level status differentials among the two sets of students, much like the practices of teachers "assigning competence" to low-status students (Cohen & Lotan, 1995) or using the jigsaw technique help to promote equal-status contact among students in classrooms (Aronson & Gonzalez, 1988). I also used the language of "learning partner", rather than mentee, tutee, or service recipient, in order to highlight the mutuality of the relationship. In fact, like Donahue et al. (2003), I avoided using the term service learning in the context of the course because such a label seemed to privilege the service provided by the college students and to position them solely as service providers, downplaying—if not dismissing entirely—their roles as service recipients. Instead, I referred to the project as Reciprocal Learning and Teaching, underscoring the reciprocity inherent in the relationships between the college and high schools students.

Kohl's essay on unlearning was among the first readings the Villanova prospective teachers did, providing a foundation for subsequent discussion and reflection. The theory of unlearning was constantly referenced throughout the course by me and the students, making it an explicit and integral aspect of the learning experience.

3.2. Participants

Twenty-one prospective educators from Villanova signed consent forms, agreeing to participate in the study. I described the study as an examination of what pre-service teachers learned from working with Sun Valley seniors. It was made clear to all students that in no way would their grades be affected by their willingness to participate in the study. All but one student signed a consent form.

The participants included six males, one of whom self-identified as Asian. The remaining males and 14 of the 15 females identified as white; the other female identified as Hispanic. All participants were secondary education majors and none had commenced student teaching.

3.3. Data sources

This study draws on both qualitative and quantitative data to achieve what Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and Sutton (2006) call "significance enhancement," that is, to maximize interpretations and understanding of the phenomenon of interest. While the quantitative data would indicate whether or not the pre-service teachers' views of and attitudes towards urban youth changed in a statistically meaningful way, the qualitative data would expose how and why the teacher candidates' attitudes shifted or remained unchanged. The mixed methods approach, then, was chosen to fulfill various research/mixing purposes, including triangulation, complementarity, development and expansion (Greene, Caracelli, & Graham, 1989; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2006).

Qualitative data came from the informal and formal reflections students produced for class. In addition, approximately one-third (7) of the prospective educators participated in a semi-structured interview. These interviews took place after the course had ended, so that participants could be assured that their grades would not be affected by their comments and so longer-term learning could be assessed. Graduate research assistants conducted the interviews, mitigating the pressure participants might have felt to give socially desirable answers to their former instructor. All interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed.

Participants also completed anonymous baseline and end-of-course surveys. The surveys included three measures of relevance to this paper. The prospective educators were asked to rate the likelihood that they would teach in an urban school following completion of their teacher preparation program using a three-point scale that ranged from not at all likely to very likely.

Their beliefs about high school students' educational understanding was assessed using a measure made up of 13 items. Respondents used a five point scale to respond to questions such as the following:

> How well do you think most high school students understand how they personally learn best?
> How much do you think most high school students know about what teachers could do to support their learning?
> How much do you think most high school students know about how their schools could be improved?

A reliability test of this scale, using 26 prospective educators and 12 current teachers, yielded an alpha of .88.

Finally, respondents were asked if the questions on the above scale asked them about their views of urban high students, rather than high school students in general, how their answers would shift. The answer choices included "skew lower," "remain the same" and "skew higher."

3.4. Data analysis

The quantitative data were analyzed to determine whether participants' responses shifted in a statistically meaningful way over the course of the semester. I calculated mean scores on the three measures of interest and used paired *t*-tests to compare baseline to end-of-course results.

I then turned to the qualitative data to illuminate the nature of the changes in prospective teachers' attitudes and beliefs about students, urban youth, and urban schools. A team of three data analysts, including myself and two graduate research assistants read, interpreted, reread, and then coded participants' written work and interview transcripts. Following grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), we used both open and axial coding, identifying patterns, themes, and shared meanings across the artifacts. Several categories of meaning emerged from successive readings of the data and from constant comparison across individual cases and across data sources. Based on these codes, we developed propositions (Yin, 2003), which we set forth in analytic memos (Charmaz, 1983), and then shared with research participants in member-checking sessions. Memos focused on participants' views of students, vetted by the participants, became the basis for the current paper.

4. Results

4.1. How the prospective teachers' attitudes and views shifted

The findings indicate that the prospective educators' views of high school students improved over the course of the semester. At the beginning of the term, most of the prospective teachers (70%) felt that high school students in general know *a decent amount* (3) or less about teaching and learning; by the end of the term, most of the pre-service teachers (76%) ranked high school students' knowledge on these matters as 3.5 or higher, describing their understanding as *good* or *great*. A comparison of pre and post-scores on the 13 item scale indicated statistically significant improvement, from $M = 2.96$ ($SD = .40$) to $M = 3.76$ ($SD = .52$), $t(37) = -5.75$, $p = .001$.

The prospective educators' views of urban students also became more positive. At the start of the course, 52% of the participants ranked urban youth as less knowledgeable than most high school students; by the end of the course, this percentage had dropped to 5% (1 respondent). On the post-course survey, two respondents indicated that urban youth were more knowledgeable about educational matters than most high school students.

Finally, the number of prospective educators who had rated themselves as "not at all likely" to teach in an urban school fell from five at the start of the course to zero by the end of the course, while the number who rated themselves as "very likely" to teach in an urban school doubled from three to six. Again, *t*-tests confirmed this shift as statistically significant, $t(43) = -4.23$, $p = .001$.

Analyses of the qualitative data shed light on what the prospective educators learned about urban youth that caused their views to shift. Within the overarching category of learning about students, two sub-categories emerged: learning about their backgrounds and the context of their daily lives; and learning about their intelligence and ability.

4.1.1. Backgrounds and daily lives

The majority of the Sun Valley students who participated in the service-learning project with the prospective teachers lived in the neighborhood surrounding their school, where they grew up in extreme poverty. None of the 17 Sun Valley participants lived in an intact home. The prospective teachers learned from the high school students about fathers who were in jail, mothers who had disappeared, and siblings who had been lost to gun violence or drug abuse.

The issues facing the Sun Valley students were issues few of the prospective teachers had had to confront during their early adolescence. As one pre-service teacher explained, "Encountering the life of an urban high school student for the first time so intimately showed me that urban students have to deal with so much more than I did when I went through high school" (FECN, 5-5-09, p. 4). Another echoed, "Their daily lives—dealing with pregnancy, drugs, violence—[involve] things that I didn't experience in my days of high school" (CRMA, 12-2-08, p. 1).

As the prospective teachers learned about "how many obstacles there are for these students" (CRLN, 12-2-08, p. 1), they came to a "better understanding of the harsh realities" (FEBN, 5-6-09, p. 8) of urban life for poor, minority youth. This awareness, however, did not prompt them to make excuses for the students, as the next section illustrates. Instead, it taught them the importance of connecting with their students and getting to know "each unique story" (CRDL, 12-2-08, p. 1). One prospective teacher explained how she came to this realization:

> During my first couple of visits to Sun Valley, I felt extremely pressed for time, only having about an hour with Gabe per week to accomplish all of our educational goals, which included creating a thesis, outline, rough draft, etc. As a result, I tried my hardest to keep all conversation directed toward teenage emancipation [his topic] and the process of writing, as I felt conversation of this nature was the only purposeful kind. I soon felt torn between wanting to get to know Gabe and wanting to stay task-oriented… As our relationship matured, I came to the realization that getting to know each other was just as important as working on outlines and introductory paragraphs. Spending time conversing about education and our personal lives allowed us to trust one another, and taking time out to do so, wasn't actually "taking time out." Getting to know one another made us more productive in the long-run. (FEKH, 12-10-09, pp. 1–2).

Other students similarly commented that the work involved in getting to know their Sun Valley learning partner, in order to write the portrait, enabled them to practice "teacher care" and helped make them more effective teachers in the end. Although acquiring more information about their learning partners' backgrounds and

daily experiences did not always involve unlearning prior beliefs about urban youth, learning about how teachers can use what they know about their students to improve their practice did prompt some prospective teachers to unlearn ideas about good teaching; that is, it inspired some participants to revisit and revise their understanding of effective pedagogy.

4.1.2. Intelligence and ability

In addition to providing them with insight into the Sun Valley students' backgrounds and daily lives, the conversations the prospective teachers had with their learning partners allowed them to see the intelligence and intellectual capacity of their learning partners, and this recognition sparked processes of unlearning for several of the participants. For example, one prospective teacher recalled:

> I know we worked with one girl who was pregnant and another whose family member had been murdered. Sitting down with these people, you would think these kids must be messed up in the head—like, there is no way they are going to be successful. But, sitting down and having conversations… One girl I worked with was having tons of family difficulty, but like you sat down with her, and she was so intelligent. She smashed all your biases. (IVIT, 3-19-09, p. 4).

Like this pre-service teacher, many of the participants in this study admitted that they learned to disassociate poverty with a lack of intelligence or motivation. In fact, when asked specifically what they had learned from their experience at Sun Valley, prospective teachers were quick to make comments like the following:

> "As a teacher, I have learned not to set standards based on assumptions because demanding hard work from these students often gives them the encouragement they need to complete it" (CRKS, 12-2-08, p. 1).
> "The students recognize when they are being underestimated. I have learned that students will rise to meet high expectations" (CRIT, 12-2-08, p. 1).
> "The students we interacted with at Sun Valley weren't afraid to be smart. They weren't teased or [excluded] for being smart." (CRBM, 4-15-09, p. 1).

The prospective teachers learned not to trust media representations that portray urban schools and urban communities as enclaves in which academic intelligence is rare and success in school is not valued.

In addition to pointing out the general intelligence of the Sun Valley students, several prospective teachers responded to the question about what they had learned from their experience by drawing attention to specific areas of knowledge they felt their learning partners exhibited. As one commented, "Many of the students demonstrated knowledge of outside subjects or areas of interest that might not be considered academic, but demonstrate their ability to learn" (IVDL, 3-16-09, p. 5). Several prospective teachers observed that their learning partners knew a great deal about matters of teaching and learning. For example, one wrote on an in-class reflection, "I have learned that students have opinions about everything that goes on in the classroom and that they really value having an outlet to share those opinions" (CRBC, 12-2-08, p. 1). Another echoed, "Many of the students I encountered were very opinionated. I learned not to equate poverty with submission." (CRIT, 12-2-08, p. 1). As this pre-service teacher continued her reflection, it was clear that she held the high school students with whom she worked in high esteem and that she respected their opinions and views. At the outset of the course, most of the pre-service teachers did not believe that the high school students would have much to offer them; by the end of the course, they had learned otherwise.

For several prospective teachers, the ultimate lesson they extracted from this experience was, as one put it, "The teacher needs to listen to the student just as much as the student needs to listen to the teacher" (FECN, 5-5-09, p. 7) because the students are valuable sources of knowledge. Another expressed her newfound understanding in this way:

> One of the most important things I have learned about working with and teaching urban youth is to first listen to them as they often provide startlingly accurate insights into what is effective and what needs to be changed as it pertains to their education. (FELN, 10-11-09, p. 5).

Although it may be painful for prospective teachers to admit how they had underestimated urban youth, their prior understandings and views are reflected in their choice of words ("startlingly accurate") and in their choice of lessons learned. The realization, indicated by so many of the prospective teachers, that urban youth are intelligent or insightful bespeaks a prior assumption or expectation that they would not be. The recurring nature of this theme in the qualitative data highlights the critical importance of disrupting pre-service educators' beliefs about the students with whom they may one day work by creating opportunities for them to unlearn, to recognize and then reconsider, how they see these young people.

4.2. Why the prospective teachers' views of urban youth changed

In interviews and in-class reflections, the prospective teachers highlighted several mechanisms that they felt facilitated the changes in their perspectives and understandings of urban youth. These mechanisms included simply being in the site, interacting individually with the youth and asking them the core questions each week, and having the chance to reflect on and discuss what they were seeing and hearing at Sun Valley. Although these sub-codes overlap to a certain extent, they do illustrate how unlearning requires a combination of first-hand experience and self-examination. In what follows, I provide examples of how attitudinal change and a process of unlearning were fomented by opportunities to be in the site, interact with the youth, discuss experiences with peers, and reflect individually.

4.2.1. Just being there

Several of the prospective teachers explained that "the being there and interacting with the students" (IVLE, 3-11-09, p. 5) helped to shift their perceptions of urban youth. As one said, "Just being able to actually interact with them and seeing their intelligence and what they bring to the table—that is what helped me" (IVIT, 3-19-09, p. 4). Another echoed:

> What the students are capable of. I think that's something else you read about: that urban youth are just as capable and should be held to just as high expectations. And being at the school has helped to show me that maybe better than just a reading would. (IVDL, 3-16-09, p. 2).

Other pre-service teachers noted that the opportunity to ask the youth specific questions helped to draw out their insight and intelligence, again challenging their preconceived notions about student knowledge and understanding. For example, one pre-service teacher explained, "We ask them questions weekly and you do learn that they do know what's going on and they know what could be better" (IVKH, 3-25-09, p. 5). Another described how conversations with the students caused her to rethink her

expectations for the youth, expectations that had largely been based on media representations of urban students:

> I was afraid of, like, what were their attitudes gonna be like? Are they going to be receptive to us? Because in these movies, they're very resistant to letting the white teacher, in *Freedom Writers*, letting the white teacher come in and help them. They're very resistant. But these students weren't like that at all. The first day, we went in and we were talking and there was, like, this group discussion where they could ask us questions and we could ask them questions, and they were very open with us and like totally receptive. And it was such a surprise. I remember we were in the van on the way home, and we were all of us talking about how awesome these kids were. And we were so surprised that they were so open with us about like their family life situations and what motivated them to keep going and working as hard as they do in high school. So that was another thing that really got rid of that assumption. (IVKS, 3-19-09, p. 3).

Similarly, another explained how her experience working closely with one boy taught her "not to trust stereotypes regarding urban schools, urban youth, and teenage boys in particular" (CRLE, 12-2-08, p. 1). As these prospective teachers' reflections demonstrate, meaningful and open conversations with high school students did help debunk previously held beliefs.

4.2.2. Discussing and reflecting

In addition to being in the site, sharing observations and emotional reactions with peers during van rides back to campus and in class helped to further the process of attitudinal change among the prospective teachers. One pre-service teacher recalled:

> I was assuming without even knowing I was making assumptions slash expectations for the service component. And I think especially the reflective essays and the reflective talks in class [helped expose them]. We had partners that we'd meet up with occasionally during class and talk about service. (IVLE, 3-11-09, p. 10)

Similarly, another pre-service teacher recounted how her process of unlearning assumptions was supported by conversations with classmates:

> We had partner peers in the course, or, you know, during the van ride back, we were reflecting on what we did and how it was part of the coursework, and it suddenly… You unlearn the assumption that you had about [the student you are working with], or the school, or the teachers there. (IVLN, 3-18-09, p. 5).

For other students, the unlearning process required individual reflection and self-analysis. The following interview excerpt represents a case in point:

> One specific lesson that we talked about was about unlearning things that you come to learn. After that lesson, it hit me. I really just took it to heart. Like with every new situation we discussed in the class, I tried to apply it to myself, and be like, well, this is what I have grown up thinking, but if you look at it from this point of view… What do I need to do to unlearn this? And so really I guess, I have tried to a little bit unlearn my bad habits. (IVIT, 3-19-09, p. 2)

Many of the pre-service teachers offered examples of their growing self-awareness, demonstrating how the service-learning experience had taught them to attend to and monitor their judgments and assumptions. For example, one shared the following anecdote:

> We missed one week for spring break, and Reggie came, and I was like, "Did you do any work on your paper?" And he was like, "Yeah. I finished it." And I said, "Wow Reggie, great!" So then I caught myself being surprised, and I was like, "Why are you surprised?" Like, of course, he had to do it. It was supposed to be finished. Why is this surprising? I found myself catching things like that; it's stuff like that—that people don't expect them to finish their papers. And so stuff like that I've caught myself on more and more. So, it's not even necessarily [what I've learned about] teaching, but more so about my expectations and assumptions of them, which will translate and be relevant for teaching. I think I've realized those things more. (IVDL, 3-16-09, pp. 1–2)

Other prospective teachers noted that they became more aware of expectations they did not know they brought to a situation until they were asked to state them and analyze them in light of their actual experience.

5. Discussion

My analysis revealed statistically significant and qualitatively meaningful shifts in the prospective teachers' views of high school students, particularly urban youth. They learned about the realities of urban living and urban schooling for a group of students; they learned that high school students possess unique insight into their educational experiences and that urban youth have "funds of knowledge" (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004) and deep wells of motivation that defy common media representations and stereotypes. And they learned to become more aware of and attentive to their own judgments and presuppositions about the students with whom they work.

These new understandings were supported, according to the prospective teachers, by both deliberate teaching strategies and informal, unstructured learning moments. The deliberate pedagogical strategies included the learning partner design, in which prospective teachers were required to ask specific questions of the high schools students and structured opportunities for reflection, in which expectations, beliefs, and experiences were examined closely. The informal learning moments included unstructured, naturally occurring conversations with learning partners and impromptu reflections with peers during van rides to and from Sun Valley High School.

The results presented in this article highlight the value of using student voice to disrupt status norms within service learning. Through student voice, prospective teachers can become intimately acquainted with one student's experiences, perspectives, and strengths. The process of learning to listen to students at the pre-service stage can thereby help prospective educators to uncover their assumptions about and stereotypes of students (Cook-Sather, 2002). At the same time, such learning may stimulate a larger process of student–teacher role revision in which power and status are redistributed, oppressive practices are challenged, and social justice becomes more likely to be realized (Cook-Sather, 2006; Cook-Sather & Younens, 2007).

In addition to emphasizing the important role of student voice in teacher preparation, the findings underscore the value of making the process of unlearning explicit for pre-service teachers. The prospective teachers frequently used the term "unlearning" in their reflections during the course and in interviews with graduate students several months after the semester had ended, when parroting the dominant discourse of the course could no longer be seen as a strategy for currying favor with the instructor. Reading and talking about Kohl's theory of unlearning enabled these pre-service teachers to acquire a language to describe and a lens through which to view their own process of perspective change. Kohl's essay offered them a model of reflection. His account of

learning to listen to and learn from youth further supported the prospective teachers in their own learning and unlearning journeys, encouraging and facilitating their individual acts of reflection. His theory also allowed the prospective teachers to name their experience and situate it within an academic discourse. As a theoretical tool, "unlearning" can help to make the experience of self-examination empowering rather than threatening to prospective teachers.

6. Conclusion

Research has shown that good teachers know their students well. They know about their communities, their cultural practices, and the things that matter to them (Darling-Hammond, 2002; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Nieto, 2000). Effective educators also value their students' existing strengths and knowledge and build on them, while holding each student to high expectations (Moll & Gonzalez, 2004). As Banks et al. (2005) put it, "Knowing one's students well is important for teaching them well, as is believing that all students can learn and achieve high levels of academic success" (p. 264).

This research raises important implications for teacher training. Teacher education programs must help prospective teachers to learn how to learn *about* as well as *from* students and communities. In some teacher preparation programs, prospective educators learn how to learn about students by observing students closely, shadowing them, analyzing their work, and writing case studies (Darling-Hammond, 2002). Other programs explicitly teach pre-service teachers to learn from students by facilitating dialogue between teacher candidates and secondary school students (Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006; Donahue et al., 2003).

Helping pre-service teachers to recognize the importance of learning not just about, but also from their students can be difficult. The argument that the students have knowledge and insights that can benefit the teacher may run counter to pre-service teachers' unexamined assumptions about what certain students know, need, and are capable of doing. It can also seem threatening to prospective educators who cling to the notion that, as teachers, they will need to have firm command of all the answers, all of the knowledge, and all of the ideas to be seen as legitimate authority figures in their classrooms.

Service learning can present opportunities to expose and challenge these biases (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Nonetheless, community-based experiences do not in themselves automatically change pre-service teachers' attitudes, beliefs, and understandings for the better (Erickson, 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2001; Petersen, 2007). My study suggests that service learning can sew the seeds of transformation among prospective educators when sustained direct experience is both complemented by student voice work that interrupts traditional status hierarchies and undergirded by structured reflection; however, I temper my claims by noting that I certainly have not investigated the longer-term implications of the service-learning experience on the attitudes and beliefs the pre-service teachers enact once ensconced in their own classrooms. Furthermore, the grounded theory approach to data analysis, even with multiple coders, triangulated data sources, and member-checking procedures in place, does not guarantee the validity of the findings and the small sample size restricts me from making generalizable assertions. Despite these limitations to my research, I believe that when service-learning projects explicitly attend to status hierarchies, pre-service teachers can come to new understandings of both students and the relationships they and their students will negotiate together.

Although service-learning advocates may be shifting away from using the potential for participants to experience pro-social attitudinal changes, such as the reduction of prejudice and a greater appreciation for diversity and social justice, as a rationale for instituting service-learning projects (Erickson, 2009), this study shows that such potential remains and holds power within teacher education. The student quoted at the start of this article stands as an example, writing:

> By having the opportunity to interact with students at Sun Valley High School, my once biased perceptions have undergone positive changes. I am now aware that urban students cannot solely be blamed for their low success rates. Rather, it is fundamental to explore the contexts of their lives. By doing so, one becomes aware of both the disadvantages that the structures of society create and the need for teachers to take responsibility in launching social reconstruction. Not only have my experiences changed my perceptions of urban youth, but they have given me an opportunity to plan a teaching approach that will aim to offer every student an equal opportunity to succeed. (FEBN, 5-6-09, p. 7)

When prospective educators come to such understandings, we advance one step further in the quest to achieve social justice in our schools and society.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Elizabeth Meier, Hailey King, and Kathleen Dempsey for their help with the research reported here; Noreen Cameron and Ronald Haigler for their support of the service-learning project; and the editors of TATE and three anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful comments on an earlier draft of this manuscript.

Appendix

Questions for Prospective Teachers to Ask High School Students

(adapted with permission from Alison Cook-Sather; see Cook-Sather, 2002, 2006)

1. How is your learning affected by the particular classmates you may have in class? Do you prefer to be in a classroom with students of the same or different backgrounds and academic interests as you? Why or why not?
2. What ideas do you have for how your classes or school could be improved to support your learning?
3. What subjects do you think students should study in school and why? What skills should students be taught and why?
4. How can a teacher meet the different learning styles and needs of students in his/her class?
5. What kinds of learning activities do you like best and why?
6. What kinds of things can a teacher do to support your learning and motivate you to work hard in his or her class?

References

Allport, G. (1954). *The nature of prejudice*. Cambridge, MA: Addison-Wesley.

Aronson, E., & Gonzalez, A. (1988). Desegregation, jigsaw, and the Mexican-American experience. In P. Katz, & D. Taylor (Eds.), *Eliminating racism: Profiles in controversy. Perspectives in social psychology* (pp. 301–314). New York: Plenum Press.

Baldwin, S., Buchanan, A., & Rudisill, M. (2007). What teacher candidates learned about diversity, social justice, and themselves from service-learning experiences. *Journal of Teacher Education, 58*, 315–327.

Banks, J., Cochran-Smith, M., Moll, L., Richert, A., Zeichner, K., LePage, P., et al. (2005). Teaching diverse learners. In L. Darling-Hammond, & J. Bransford (Eds.), *Preparing teachers for a changing world: What teachers should learn and be able to do* (pp. 232–274). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Barton, A. C. (2000). Crafting multicultural science education with pre-service teachers through service learning. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 32*, 797–820.

Boland, J., Keane, E., & McGinley, H. (2009, June). Learning to teach for social justice: lessons from initial teacher education in Ireland. Paper presented at the second International Conference on Service-Learning in Teacher Education, Galway, Ireland.

Carrington, S., & Saggers, B. (2008). Service-learning informing the development of an inclusive ethical framework for beginning teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 24*, 795–806.

Castle, J., Osman, R., & Henstock, V. (2003). Coupling school experience with community service: a case study. *Education as Change, 7*, 3–20.

Charmaz, K. (1983). The grounded theory method: an explication and interpretation. In G. MCCall, & J. Simmons (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 428–444). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Chesler, M., & Vasques Scalera, C. (2000). Race and gender issues related to service-learning research. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 7*(Special Issue), 18–27.

Cohen, E., & Lotan, R. (1995). Producing equal-status interaction in the heterogeneous classroom. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*(1), 99–120.

Coles, R. L. (1999). Race-focused service-learning courses: issues and recommendations. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 6*, 97–105.

Collins, K. M. T., Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Sutton, I. L. (2006). A model incorporating the rationale and purpose for conducting mixed methods research in special education and beyond. *Learning Disabilities: A Contemporary Journal, 4*, 67–100.

Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Re(in)forming the conversations: student position, power and voice in teacher education. *The Radical Teacher, 64*, 21–48.

Cook-Sather, A. (2006). The "constant changing of myself": revising roles in undergraduate teacher preparation. *The Teacher Educator, 41*, 187–206.

Cook-Sather, A., & Younens, B. (2007). Repositioning students in initial preparation. *Journal of Teacher Education, 58*, 62–75.

Cooper, J. (2007). Strengthening the case for community-based learning in teacher education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 58*, 245–255.

Darling-Hammond, L. (2002). Educating a profession for equitable practice. In L. Darling-Hammond, J. French, & S. P. Garcia-Lopez (Eds.), *Learning to teach for social justice* (pp. 201–212). New York: Teacher College.

de Freitas, E., & McAuley, A. (2008). Teaching for diversity by troubling whiteness: strategies for classrooms in isolated white communities. *Race, Ethnicity and Education, 11*(4), 429–442.

Donahue, D., Bowyer, J., & Rosenberg, D. (2003). Learning with and learning from: reciprocity in service learning in teacher education. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 36*, 15–27.

Dovidio, J., Glick, P., & Rudman, L. (2005). *On the nature of prejudice: Fifty years after Allport*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Erickson, J. A. (2009). Service-learning's impact on attitudes and behavior: a review and update. In J. Strait, & M. Lima (Eds.), *The future of service learning: New solutions for sustaining and improving practice* (pp. 106–118). Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.

Erickson, J., & O'Connor, S. (2000). Service-learning's effect on prejudice: does it reduce or promote it? In C. O'Grady (Ed.), *Transforming education, transforming the world: The integration of service-learning and multicultural education into higher education* Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Eyler, J., Giles, D., & Braxton, J. (1997). The impact of service-learning on college students. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 4*, 5–15.

Forlin, C., Loreman, T., Sharma, U., & Earle, C. (2009). Demographic differences in changing pre-service teachers' attitudes, sentiments and concerns about inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 13*(2), 195–209.

Greene, J. C., Caracelli, V. J., & Graham, W. F. (1989). Toward a conceptual framework for mixed-method evaluation designs. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 11*, 255–274.

Hale, A. (2008). Service learning with Latino communities: effects on pre-service teachers. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 7*, 54–69.

Hillman, T. (1999). Dissolving the provider–recipient split. *Academic Exchange, 3*, 123–127.

Jones, S. R., & Hill, K. (2001). Crossing high street: understanding diversity through community service-learning. *Journal of College Student Development, 42*, 204–216.

Kohl, H. (1994). *"I won't learn from you" and other thoughts on creative maladjustment*. New York: The New Press. pp. 1–32.

Kwalula, M., von Hahmann, G., & Collins, H. (2009, June). Youth leaders guide teachers in service-learning. Paper presented at the second International Conference on Service-Learning in Teacher Education, Galway, Ireland.

Ladson-Billings, G. (1995). Toward a theory of culturally relevant pedagogy. *American Educational Research Journal, 32*, 465–491.

Ladson-Billings, G. (2001). *Crossing over to Cannan: The journey of new teachers in diverse classrooms*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mills, C. (2009). Making sense of pre-service teachers' dispositions towards social justice: can teacher education make a difference? *Critical Studies in Education, 50*(3), 277–288.

Moll, L. C., & Gonzalez, N. (2004). Engaging life: a funds of knowledge approach to multicultural education. In J. A. Banks, & C. A. M. Banks (Eds.), *Handbook of research on multicultural education* (2nd ed.). (pp. 699–715) San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Myers-Lipton, S. J. (1996). Effect of a comprehensive service-learning program on college students' level of modern racism. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 3*, 44–54.

Nieto, S. (2000). Placing equity front and center: some thoughts on transforming teacher education for a new century. *Journal of Teacher Education, 51*(3), 180–187.

O'Grady, C. R. (1998). Moving off-center: engaging white education students in multicultural field experiences. In R. Cahvez Chavez, & J. O'Donnell (Eds.), *Speaking the unpleasant: The politics of (non)engagement in the multicultural education terrain* (pp. 211–228). Albany: State University of New York Press.

O'Grady, C. R. (Ed.). (2000). *Transforming education, transforming the world: The integration of service-learning and multicultural education into higher education*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.

Onwuegbuzie, A. J., & Leech, N. L. (2006). Linking research questions to mixed methods data analysis procedures. *The Qualitative Report, 11*, 474–498.

Pennefather, J. (2008). Rural schools and universities: the use of partnerships as a teaching strategy in enhancing positive response to rurality. *Perspectives in Education, 26*, 81–94.

Petersen, N. (2007). Pre-service teacher education students' engagement with care and social justice in a service learning module. *Education as Change, 11*, 169–181.

RMC Research Corporation.. (2008). *Senior projects evaluation: Partnerships in character education*. Denver, CO: RMC Research Corporation.

Root, S., Callahan, J., & Sepanski, J. (2002). Building teacher dispositions and service-learning practice: a multi-site study. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning, 7*, 142–157.

Sperling, R. (2007). Service-learning as a method of teaching multiculturalism to white college students. *Journal of Latinos and Education, 6*, 309–322.

Stamopoulos, E. (2006). Empowering pre-service teachers to embrace diversity. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood Education, 31*, 30–39.

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Theriot, S. (2006). Perceived benefits of service-learning in teacher education. *Issues in Educational Research, 16*, 241–252.

Villardon, L. (2009, June). Personal and social development of university students through service-learning. Poster presented at the second International Conference on Service-Learning in Teacher Education, Galway, Ireland.

Villegas, A. M. (2007, November/December). Dispositions in teacher education: a look at social justice. *Journal of Teacher Education, 58*(5), 370–380.

Villegas, A. M., & Lucas, T. (2002). *Educating culturally responsive teachers: A coherent approach*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.