Service Learning for Social Justice?: An Analysis of a School-University Partnership

Danielle E. Hartsfield, University of North Georgia
Diana Chang, University of North Georgia
Victoria Bottoms, Dawson County Schools
Kristina Chérres, Forsyth County Schools

Abstract: Engaging in service learning has the potential to increase pre-service teachers' awareness of and capacity for addressing social justice issues. In this study, we examine whether a semester-long service learning project implemented within the context of a PDS partnership aligns to the goals of social justice. We analyzed 51 service learning projects completed by university seniors (pre-service teachers) between 2017 and 2020 using Gibson's (2018) framework for social action. We found that only one project involved a higher level of engagement in social action and went beyond providing direct service to the school partner. We posit that time constraints, project parameters, and the need for more scaffolding by instructors about project possibilities contributed to this finding. We conclude by suggesting ways of altering the service learning project to better align to the goals of social justice.

KEYWORDS: Service learning, School-University partnership, social justice, social action, teacher education

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS ADDRESSED:
1. A comprehensive mission that is broader in its outreach and scope than the mission of any partner and that furthers the education profession and its responsibility to advance equity within schools and, by potential extension, the broader community;
2. A school–university culture committed to the preparation of future educators that embraces their active engagement in the school community;
3. Ongoing and reciprocal professional development for all participants guided by need;
4. A shared commitment to innovative and reflective practice by all participants;

Service Learning for Social Justice?: An Analysis of a School/University Partnership

At our university, which engages in a professional development school (PDS) partnership with several area school districts, service learning is an essential component of a capstone course that our seniors take in their final semester while they are completing full-time student teaching. These seniors investigate an area of need at their placement school and then design and implement a service learning project to address the need. The project is associated with a course, *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities*, which has an enrollment of approximately 150 seniors each year. A variety of projects have been completed in the years since we (the first and second authors of this article) have taught the course. Some specific examples include supporting children with their mastery of sight words and phonics knowledge, helping children increase their multiplication fact fluency, and teaching children how to cope with socio-emotional concerns. In this way, the service learning project is meant to support the various needs of children in the seniors' placement schools and offer a beneficial service to the university's PDS partners.

However, as we have increased our knowledge of service learning and its purpose, we have often asked ourselves if our seniors' service learning projects are achieving the goals of social justice. This question is particularly salient because one of the course outcomes for *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities* is to support the development of teacher candidates who will "display an ability to analyze and reflect on their personal and professional practices and issues in the field from a social justice perspective" as stated on the course syllabus. Given this question, our purpose in this paper is to analyze whether the service learning projects completed by the seniors placed within our university's K-5 PDS partner schools support social justice work. Are their service learning projects meeting the goals of social justice? If the projects do meet social justice goals, what are the key factors, ideas, or implementation strategies that help advance these goals? If not, in what ways can instructors of *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities* help the seniors advance social justice goals in their service learning projects? Our purpose for sharing our analysis and interpretations is to inform and support fellow educators who are considering service learning opportunities to enhance their students' educational experiences or their PDS partnerships.

About Service Learning

Service learning is an instructional approach in which students participate in a service experience related to their academic learning. Service learning is distinct from community service or volunteerism in several ways. In service learning, academic goals are integrated with the service experience (Harrison et al., 2016; Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015), and students are encouraged to reflect and make connections to the content they are studying in the classroom (Cipolle, 2010). The service experience is designed to enhance and enrich academic learning and vice versa (Middleton, 2003).

Service learning has become a popular approach in both K-12 and higher education contexts (Butin, 2007). Research suggests that participating in service learning can have positive outcomes for pre-service teachers. For example, it can support what they are studying in their coursework and help them learn about the needs of their community (Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015). PDS partnerships can be an especially advantageous context for service learning. The sustained relationships between schools and universities provide an existing structure for service

learning (Harrison et al., 2016), and service learning projects completed within PDS partnerships can offer schools much-needed services while enhancing the professional learning of pre-service teachers (Middleton, 2003). Further, service learning affords opportunities for pre-service teachers to develop more robust connections to their school communities (Harrison et al., 2016). Thus, service learning can be mutually beneficial for those serving and those receiving services, particularly within PDS partnerships.

Service Learning and Social Justice

Social justice is concerned with the inequitable distribution of power and resources among groups in a society. Social justice work often addresses problems and injustices related to race, gender, sexuality, age, and ability, among other concerns (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). Those committed to social justice understand that society is not equal; they recognize that inequality is structural and permeates all facets of society (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012). Leaders who work toward achieving social justice question policies and procedures linked to injustice, assume critical perspectives and engage in praxis, or reflective action, to call attention to injustice (Dantley & Tillman, 2010). People engaged in social justice work also develop solutions for problems that create and reproduce inequities across groups in a society (Dantley & Tillman, 2010) and take action to address injustice (Gibson, 2018). To engage in social justice work, then, means to engage in work that seeks to resolve problems related to the marginalization and oppression of groups within a community or the broader society. While social justice work could take many forms, examples could include developing and advocating for policies that would result in a higher minimum wage, more affordable housing options, or equitable public school funding formulas.

In addition to the positive outcomes of service learning that have been previously noted, some educators believe that service learning has the potential to increase pre-service teachers' awareness of social justice issues and their commitment to creating social change (Donahue et al., 2003; Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015; Middleton, 2003; Stringfellow & Edmonds-Behrend, 2013). Kirkland (2014) explains that service learning within teacher education is intended to help pre-service teachers understand diversity and become aware of the injustices in their communities. Indeed, service learning projects can be an initial step toward supporting pre-service teachers as they participate in social justice work (Tinkler et al., 2014).

Although some teacher educators assume that service learning is always tied to social justice (Mitchell, 2008), participating in service learning does not necessarily advance the goals of social justice work (Kirkland, 2014). In fact, Butin (2007) argues there is little overlap between education for social justice and service learning, while Donahue et al. (2003) critique service learning because of the unequal power relations created between those who are serving (pre-service teachers) and those being served (members of the school or community). Kirkland (2014) contends that teacher education programs are moving away from linking service learning to social justice:

> Today, service learning has come to mean something equivalent to an extended and sustained field trip (a kind of localized study away) for privileged learners who often imagine their roles in communities as agents of salvation as opposed to agents of service. (p. 583)

From these perspectives, service learning does not equate to doing social justice work despite the common assumption that social justice goals are invariably embedded within service learning.

Mitchell (2008) provides a helpful framework to distinguish between service learning approaches that do and do not advance social justice goals: *traditional service learning* and *critical service learning*. According to Mitchell's framework, the traditional approach involves providing a service without calling awareness to issues of inequity within a community; Butin (2007) notes that such approaches are typically associated with charity. In contrast, the critical approach involves making efforts to remedy injustices and enact social change.

Based on Mitchell's (2008) definition, critical service learning includes several components. First, critical service learning must include actions directed at creating social change, which involves learning what causes social problems, addressing these problems, and reflecting on one's actions to reinforce or dismantle the existence of these social problems. Second, participants in critical service learning must examine issues of power in the community and within society: who has it, who does not, and why this is the case. Third, those involved in critical service learning - the learners and the members of the school or community - must develop shared goals and build authentic relationships. Mitchell further suggests that service learning engagements should be long-term partnerships because social justice cannot be achieved in a short amount of time.

Though service learning and social justice work are not synonymous, service learning does have the potential to address social justice problems, particularly if projects incorporate the components that are characteristic of the critical service learning approach that Mitchell (2008) describes. In the remainder of this article, we analyze the service learning projects that our seniors have completed within the context of a social justice, diversity-oriented capstone course taught at a university engaged in PDS partnerships. Our purposes are to 1) determine whether our students' projects are addressing social justice goals and 2) consider how we, as instructors of the course, might adjust the course and the service learning project to address issues of inequity and injustice within our locality's schools.

Methods

Contextual Factors

The University of North Georgia is a public, multi-campus university in the Southeast region of the United States. The university is engaged in PDS partnerships with several nearby school districts that have varying demographics. One district is located within an affluent, suburban county with a rising population of Asian Indian families, and two are rural counties with large numbers of families experiencing poverty. Another county has a mix of rural and suburban schools within its school district. Situated within this county is a small, culturally diverse city that has its own separate school district.

Within the university's elementary/special education program, approximately 150 juniors and 150 seniors are placed at elementary schools throughout these school districts each year. Juniors and first-semester seniors participate in internships at their schools three days per week, while seniors are present at their schools full-time in their final semester. Students are divided into geographically-based cohorts; currently, the program has seven cohorts with five to six elementary schools (PDS partner schools) connected to each cohort. About eight university students are placed at each elementary school, usually four juniors and four seniors.

The university students who take *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities* are seniors in their final semester. These pre-service teachers are earning a dual degree (with certification) in both elementary and special education. When they take the course, the seniors are simultaneously completing a semester of full-time student teaching that includes six weeks of taking over the planning and teaching of all subjects. *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities* is a hybrid course with online components and periodic face-to-face meetings that occur in the late afternoon following the school day's conclusion. The course is focused on growing seniors' awareness of social justice issues and how to support children and families from diverse backgrounds, including differences in race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, social class, religion, and language.

The capstone project in *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities* is the completion of a service learning project and an accompanying paper. Seniors work with peers who are student teaching at the same elementary school to design and implement a project addressing an area of need at the school. To begin the project, the seniors research the areas of need at their school by talking with stakeholders such as teachers and administrators and consulting their school's improvement plan. After determining a project topic and receiving approval from school administrators and the course professor, the seniors investigate appropriate methods for addressing their school's area of need to ensure their project implementation is research-based. Next, they plan and implement their project, which involves determining a target population of children, developing and teaching lesson plans, and collecting data to determine the project's impact. Seniors are expected to teach at least two 30-minute lessons per week for a minimum of eight weeks. At the conclusion of the project, the seniors analyze the data they have collected to evaluate their project's success and consider recommendations they could make to administrators at their school. Once the implementation is complete, seniors write about the project and its results. Afterward, they are asked to present their projects to juniors and faculty within their cohorts during the last week of the spring semester.

Data Sources

For the purpose of the analysis, we examined past service learning projects completed by the seniors we have taught in *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities*. Danielle (first author) has taught the course since 2017 and supported the completion of 23 projects between 2017 and 2019, while Diana (second author) has taught the course since 2018 and supported the completion of 28 projects between 2018 and 2020. We each analyzed and coded our own students' service learning projects separately and afterward reviewed our findings with each other to ensure consensus. In total, we analyzed 51 projects completed by our seniors between 2017 and 2020.

Framework

For our analysis, we used Gibson's (2018) framework for social change, which identifies types of social action ranging from philanthropy to community organizing. Because a goal of social justice work is to solve social problems and remedy injustice, we believed a framework for social change would be well-suited to the purpose of our analysis. Although Gibson's (2018) framework is meant to describe a variety of ways that people can work toward social change, for

our purposes, we conceptualized the framework as a hierarchy. The framework includes four types, or pillars, of social action:

- *Philanthropy*, or offering resources in support of a cause (e.g., giving money or goods to a charitable organization)
- *Direct service*, or providing some kind of needed service to a group of people (e.g., tutoring English learners to improve their English skills)
- *Politics and advocacy*, or working to change laws and policies or raise public awareness of an issue (e.g., attending a legislative session to advocate for a new law, participating in a march to raise awareness about a cause)
- *Community organizing and development*, or working with a community to solve social problems (e.g., creating a task force of parents, teachers, and students to examine bullying in local schools and implement steps to reduce or eliminate bullying)

We viewed *philanthropy* and *direct service* as lower forms of social action because although they offer needed resources and services to people impacted by a social problem, these forms do not involve taking action to eliminate the root of the problem. As Gibson (2018) suggests, these forms address the symptoms of the problem and not the causes. We viewed *politics and advocacy* and *community organizing and development* as higher forms because these actions are aimed at the broader goal of eliminating a social problem through advocacy and community efforts. These types of social action go beyond mitigating the impacts of a problem by attempting to develop a solution to the problem itself.

Data Analysis

To conduct our analysis, we reviewed all key assessment papers completed by groups of seniors who took *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities* with us in previous semesters; reviewing these key assessment papers reacquainted us with the projects that the seniors designed and implemented. After this review, we independently analyzed and categorized the projects completed by our own students according to the four types of social action (Gibson, 2018); Danielle categorized all of the projects from students that she has taught, and Diana categorized all of the projects from students in her classes. Following this independent categorization, Danielle and Diana met in person and discussed their independent analysis and reconciled differences. Interpretations were discussed until full agreement was achieved. In the next section, we address our findings and what we learned from this analysis.

Findings: Analysis of Service Learning Projects, 2017-2020

Findings from our analysis suggest that all of the senior groups chose service learning projects that provided a direct service (Gibson, 2018), offering necessary academic or social supports to the students at their elementary schools. Within 51 total projects, only two groups met an additional pillar of change aside from providing a direct service. One group was able to tie in philanthropic services by conducting a canned food drive. Another group moved further along the hierarchy towards politics and advocacy; after group members concluded their direct service work with the elementary students at their school, they worked with these children to host a community resource fair and disseminate information to others.

All service learning projects that occurred between 2017-2020 addressed either an academic or social need at the school. The topics of the service learning projects included math

support, English language arts support, study skills, and socioemotional skills and strategies. English language arts was the most popular topic chosen within all service learning projects: 21 out of 51 groups (41%) chose to work on either reading, writing, or speaking skills. Within the 21 groups, 14 chose to focus on reading, providing support in reading comprehension, reading engagement, phonics, and sight word skills; five groups worked on improving students' writing; and two groups worked to improve students' English-speaking proficiency with English language learners.

In these groups, the seniors created engaging lessons that provided specific and targeted supports to the students. For example, there were a few groups who chose reading engagement as their topic. The seniors noticed that many students hated to read, and they sought to change the students' perceptions of reading: They wanted the students to realize that reading could be enjoyable and pleasant. Working towards the goal of having students develop a love for reading, the seniors brought to class a curated selection of books based on the students' interests and hobbies. Moreover, the seniors had students bring in and share books that they enjoyed. They provided supports for students to conduct a "book talk," where students could discuss and describe the books they enjoyed reading. This opportunity allowed the students to share their ideas about what made the books engaging, as well as to provide an opportunity for other students to hear about books that they might be interested in reading. Additionally, the seniors also provided support for students to write book reviews, which were displayed in the classroom and on hallway bulletin boards for all students in the school to view. By providing access to high-interest books and allowing students to share their ideas about books they liked reading, the seniors were able to demonstrate that reading could be a pleasant and enjoyable experience.

The second most popular topic that pre-service teachers chose for their service learning projects was socio-emotional learning. Sixteen groups of seniors (31%) chose to work with students who were struggling socially or behaviorally. The topics within socio-emotional learning were varied, depending on the age group that the seniors chose: Some groups focused on identifying positive social behaviors and self-monitoring strategies, and others taught students strategies to help cope with anxiety or anger. Seniors who were working with older elementary-aged students supported them with developing self-respect as well as the social skills needed to help with the transition from elementary school (fifth grade) to middle school (sixth grade).

The third most popular topic among the service learning projects was improving mathematics. Ten groups (19%) focused on strategies and supports to improve students' mathematical abilities. Many of these groups emphasized improving math fluency and math facts; others addressed problem-solving strategies with word problems. The remaining four service learning project groups selected something other than math, English language arts, or socio-emotional learning. Two groups focused on study skills, and the other two groups focused on student motivation to attend school.

As mentioned briefly at the beginning of our Findings section, a few groups created service learning projects that met the criteria of two pillars of social change. In addition to providing a direct service by working with students who had socio-emotional needs, one group also provided philanthropic services by having these students conduct a canned food drive, receiving donations from the entire school community. These seniors were able to develop students' social skills through the collaborative task of collecting canned food to donate to the local food bank, which involved composing messages about the food drive that were broadcast

on the morning announcements, counting the number of cans donated by children in each grade level, and reporting each grade level's contributions. Through the philanthropic activity of collecting canned food and donating it to the food bank, students were able to learn valuable prosocial skills. Although philanthropy is considered a lower hierarchical level within our interpretation of the pillars of social change framework (Gibson, 2018), it is worth noting that the seniors created a service learning project that went beyond the four walls of the school and benefited the local community through their project. This group produced one of the very few projects which impacted the community beyond the elementary school.

The second service learning project that encompassed two pillars of social change met both the criteria for direct service and the advanced hierarchical level, politics and advocacy. In this project, the seniors provided a literacy intervention to students, but the project also addressed another need identified by the school principal: access to resources and information about community issues. The seniors taught lessons designed to help the students improve their research and informational reading comprehension skills, and the students applied their learning by studying and writing about important community issues, such as water safety, internet safety, and healthy eating. As a culmination of the project, the group hosted a community fair at the school to raise public awareness of these local issues and to provide resources to the community. The public was invited to attend this resource fair and learn more about issues that may affect their lives or impact the local community, and local nonprofit organizations were present to offer information about their services. Posters showcasing the students' research findings were displayed at the fair, and similar to an academic or professional conference, the students stood by their posters to share information with attendees. By teaching the students reading comprehension skills through a research project centered on issues that were important to the community, and then creating a resource fair where students were able to share their learning with the public, these seniors were able to extend their impact beyond the school to reach the level of politics and advocacy.

Although these two service learning project groups were the only groups that met more than one pillar of social change, two additional groups completed projects that went beyond providing a direct service to the small group of children who partook in their project. These two service learning projects made an impact on the whole school community.

One group, which called themselves the "Recycling Club," used the theme of recycling throughout their reading skills remediation. The seniors asked students to read and learn about all aspects of recycling. Then, as an engagement activity, the students created posters that shared information about recycling, and their work was displayed on the walls throughout the elementary school. Additionally, as part of the club, the students went around to each classroom every week to collect paper for recycling. By sharing information about recycling through posters and by collecting paper to be recycled each week, the service learning project participants were given opportunities to advocate for the care of the environment through recycling. These actions provided opportunities to spread awareness about recycling and shape the consciousness of children in the school, which is a step towards advocacy, a higher form of social change.

The second group, which called themselves the "Elite Eagles Writing Club," focused on writing enrichment. In their club, students practiced informational writing skills by creating scripts for videos that were used to inform parents and guardians of activities and games that

could be played at home in order to support students' learning. First, students learned informational writing skills. Then, the students created scripts for their videos. Afterward, the students acted out their scripts and recorded their scripts on video. Lastly, the videos were uploaded to the school's website for parents to access. Parents were able to watch the videos to understand the directions of the activities and games which they could implement to support and extend their children's learning at home. This group's service learning project extended beyond benefiting only the students in the group; it provided a service to the parents and guardians of the students at the school, which broadened the impact of their service learning project on the local school community. Tori and Kristina, who are the third and fourth authors of this paper, respectively, were in charge of the design and implementation of the Elite Eagles Writing Club. Both are alumni of the elementary/special education program and currently teaching within the university's PDS partner schools. In the section below, they offer additional details about their project and how it aligns to the framework for social change (Gibson, 2018) from their perspective, which corroborates Danielle and Diana's analysis of this project.

Alumni Perspectives: Elite Eagles Writing Club
        We designed the Elite Eagles Writing Club to support the academic goals of our elementary placement school. The primary objective of the project was to increase the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) scores, as outlined in the school's annual improvement plan. Specifically, the school wished to improve informational writing scores. In addition to working with students to increase writing scores, the school administration also requested that we create supplemental videos to educate parents and community members about the school's Academic Parent-Teacher Teams (APTT) games and activities designed to support students' academic progress. Accordingly, a secondary purpose of our service learning project was to support the school's APTT program, which aims to increase communication between parents and teachers concerning student scholastic success (Georgia Department of Education, n.d.).
        In order to accomplish both goals, we chose to focus on writing scripts for the APTT videos. Our student population consisted of 16 fourth- and fifth-grade student ambassadors divided into three groups based on pre-assessment data. Each group focused on specific writing skills such as brainstorming, sequencing, transition words, editing, word choice, or clarity. Over 10 weeks, students met for 30 minutes twice weekly during the school-wide response to intervention (RTI) time. Each session began with a 5-10 minute mini-lesson that addressed a specific writing skill, followed by independent writing time where we conferenced one-on-one with students to provide additional instruction through guided writing. Once the first script was complete, each group filmed their video. We then administered a mid-assessment to analyze which skills to address while writing the second script, as well as to note the progress students had made in the first half of the program. We repeated the same instructional process for the second set of scripts, then administered a post-test to measure overall growth.
        Our service learning project fell in the direct service level of Gibson's (2018) framework of social change. In collaboration with our partnership school, we worked directly with staff and students to provide writing instruction to a specific student population in response to a documented need for support. Students who were considered to be at risk and in need of interventions for grade-level standards received targeted instruction through the implementation

of this program in the school. We also guided and facilitated students in recording videos that were then shared with parents and community members.

      Our partnership school has dedicated its time and resources to increasing parent involvement by reaching out to parents and stakeholders across several community needs. A few examples of our school's influence in the community included educating families on how to obtain a free library card and offering parents access to a resource room with books, games, and other activities for use at home with their children. The school worked diligently to fill in gaps for families with limited resources. In this way, our service learning project was close to operating within the community organizing and development pillar of Gibson's (2018) framework, since our partnership school had organized, designed, and implemented programs to affect change across social issues in the community. To be transparent, our relationship was a transitive one, as we did not intend to affect social change within this school community; any benefits to the community in this aspect were due solely to our school's relationship with stakeholders.

Discussion

      In summary, although there was one group that reached the level of politics and advocacy and a few groups that were approaching this category, the vast majority of groups fell into the category of direct service, in which seniors implemented projects that provided a service to students addressing academic or socio-emotional needs. We believe there are several reasons why the majority of service learning projects fell into the direct service category for social change. First, the seniors were required to complete the service learning projects within their field placement schools, limiting options for impacting the broader community. Second, the seniors were expected to select a topic related to their school's improvement plan, which was created by school district personnel to identify areas of improvement for the school. These improvement plans typically targeted academic areas of growth, socio-emotional development of the children, or the development of prosocial behaviors and positive school culture. Third, when the seniors were implementing their service learning projects, they were also student teaching on a full-time basis and completing edTPA, a performance assessment that leads to teacher certification. Quite understandably, these responsibilities may have limited the time our seniors had to devise projects that could serve their schools and the needs of the broader community. We believe that these reasons may have prompted our seniors to choose projects that provide more direct services to students rather than extending their reach to community-based projects.

      We pondered one question after analyzing the data: whether it was possible to consistently enact higher levels of social change, such as advocacy or community organizing and development, within these service learning projects. With the current service learning project guidelines, reaching higher levels of the hierarchy would be challenging because of the established standards for meeting specific academic achievement goals. After all, service learning is supposed to be a blend of academic learning and service (Harrison et al., 2016; Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015).

      However, with some changes to the requirements of the service learning project, we believe that enacting projects at the higher levels of social change is a possibility. For example, removing the requirement to link the project to the school's improvement plan would provide seniors with more options when selecting and designing their projects. Recently, a school in a

nearby community received media attention when students sent racist and hateful messages to peers via social media. Regrettably, racism continues to be a pressing problem in the schools and communities of our region as it is elsewhere in the United States. Our seniors could be responsive to these problems by designing a project in which they collaborate with students to research and implement actions that schools and individuals should take to eliminate racism. These actions might include advocating for curricular changes built on principles of anti-racism (Husband, 2012) or forming a school-based organization dedicated to promoting intercultural respect, raising awareness about the impacts of racism, and eliminating bullying, acts of hate, and discrimination within the school. Such efforts could also be extended into the community if seniors and students are permitted to share their ideas and collaborate with community organizations dedicated to anti-racism, which aligns to Mitchell's (2008) point that critical service learning, an approach aimed at creating social change, must involve sharing goals with the broader community.

Making some changes to the service learning project, such as removing the requirement to choose a project aligned to the school's improvement plan, could give our seniors more latitude to design projects aligned to the goals of social justice while continuing to serve the needs of the university's PDS partners. Instead of referring to the school's improvement plan, seniors could work with teachers, students, administrators, and others to identify areas of need at the school that are not necessarily articulated in the improvement plan. In addition, we wonder if completing *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities* and the service learning project in a different semester would help our students design projects aligning to the higher levels of social change, such as politics and advocacy, and community organizing and development. While our university students always have many demands on their time given their dual major and internship requirements, the spring semester of senior year is the most time-intensive of all. Shifting the course to the spring or summer of junior year or the fall of senior year might provide them with more time to plan meaningful projects beyond the school walls and into the community.

As another solution to address the issue of time, we could develop the service learning project into an assignment spanning multiple semesters. In our program, the seniors take a content literacy course in the fall semester before they begin student teaching and before they start implementing the service learning project. Within this content literacy course, seniors learn evidence-based practices for teaching children to read and write within various academic disciplines. Perhaps within the content literacy course, the seniors could work with children at their placement schools to identify a meaningful community or social issue. Within the context of investigating this issue, seniors could teach elementary students about conducting research, reading and synthesizing sources, and academic writing. At the same time, the seniors might explore the issue themselves through reading relevant scholarship and talking to community stakeholders, and they could begin developing some components of their capstone paper such as the literature review. In the spring semester as the seniors enter student teaching, they might continue working with the same group of children to implement a project related to the chosen issue, such as engaging in advocacy or building awareness of the issue within the local community. Powell et al. (2001) describe an outstanding example of fourth grade children in Kentucky who practiced and applied their literacy skills to successfully save Black Mountain, the highest peak in the state, from the environmental destruction caused by strip mining. The real-

life project described in this article models how academic skills like reading and writing can be practiced in the context of advocating for a better world. Essentially, we are suggesting that students could begin building the background for their service learning project in the fall semester within their content literacy course and implementing the actual project in the spring semester when they take *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities*. By spreading the service learning project across the fall and spring semesters and integrating it in two courses, the issue of time could be addressed. Redesigning the service learning project in this way would allow elementary children to have input on the issue addressed in the project, which opens more possibilities for more meaningful projects, and it would provide the seniors and their student groups more time to brainstorm and implement a project with social justice-oriented goals.

       As instructors of *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities*, we recognize a need for providing more scaffolding to our seniors if we expect their projects to achieve the aims of social justice and align to higher levels of Gibson's (2018) framework. First, we recognize that some of the seniors may not be permanent residents of the communities where they teach, and they may be unaware of the social issues these communities face. We acknowledge that it takes time to get to know the community's issues, goals, and values. As instructors, we could be more deliberate about linking the topics taught in the course to local issues and current events, especially because Danielle and Diana both live and work in the communities where the university has PDS partnerships. In some cases, our knowledge of our community could be more intimate than the seniors' knowledge. Taking the step to link course content to local issues might help seniors generate new ideas for projects, ideas that may not have occurred to them without this more intimate, "insider" knowledge of local communities. Second, we realize that many of the seniors may not fully understand what social justice looks like in practice. While much of our class time is spent discussing social justice issues and the ways we can address them in schools, the seniors may need support with applying their learning in new ways. We could address this concern by sharing examples of social justice-oriented work that would be feasible to address in a semester-long project. For example, the literacy intervention/community resource fair project would be an excellent model to share with future seniors because it addressed a need of the school (improving students' reading skills) and a need of the community (raising awareness about relevant issues and providing access to resources and information). Sharing examples like this could inspire future seniors to be more creative and intentional about addressing social change in their service learning projects.

       Danielle and Diana have experienced the service learning project from the perspective as instructors of *Strategies for Supporting Diverse Communities*. However, as alumni and current teachers within PDS schools, Tori and Kristina offer additional ideas about aligning the service learning projects to the higher levels of social change (Gibson, 2018). Their insights are useful to us (Danielle and Diana) as instructors, but they also have implications for the university's PDS partners. Their perspectives are shared next.

Alumni Perspectives: Service Learning for Social Justice

       In order for future service learning projects to meet the highest goals of social justice, partnership schools must be willing to support pre-service teachers in such efforts. In our experience, partnership schools limited the activities that seniors were allowed to participate in. This might be due in part to the fact that pre-service teachers must use their partnership school's

annual improvement plan as a starting point when identifying a need. Typically, school improvement plans are constructed strictly on data-based academic needs within the student population and not underlying social issues. Another consideration for future success is time. We were required to complete our service learning project concurrently with our full-time student teaching and our teacher-certification assessment, edTPA. Consequently, we had to make concessions and prioritize how much time and effort we could pour into specific tasks. The time to work with the community on social issues was extremely limited. Additionally, we feel that further education regarding the framework for social change (Gibson, 2018) before beginning student teaching would benefit pre-service teachers in choosing, designing, and implementing service learning projects that meet the highest levels of social justice goals.

Conclusion

In its current form, the service learning project that our seniors complete is valuable for several reasons. The project provides the seniors with opportunities to learn about research-based practices and collect and analyze data to improve instruction, which are critical skills they will frequently utilize when they enter the teaching profession. Further, the project provides a service designed to address the needs of the university's K-5 PDS partner schools, helping the university sustain a mutually beneficial relationship with its partners. Nevertheless, we believe that our seniors' service learning projects can be more intentionally designed to address social justice goals with some adjustments to the requirements and additional scaffolding from instructors.

References

Butin, D.W. (2007). Justice-learning: Service-learning as justice-oriented education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *40*(2), 177-183. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680701246492

Dantley, M.E., & Tillman, L.C. (2010). Social justice and moral transformative leadership. In C. Marshall & M. Oliva (Eds.), *Leadership for social justice: Making revolutions in education* (2nd ed.; pp. 19-34). New York: Allyn & Bacon. https://doi.org/10.1177/0013161X13514440

Cipolle, S.B. (2010). *Service-learning and social justice: Engaging students in social chang*e. Washington, D.C.: Rowman & Littlefield.

Donahue, D.M., Bowyer, J., & Rosenberg, D. (2003). Learning with and learning from: Reciprocity in service learning in teacher education. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *36*(1), 15-27. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680303498

Georgia Department of Education. (n.d.). *Academic Parent-Teacher Teams.* https://www.gadoe.org/School-Improvement/Federal-Programs/Partnerships/Pages/APTT.aspx

Gibson, M.L. (2018). Scaffolding critical questions: Learning to read the world in middle school civics class in Mexico. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *62*(1), 25-34. https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.735

Harrison, L., Reiser, C., & Hawk, R. (2016). Creating meaningful partnerships: Connecting teacher candidates with professional development schools through service learning. *School-University Partnerships*, *9*(2), 40-49.

Hildenbrand, S.M., & Schultz, S.M. (2015). Implementing service learning in pre-service teacher coursework. *Journal of Experiential Education*, *38*(3), 262-279. https://doi.org/10.1177/1053825915571748

Husband, T. (2012). "I don't see color": Challenging assumptions about discussing race with young children. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, *39*(6), 365-371. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-011-0458-9

Kirkland, D.E. (2014). "They look scared": Moving from service learning to learning to serve in teacher education - a social justice perspective. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *47*(4), 580-603. https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2014.958967

Middleton, V.A. (2003). A diversity-based, service learning PDS partnership. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, *34*(3), 231-237. https://doi.org/10.1080/714044330

Mitchell, T.D. (2008). Traditional vs. critical service-learning: Engaging the literature to differentiate two models. *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *14*, 50-65.

Powell, R., Cantrell, S.C., & Adams, S. (2001). Saving Black Mountain: The promise of critical literacy in a multicultural democracy. *The Reading Teacher*, *54*(8), 772-781.

Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2012). *Is everyone really equal?: An introduction to key concepts in social justice education*. New York: Teachers College Press.

Stringfellow, J.L., & Edmonds-Behrend, C.R. (2013). Service learning: Extending the classroom to the community. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, *79*(3), 42-45.

Tinkler, B., Hannah, C.L., Tinkler, A., & Miller, E. (2014). Analyzing a service-learning experience using a social justice lens. *Teaching Education*, *25*(1), 82-98. https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2012.744742