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Alternative Service Learning Placements for Teacher Candidates

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Executive Summary

Context

Teaching preparation is enriched by opportunities for teacher candidates to participate in practicum experiences where they integrate classroom theory into practice. Typically, such practicum placements take place in classroom settings where teacher candidates facilitate the learning of school-aged children by teaching the established curriculum of the jurisdiction. However, some teacher education institutions are offering teacher candidates alternative practicum experiences that may take different forms. One of those forms is a service learning practicum. However, the advantages and challenges to a teacher candidate's professional growth resulting from involvement in this alternative form of community-based practicum are not yet fully understood. This study examines the experiences of two groups of teacher candidates who engaged in 120 hours of pre-service community-based service learning placements in different models, and reports on teacher candidates' perceptions of their learning. The major difference between the two placement models was the configuration of time allowed for service learning in the programs. On one campus, teacher candidates engaged in service learning for four consecutive weeks in the final term of their five-year program. On the other campus, teacher candidates could configure 120 hours of service learning over an extended time period during their fourth year of the program. The perceptions of each group of participants allow for comparisons of the benefits of each model and provide an overview of the associated learning outcomes of the entire group.

Research Questions

This study sought to answer two research questions: 1) How do teacher candidates perceive the intended value (i.e., the social justice outcome) of service learning when it is engaged as an alternative to traditional classroom practica? and; 2) How do teacher candidates' perceptions of the effectiveness of service learning in achieving the intended outcomes differ between implementation models?

It was hypothesized that we would find differing student outcomes in the two models since the implementation of service learning was slightly dissimilar. Although requiring the same types and amounts of service, the two models were organized in different years with different configurations of teacher candidates in each concurrent education program.

Methods

The nature of the impacts of the two service learning practicum models was investigated using data from an online survey of participants from each campus of the university. Forty-two items were adapted to each practicum structure and answered by participants on a Likert-type scale. In addition to these items, three open-ended questions were presented in the survey, providing participants with less structured methods of responding to their service learning experiences. Results of the survey were analyzed to examine student relationships to aspects of service learning experiences that had been investigated in previous research, using a hierarchy for service learning engagement described by Chambers (2009).

Summary of Findings

Participants indicated that the value of service learning included: linking theory and practice; improved critical thinking and problem solving capabilities; thinking more deeply about day-to-day resource distribution and acquisition; providing opportunities to engage in distinctly different communities to develop understanding and tolerance; developing social values, knowledge and skills to live in a diverse democracy; preparing for a lifetime of informed and participatory citizenship and for various personal and educational challenges. The intended outcomes of the placements were realized, with some reservations and cautions. Both qualitative comments and quantitative data support this conclusion. However, it was also evident from the qualitative data that participants felt that the benefits of service learning to their professional growth and development as teachers were strongly dependent on the type of service learning placement they had arranged. Generally, those teacher candidates who served in positions that allowed them the most opportunity to use their teaching skills and to interact with those being served perceived their alternative placements as providing the most valued outcomes. This was also the case where participants had experiences that exposed them to career options and where participants were provided with strong support to ensure successful placements. When items were combined within areas of impact of service learning practicum experiences on the intended learning outcomes, no significant differences between the two campus groups were found for three of the six areas of impact that were measured. However, significant differences were found across the two campuses in relation to the remaining three areas of impact. Teacher candidates from the regional campus who participated in year four alternative service learning practicum experiences, over an extended period of time, appeared to report greater strength in their ability to: 1) link theory and practice; 2) think more deeply about day-to-day resource distribution and acquisition; and 3) develop social values, knowledge, and skills to live in a diverse democracy. This finding leads to the cautious conclusion that the structure and timing of service learning and the opportunities to reflect on experiences in program-embedded strategies influence some of the intended outcomes of this alternative form of practicum.

This study has demonstrated the broad range of positive outcomes that may be realized for teacher candidates who engage in alternative service learning community-based practicum experiences, regardless of the model used to implement this opportunity. While participants had many suggestions to strengthen and enrich their service learning experience, specifically as related to the supports available to arrange and monitor their placements, generally they felt that this was a beneficial experience that broadened their perceptions of society and of their professional career options. Teacher candidates reported developing a broader and more inclusive sense of their profession and a greater awareness of the potential contexts in which teaching can be integrated. In an economic and professional environment where jobs in traditional teaching may not be readily available to graduates, the opportunity to expand their perceptions of career options, while providing service to the community, may make alternative practicum placements worthwhile in any teacher education context.

Introduction

Service learning in a teacher education context combines formal teaching with related service in the community to enhance a student's understanding of social concepts related to serving others. Service learning provides students with an opportunity to apply classroom learning to work contexts in supervised venues. It is widely used in postsecondary education courses to enhance learning experiences that are gained in a classroom. Evidence of the breadth of use of this strategy to enrich learning is evident through the work of the International Association for Research in Service Learning and Community Engagement (IARSLCE; www.researchslce.org). There are many forms of service learning, which are used in a variety of ways to complement the programs with which they are aligned. Most of these various forms, however, strive to accomplish a common goal, that is, to enrich theory with practice.

In teacher education programs, teacher candidates have frequent opportunities to practise their teaching skills in classrooms. These experiences are usually referred to as practicum experiences. In some teacher education programs, students also have opportunities for alternative practicum experiences that allow them to apply teaching skills in contexts unlike traditional classrooms (e.g., in developing countries, in non-traditional schools and in community settings). Service learning is one such form of a non-traditional practicum. Eyler and Giles (1999) identify a deeper understanding of social concepts by the participants as a goal for service learning, when it is supported by structured reflection to assist students in their efforts to internalize new understandings.

In 2009, service learning was introduced as an alternative, community-based practicum option for teacher candidates in the concurrent education stream on the home campus of a small university with a large teacher preparation program. While service learning had been used in other courses, this was the first time it was used as a credit requirement in the concurrent education program (BA/BEd). In this context, service learning was introduced to provide teacher candidates with opportunities to enrich course-related theory with practical experience and to expose them to employment options outside of the traditional classroom setting; service learning settings were an option to be chosen based on their focus on education.

In 2010, the community-based service learning alternative practicum was also introduced at a regional campus of the same university as a mandatory requirement of the concurrent teacher preparation program. This feature of the practicum also became a mandatory component on the home campus in that same year. On both campuses, service learning became a requirement for the bachelor of education concurrent education degree. Also on both campuses, similar requirements were built into the experience: 120 hours of service, frequent opportunity to use one's teaching skills in the service/community context, workplace safety requirements, and guidance from an on-site service learning supervisor, who would stand at arm's length from the university and mentor and ultimately evaluate the participating teacher candidate.

However, the structure for the concurrent education program is different at each campus. At the home campus, teacher candidates could engage in service learning in any area of the province, or even outside of the province. Community-based service learning time was structured as a four-week block of time in year five of the five-year concurrent degree program. At the regional campus, teacher candidates engaged in an alternative service learning placement within the province of Ontario during the fourth year of their five-year concurrent education program, in a time configuration that suited both student and site needs. These different structures were designed to reflect the existing differences in course offerings in each year of the concurrent program and to reflect the different timing and availability of teacher candidates to engage in practicum experiences. On the home campus, students could choose to locate their teaching practicum placements in any of 52 school boards. The diversity in location was possible because the home campus program

placements were scheduled in a four-week block of time, which allowed for travel and relocation during the service learning practicum. At the regional campus, service learning placements could be incorporated into the undergraduate program on a weekly basis or in a time configuration that met the total 120-hour criterion. The regional campus teacher candidates also had the option to participate in an international practicum sponsored by the university in the same year of the program. For the purposes of this study, only Ontario service learning placements were studied and analyzed.

In this study, researchers examined the experience of the teacher candidates and their perceptions of the value of service learning as a component of their teacher education program. We were interested in the students' perceptions of their respective service learning model in order to determine if there were differences between the two models offered.

We adapted a survey based on previous research in this area (Maynes, Hatt & Wideman, 2013) and provided it electronically to each student. The survey included several questions with response ranges on a Likert-type scale, providing quantitative data that could be used to compare perceived impacts of the two models. Additionally, some qualitative data were collected from the surveys and analyzed to determine patterns and themes across the two models.

This paper reports on the strengths, challenges, successes and lessons learned from participants in each of these types of service learning models in teacher preparation contexts. Although some data in this study relate to the teacher candidates' perceptions of the benefits of their service to the community, we have focused on analyzing the participants' perceptions of benefits to themselves as developing professionals.

Literature Review

Since the beginning of the last decade, community-based service learning has become increasingly prevalent in many Canadian postsecondary education programs. The experience of service learning is designed to achieve organizational objectives for the host organization in the community, and deeper understandings related to the learning institution's goals for the student (Eyler & Giles, 1999). Evidence that service learning has the potential to improve learning outcomes has provided increased institutional motivation to explore service learning as a strategy of instruction for deep understanding (Astin, Vogelgesang, Ikeda & Yee, 2000) and to support the development of basic principles of justice, equity and equality (Rawls, 1971). Service learning involves a cycle of service in a volunteer capacity, accompanied by opportunities for reflection. Theoretically, service learning is discipline-based and structured to focus on individual identity formation through personal growth and sociocentric engagement (Chambers, 2009). The opportunity for benefits to both the host organization and the teacher candidate creates the potential for well-structured service learning experiences to provide lasting and significant advantages for both the server and the served.

The structure of concurrent education programs that are rich in practicum exposure time allows community-based service learning to become a significant and meaningful aspect of teacher candidate preparation. While many teacher candidates have had volunteer experiences during high school and some may have already provided service consistent with service learning models, many cooperative learning experiences may not be linked to specific learning goals and may be more focused on extending the professional skills of the students through unique experiences (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). In the service learning context of a concurrent education program, the experiences provide opportunities for teacher candidates to observe the behaviours of others and to consider the impact of these behaviours in relation to outcomes, in manners consistent with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). While similar opportunities to observe other professionals and consider the impact of these behaviours are also part of the classroom practicum for teacher candidates, the

service learning practicum expands the experience for teacher candidates by providing exposure to teaching roles in organizations whose main mandate differs from that of traditional schools. In service learning, teacher candidates can experience the application of teaching concepts in contexts such as museums, hospitals and social agencies, and with older populations.

Four Approaches to Service Learning

Literature that contributes to developing a conceptual framework for service learning in teacher candidate education is emergent. However, in a higher education context, Chambers (2009) outlines the potential impacts of four approaches to service learning (i.e., experiential, social, student development, liberatory education), each structured with the expectation of slightly different learning outcomes and community benefits. These four approaches are hierarchical, in the sense that the potential impact on students' learning is intensified as the agenda for their learning becomes more transformative in nature. The transformative approach to service learning provides the greatest potential return in social transformation, to develop students' understanding of the principles of social justice and potentially support the long-term goals of the community. However, longitudinal studies of the impact of service learning on student attitudes are unavailable, both in relation to higher education and to a teacher preparation context. Further study of the benefits of community-based service learning as an aspect of teacher preparation is needed to determine how it meets the goals of community organizations and how the experience of serving others also serves the learner him- or herself (Chambers, 2009).

Chambers (2009, p. 79) identifies the four approaches to service learning by contrasting the potential outcomes of each approach. These approaches range from an approach that sees participation in service learning as an isolated experience, where the participant is a "taker" of the experience, and moves toward a vision of service learning more in keeping with Kolb's (1984) view of knowledge development as a transformative process.

Service learning has been developing into an increasingly popular and powerful option for course pedagogy (Campus Compact, 2002; Longo & Meyer, 2006). When the placement allows for and supports social engagement and critical reflection, service learning can provide the opportunity to enrich understanding of academic subject matter in an integrated context (Longo & Meyer, 2006). In the words of Chambers:

The theoretical underpinnings of service-learning offer a basis for understanding how learning occurs within a social context (experiential education and social learning), how student participants are impacted, personally and educationally, by their involvement in service-learning (student development), and how social change and social consciousness can occur through service-learning (liberatory education). (2009, p. 95)

Some approaches to service learning are structured to allow learners to work toward identifying their strengths and their professional and personal abilities. These approaches provide comparable outcomes to those proposed by critical pedagogy, with the goal of changing social conditions in students' communities and in society (Friere, 1970). Critical pedagogy aims to provide educational experiences to promote progressive social change. By engaging in experiences where service to others is required and critical thinking is expected, critical pedagogy can provide students with the tools to better themselves as teachers and to strengthen democracy in their community. This focus on developing social consciousness was one of the reasons for offering this experience to our teacher candidates.

Only in the liberatory model of service learning does the community agency receiving the service benefit from the reciprocity of engagement in the process of service learning. That is, the server gets experience and

perspective in new contexts as they engage in service learning, while the agency being served gets assistance with its mandated role. These benefits may be missing in the other three approaches to service learning because of the types of tasks the student may engage in during the experience. The liberatory education approach to service learning may include a research component, where students investigate a site-related concept or issue, or organize a special project while on a placement. In these cases, students can develop a greater commitment to making a difference in their own broader community through their deeper understanding of a social concept or issue (Wiechman, 1996; Reardon, 1998; Schutz & Ruggles, 1998; Barazangi, Greenwood, Burns & Finnie, 2003; Weinburg, 2003; Van Wynsberghe & Andruske, 2007). While such a research or project component was not required of our teacher candidates during their placements, some participants did provide such services as a part of their duties.

Service learning improves learning outcomes for the participating students (Astin, Vogelgasong, Ikeda & Yee, 2000), but the nature of these outcomes may depend on both the structure and nature of the service learning experience. Forms of social justice may not be targeted goals of all service learning experiences (Zlotkowski, 1996; Marullo & Edwards, 2000). Several studies have identified either positive or neutral outcomes of service learning experiences in relation to academic performance for students or in relation to the students' feeling about situations and issues (Tartter, 1996; Gray, Ondaatje, Fricker, Gershwind, Goldman, Kaganoff, Robyn, Sundt, Vogelgesang & Klein, 1998; Astin, Sax & Avalos, 1999; Eyler & Giles, 1999). However, in the context of a teacher education program, the university aimed to provide service learning experiences with the potential for specific critical pedagogy outcomes, as they relate to increased awareness of social issues. Awareness of social issues and of the ways our society organizes itself to address these issues through available services is of value to teachers, since teachers play a critical role in providing guidance and access to such services (e.g., family counseling, child and family services, disability services).

The cost in terms of time and human resources to support the organization, monitoring and follow-up of service learning at the postsecondary level seems to provide positive payoffs for both student participants and the community, since community-based service learning participants are more likely to participate in later service that benefits the community (Rhoads, 1997; Astin & Sax, 1998; Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000) and since such involvement in the community might be beneficial to the school that the teacher candidate ultimately serves and may help the teacher understand the community and its challenges and successes more fully.

Additionally, service learning participation may create in the participant a greater commitment to social issues and social responsibility (Giles & Eyler, 1994; Astin & Sax, 1998; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Keen & Keen, 1998). Service learning experiences with the greatest impact on the student result in human behaviours that are reflective of the meaning each participant makes from the experiences they have, the academic material to which they can relate their experiences, the community they are serving and the actions they take as a result of these connections (Chambers, 2009). The efficacy of a service learning opportunity depends on its organization, the time and effort that it requires, the learning opportunities that it provides and the institutional support provided for the experience (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt & Associates, 1984). The time and effort that participants devote to processing thoughts and feelings about their service learning experience predicts the resulting growth of their active engagement in community service (Astin, 1984; Pace, 1979; Pace, 1984; Ethington & Horn, 2007). Service learning that results in liberatory outcomes supports the development of participants' critical consciousness reflective of a social justice agenda (Friere, 1970). Friere identifies social change as a function of the individual's increasing clarity about his or her own values, a concern for social equity and a willingness to act supportively to achieve community equity. Chambers (2009) combines critical thinking with discipline-based learning and "honest dialogue" as aspects of individual identity formations required to develop the critical consciousness that is a precursor of social justice and "socio-centric engagement" (p. 84).

Chambers (2009) indicates that service learning approaches must be defined by the community's priorities and needs, the time available for service, the student's readiness to provide the needed service, the pedagogical philosophy of the originating academic program, the available community assets and the community expectations for such partnerships. In the Marullo and Edwards (2000) approach, a defining criterion for effective service learning is the engagement of all participants in problem solving to provide effective service.

Service learning opportunities are optimized through an expansive conception of their potential and the appropriate supports. When organizers of service learning opportunities understand how to structure them to allow participants to have opportunities for problem solving with a social justice focus, and provide supports for the problem solving to be successful, service learning participants can realize the full benefits of the experience. Academically supported opportunities to examine factors that cause and contribute to social inequities and to provide ways to influence the causes of these inequities can lead to social transformation (Green, Eckel & Hill, 1998; Chambers, 2009). Chambers (2009) refers to this as the opportunity to "change and challenge the world" (p. 14). There is considerable evidence that well-conceived service learning experiences can support learners in addressing societal problems of some complexity in creative ways and in developing the self-awareness to examine their own contribution to the problem. Additionally, service learning practicum experiences provide teacher candidates with an alternative to the traditional classroom placement, exposing them to other career opportunities related to the Bachelor of Education degree.

Research Questions

Two research questions have been investigated in this study:

- 1) How do teacher candidates perceive the intended value (i.e., the social justice outcome) of service learning when it is engaged as an alternative to traditional classroom practica?
- 2) How do teacher candidates' perceptions of the effectiveness of service learning in achieving the intended outcomes differ between implementation models?

Methods

In this study, we collected both quantitative and qualitative data through a survey to assess teacher candidates' perceptions of the value of the service learning experience to their growth and development as professional teachers. The online survey was distributed to participating teacher candidates, who were invited to complete the survey (see Appendix 1) over a two-month period immediately following their placement.

The survey included seven questions that were to be answered on a five-point Likert-type scale ("strongly disagree", "disagree", "neutral", "agree", "strongly agree"). Aside from slight variations in wording to reflect the different contexts of the two campuses, this survey was the same as that which had been used in previous research (Maynes, Hatt & Wideman, 2013). The survey included six questions that collected demographic data. Additionally, the survey included five Likert-type questions, each with several sub-categories, for a total of 42 statements requiring selection among response options; and three open-ended questions that allowed participants to respond with written comments. The open-ended questions were:

- 1) What are the benefits of the alternative practicum/service learning placement?
- 2) Are there any drawbacks to an alternative practicum/service learning placement?

- 3) What are some recommendations for enhancements to the alternative practicum/service learning placement in the concurrent education program?

The demographic and descriptive data that were collected included: campus attended, gender, the alternative service learning setting each participant attended (see Table 2), the needs that each participant addressed at their placement (see Table 3), the types of tasks each participant completed at their placement (see Table 4), and the number of hours per week each participant engaged in service learning.

Surveys were analyzed by calculating the percentage of positive (“strongly agree” or “agree”) and negative (“disagree” and “strongly disagree”) responses to each item. The percentage of responses across each of the positive and negative groups was then compared to reveal issues that may have emerged during the service learning practicum and may have affected the teacher candidates’ perceptions of its value to them as learners, and to highlight significant differences in perceptions. Tests of significance were completed and are reported later in this paper.

Open coding (Creswell, 2009) was used to analyze responses to the three open-ended questions and to determine themes related to the participants’ interpretations of the alternative community service learning practicum experience.

Participants

Recruitment of survey participants included an email invitation to the online survey. There were 91 participants in this study. Forty-three attended the home campus of the university, while 48 attended the regional campus. Over 93% of the participants on each campus were female. On the home campus, the response rate was 44.8%, while 29.7% of teacher candidate participants at the regional campus responded to the survey, providing a combined response rate of 37.2 % from both programs (Table 1). Participation in the survey was optional and teacher candidates received one email reminder of the survey at the end of the two-month survey window. No incentives were offered to complete the survey.

Table 1: Participant Response Rate

	Number of teacher candidates who completed a service learning practicum	Number of students who completed the survey	Response rate
Home campus	98	43	44.8%
Regional campus	155	46	29.7%

The variation in the response rates could be due to the timing of the placements. The home campus participants completed their placements in a four-week block, followed by a two-month opportunity to complete the survey while their teacher preparation program continued with additional classroom placements. However, regional campus participants could continue their service learning practicum until the end of their fourth year of study in the program, followed by a two-month opportunity to complete the survey. This timing placed the survey completion window outside of the regular academic year for the regional campus participants.

Settings

Teacher candidates arranged their own service learning placement with guidance from two sources. On each campus there was a staff member/office charged with the task of overseeing placements, and each teacher candidate had to obtain approval for their proposed placement. In addition, teacher candidates were provided with an Alternative Placement Service Learning Handbook that had been developed by a Faculty of Education faculty member. This handbook provided students with examples and criteria related to the types of placements they could arrange. Students were responsible for arranging their own placements with the support of faculty and staff within the parameters outlined in the handbook. The nature of the service learning setting that participants arranged for their practicum may have had an influence on their perceptions of the value of the experience. For this reason, data about the practicum settings were collected from each campus group. Settings are reported in Table 2. Students identified their service learning setting based on the mandate of the agency in its community. Some placements included more than one mandate, so totals may exceed 100%.

Table 2: Community Service Learning Practicum Settings

Setting	Regional campus	Home campus
Community agency (e.g., Child and Family Services (CAS), social assistance programs, supportive housing, etc.)	20.8%	30.2%
Hospital/Health system	2.1%	7.0%
Private school	10.4%	4.7%
Community centre (e.g., clubs, after-school programs, sports teams, tutoring)	12.5%	18.6%
Social service agency (e.g., parole services, jails, Section 23 classes, social assistance programs)	2.1%	7.0%
Postsecondary	10.4%	0%
Camp	6.3%	0%
Other (museums, tutoring agencies, alternative school programs, etc.)	35.4%	53.5%

Nature of the Alternative Service Learning Practicum

The duties in which the teacher candidates engaged during their practicum may have influenced their perception of the value of the experience. For this reason, data were collected about the types of services that each participant provided during the alternative service learning practicum. These services are reported in Table 3. Students used the categories provided to identify the key focus of services given by the agency where they served. The survey asked them to report on those activities most closely associated with the agency's mandate but not on specific activities in which they engaged during their placement. Many practica may have had participants addressing needs in many of these categories during the same placement. For this reason, totals may exceed 100%.

Table 3: Needs Addressed during the Community Service Learning Practicum

Needs addressed	Regional campus	Home campus
Education/Providing a teaching service related to the organization's goals and mandate	82.5%	83.7%
Language learning	41.3%	30.2%
Child/Youth work	38.1%	46.5%
Disability issues	23.8%	37.2%
Health	19.0%	14.0%
Elderly care	4.8%	2.3%
Homelessness	1.6%	2.3%
Victim assistance	0%	7.0%
Other (e.g., clerical, display design, maintenance)	6.3%	20.9%

Specific Service Tasks Addressed during Alternative Community Service Learning Placements

The tasks that teacher candidates completed to provide service to their supervisors and agencies during the alternative service learning practicum varied greatly. A summary of the tasks is provided below in Table 4. The nature of the tasks may have had an influence on how participants perceived the value of the practicum experience. Once again, totals may exceed 100% as some agencies allowed participants to engage in a variety of tasks.

Table 4: Alternative Community Service Learning Practicum Placement Tasks

Tasks	Regional campus	Home campus
Direct involvement with clients (teach, coach, visit)	90.5%	85.7%
Create/Organize a new program	47.6%	47.6%
Special projects for group (brochure, fundraiser)	31.7%	33.3%
Manage a program (e.g., a special project that the organization was able to offer because of the additional assistance provided by the student)	25.4%	14.3%
Indirect service (clerical, physical labour, transport)	23.8%	21.4%
Supervise other volunteers	15.9%	11.9%
Other	3.2%	7.1%

Hours of Alternative Community Service Learning Work during the Program

Each campus used different approaches and timeframes for the completion of the required alternative service learning component of the program. At the regional campus, 46 teacher candidates reported an average per participant service time of 11.8 hours per week. At the home campus model, 43 participants provided service averaging 28.3 hours per week. This average was calculated within the Surveygizmo program in response to information provided by participants. This difference reflects the different parameters of the two implementation models, with the home campus approach concentrating service in a four-week block, while the regional campus model allowed for the completion of service time over three terms (12 months). During two of these three terms, regional campus students were engaged in year 4 courses in their program. In each

model, participants organized their time to meet the required 120 hours of service learning in ways that addressed the needs of the organization they were serving. The implications for the different organizations of the two time distribution models will be discussed in the results section of this paper.

Data Sources

Data for this study were collected using the online survey data program Surveygizmo. This program was selected due to its intuitive participant interface and its flexibility in survey setup, design and delivery. Data were collected between mid-February and the end of June 2012.

Limitations

This study was a one-year examination of the responses from volunteer participants in winter 2012. Response rates may have influenced the outcomes of this study. Additionally, we now have enough data about issues arising from this study to provide a stronger sense of how the survey itself could be redesigned to provide more specific information related to teacher candidates' perceptions of the value of service learning to their professional development. A redesigned survey would allow researchers to examine the implications of the service learning practicum for liberatory education outcomes and allow us to mediate the potential drawbacks of some types of placements.

Results/Findings

It was the intention of both campuses involved in this study to provide teacher candidates with opportunities for transformative growth in professional attitudes and skills, while exposing them to career alternatives where employers would value their teaching degrees. These objectives were described to teacher candidates during an introductory meeting about service learning on each campus and again in the service learning handbook that each participant received. Results of the post-service survey were analyzed to determine if these goals had been met and to direct further program decisions.

Participants' responses to the survey completed after the alternative community service learning placements allowed us to examine their perceptions of the value of their experiences. Teacher candidates also responded to three open-ended questions. The quantitative and qualitative findings from the survey will be addressed separately in the following sections.

Quantitative Results

Five sets of items on the survey addressed teacher candidates' perceptions of the value of their alternative service learning practicum placement. These five sets of items each had sub-components, resulting in 42 items that required responses on a five-point Likert-type scale. Analysis revealed low internal consistency in some sets of items and irrelevance to the goals in others, so 37 of the 42 original survey items were retained for further analysis. Table 5 displays the percentage of teacher candidates who responded positively (i.e., "agree" or "strongly agree") to each prompt. Data are presented in this way because the majority of responses fell into the "agree" or "strongly agree" categories. Table 5 displays only the essential focus phrase to capture the intent of each of the 37 items. Appendix 1 includes the entire survey for reference. Comparative percentages are presented in Table 5 for the home campus participants and their regional campus counterparts, followed by averages for each item across the two campuses.

Table 5: Quantitative Responses to the Service Learning Survey (Percentages of Agree or Strongly Agree)

Question focus	Focus on prompt	Home campus	Regional campus	Average
Learning value of the placement	Using course materials in alternative settings	69.8%	87.6%	78.7%
	Gained information	72.1%	81.3%	76.7%
	Should implement service learning	53.3%	75.0%	64.2%
	Increased responsibility for own learning	60.5%	70.9%	60.7%
	Skill building	55.8%	79.2%	67.5%
	Increased awareness for teachers of roles outside of teaching	62.8%	81.3%	72.5%
	Intent to continue service learning connection	51.1%	77.1%	64.1%
	Service learning placement was appropriately timed	55.9%	41.7%	48.8%
Value to the tasks engaged in during the service learning placements	Had important duties	60.4%	87.6%	74.0%
	Had challenging tasks	48.9%	72.9%	61.4%
	Had interesting tasks	74.4%	89.6%	82.0%
	Completed tasks independently	88.4%	98.0%	93.2%
	Interacted with those being served	90.7%	91.7%	91.2%
	Other professionals took an interest in me	90.7%	91.7%	91.2%
	Had a variety of tasks	69.8%	85.4%	77.6%
	Was appreciated	90.7%	89.6%	90.2%
	Made a contribution	67.5%	87.5%	77.5%
	Was free to develop and use my ideas	76.8%	91.7%	84.3%
	Discussed experiences with supervisor	81.4%	85.4%	83.4%
	Worked with people with diverse backgrounds	83.8%	85.4%	84.6%
	Got good feedback on evaluation forms	46.5%	87.5%	67.0%
Views of themselves as contributors to their communities	Had done previous volunteer work	62.8%	77.1%	69.9%
	Learned how to become more involved in community service	67.5%	75.0%	71.3%
	Intention to continue association with the service learning agency	48.8%	70.9%	64.5%

Question focus	Focus on prompt	Home campus	Regional campus	Average
	Service learning placement benefitted the community	67.5%	81.2%	74.4%
	Increased awareness of needs in the world	58.2%	70.8%	64.5%
	Helped define own strengths and weaknesses	62.8%	85.4%	74.1%
	Helped clarify career/specialization choices	76.8%	70.9%	73.6%
	Will include service learning in future plans	62.8%	85.4%	74.1%
	Understood the variety of work being done with an education degree	55.8%	81.2%	68.5%
Sense of personal growth through service learning experiences	Developed a good relationship with supervisor	95.4%	89.6%	92.5%
	Comfortable working with diverse people	80.9%	83.3%	82.6%
	More awareness of own biases and prejudices	34.9%	50.1%	42.5%
	Helped enhance own leadership skills	62.8%	83.0%	72.9%
	Enhanced real world communication skills	60.5%	77.1%	68.3%
	Helped apply skills in real-life situations	53.4%	75.0%	64.2%
	Understand rewards of helping others	72.1%	81.3%	76.7%

These data show the areas of potential impact of service learning and the percentages of each group that perceived positive impacts from their placements. Combined averages were calculated to support conclusions about experiences across the two campuses. While some areas revealed considerable differences between the two campuses, combining the data allows us to address the first of our research questions to determine the overall perceived value of the experience.

Teacher candidates felt that there was learning value to their placements in all areas, but more than half of the participants in this survey felt that the placements were not timed appropriately to their program, with only 41.7% of the regional campus participants expressing that timing was appropriate. Further details about these concerns are provided in the qualitative data.

Teacher candidates perceived value in the tasks they undertook during the service learning placements and viewed themselves as contributors to their communities. They had a sense of personal growth through service learning experiences. Teacher candidates felt less strongly that their service learning experiences helped them to become more aware of their own biases and prejudices.

Qualitative Results

Three open-ended questions asked teacher candidates to respond with comments. In the following sections, quotes are chosen as typical of the range of responses that were collected, and these are later used to exemplify the patterns in the findings. As qualitative responses were very similar across the two campuses, with the exception of comments related to the timing of the practicum and the support they needed to arrange a suitable placement, the responses are presented together.

What are the benefits of the alternative practicum/service learning placement?

This question allowed participants to provide anecdotal evidence about any issue that was of interest or concern to them. As this question followed the quantitative part of the survey, the participants were able to use issues identified in the earlier questions to identify ideas that they may have wanted to expand upon in qualitative areas of the survey.

These sample responses are indicative of the teacher candidates' **new awareness of the career options** they may have developed:

- *It allows you to experience other job opportunities that you can do when we have graduated.*
- *Seeing how you can work somewhere else other than in a classroom with a teaching degree.*
- *New experiences – Exploring options*
- *Discover alternative career paths available with an education degree*
- *You realize there are so many options other than the classroom setting.*

These sample responses are indicative of teacher candidates' **new awareness of services available in their community that they can access as a classroom teacher**. This new awareness may help these teacher candidates as they enter the profession and have opportunities to provide guidance and direction to parents who may seek additional supports for their children.

- *I became aware of all of the services that child/family services offer for individuals under the age of 18. As a practicing teacher this is imperative knowledge that I will now be aware of and know of these programs that are out there in the community. Prior to this placement I had no idea.*
- *... creates more global/community minded students*

These responses are indicative of teacher candidates' **awareness of the development of new skills to address the needs of a diverse population**. The provision of opportunities to develop skills to work with students and communities with various needs is a goal of teachers' professional growth and strengthens their ability to differentiate curriculum and assessment practices with diverse populations.

- *It was a great experience; it makes me want to work with children with disabilities as a career choice; it provided me with a summer camp counselor paid position this year as well as providing personal support with children with disabilities in their homes, and finally I continue to volunteer with swimming and soccer as it is so rewarding to work with these children and develop special bonds with them.*
- *...being able to learn about and understand a different culture and be able to teach them in order to meet their needs was very beneficial*
- *This program enabled me to develop new skills and enhance the ones I already had... to apply in-class knowledge in real life situations, which resulted in me gaining a better understanding of the taught materials. We have the skill set that many organizations require (planning, organization,*

responsibility, public speaking skills, collaboration, and the like) and it is nice to feel like we are providing these services to an organization that really needs it... will allow them [new concurrent students] to continue with studies in the program, rather than quitting or switching programs.

These responses are indicative of **teacher candidates' awareness that they may be better positioned to find teaching jobs** because of the extensions to their professional contacts made possible by their service learning placements. The opportunity to apply teaching knowledge and skills to other employment contexts may be beneficial to students in situations where employment may be less available because of demographics of both the student and teacher populations in their jurisdiction.

- *It gives students a head start – volunteering looks good on a resume. We get to practice/enhance skills we already have (these skills are what led us to the program in the first place). We get to network and meet new people in different fields.*
- *...mainly that we could extend our learning. Especially in the Concurrent Education Program, we have so many weeks of placement that I think 4 weeks of regular placement would have benefitted us less than having to explore more fields.*
- *I wish this was offered before year 4, because now I have been exposed to a completely different career setting which I really enjoyed!*

These responses signal **teacher candidates' awareness of possible uses of a teaching degree outside of a traditional classroom setting.**

- *Showed to students there are more jobs out there than just teaching in a regular classroom.*
- *I would never have had the opportunity to experience this role if I had not had this placement. It has changed my career scope and direction.*
- *You realize there are so many options other than the classroom setting.*

Are there any drawbacks to an alternative practicum/service learning placement?

These responses illustrate **teacher candidates' concerns about the fourth-year placement of the service learning alternative practicum** in the regional campus context. Comments generally indicate concerns about losing the opportunity to establish and maintain school-based contacts close to the time when the students would be seeking employment.

- *Time of when it is placed in the program (4th yr.)*
- *It should not be in 4th year, should be placed in 3rd.*
- *I would say the one drawback would be the year in which the placement occurs. Possibly doing it in third year would be better, as fourth year being in the classroom would be beneficial before graduating the year after.*

It was evident from the frequency of comments about locating the regional campus service learning placement in the third year of the program rather than in the fourth year that students felt that making school-based contacts later in their program through school-based practicum experiences would be to their advantage when they applied for teaching employment.

These responses are typical of statements that indicated **concerns about the value of service learning in the program compared to the addition of classroom teaching time.**

- *I strongly feel that alternative practicum should be an option, not a requirement for students. I personally have been set on becoming a teacher since before university. Thus, I took concurrent education to increase the amount of classroom time I had. I feel that by having this placement, I did learn and have experiences. However, I would have preferred making yet another connection by being in a classroom. Also, I know that many people have said they feel like they are thrown into the placement, and although it is a good learning opportunity, it is hard to be delegated responsibility when we are here for such a short time.*
- *It really depends what someone is doing. I heard of friends who ended up sitting in an office all day – in this respect, yes, there are drawbacks, but that is life really. That could have been 4 weeks that that person learned what they really wanted/did not want to do. In my case, there were no drawbacks and I believe this was an amazing growing experience for me and should be implemented every year.*

These responses are indicative of **concerns about the limited amount of time dedicated to service learning, and the constraints placed on the service learning location**. Some students felt that they were able to take on projects of greater significance and importance because of their skills sets but that the option to do this was limited by the amount of time they could or would be at the placement (i.e., shorter than the time needed for larger projects).

- *The program is too short therefore it does not allow you to do everything you want nor build upon the relationships you have established with clients.*
- *I know many students were unmotivated to find their own placement and then they ended up with something that they didn't feel any connection or passion towards.*

These responses are indicative of the home campus participants' **concerns about a perceived lack of support in arranging appropriate service learning placements**.

- *... poor communication from the alternative practicum office and our community partners*
- *I found the guidance and the letter we were given to help us organize the placement was insufficient guidance to help me figure out and get a placement. Actually being on the placement was amazing though.*

Conclusions from the Analysis of Qualitative Data

Overall, the qualitative data supported three key observations. First, the participants in the alternative service learning placements on both campuses indicated that their placements were of considerable value when they provided opportunities for them to teach, regardless of the way in which teaching was related to the goals and roles of the organizations that they were serving. Regardless of the context of the teaching, such as in a museum or tutoring sessions, participants were consistently more positive about their service learning placements if they were engaged in serving people as an instructor in some capacity rather than serving in a clerical role. It was evident from teacher candidates' comments in the written responses that they felt most rewarded when the alternative service learning practicum put them in direct contact with the people whom they were serving and when tasks related most closely to teaching or to planning programs designed to instruct others. Alternative service learning practicum tasks that were clerical or involved physical labour, such as maintenance tasks, had much less personal impact.

Second, students indicated the need for institutional support for arranging and monitoring their placements to ensure that optimal placements were available to them. Some participants felt that too little guidance and support were given during the time when they were trying to arrange a suitable placement in their selected

community. Some felt that, because they did not have enough time to arrange a suitable placement, they had settled for something that was less than ideal for them and therefore felt that the time was less well spent than it might have been in a traditional classroom. This observation was more strongly evident in the home campus comments than it was in the regional campus comments.

Third, the participants were also aware that these experiences might serve as introductions to new career options. Many comments supported the idea that participants were able to consider their teaching skills in totally new ways and to organize their career plans in response to these new options. Some participants were offered employment with their service learning organizations after their placement was complete.

Comparing our Results to Liberatory Models for Service Learning

The following section of this paper will discuss the results of data analysis from the qualitative and quantitative sources taken together, with the objective of identifying patterns for the purpose of program enrichment.

The two campuses used two different approaches to the implementation of the alternative service learning practicum. One group of participants was in the fourth year of their concurrent education program, while the other group included students who were starting the final term of their five-year program. We will examine the data through the lens of the liberatory model of service learning to determine if our participants felt that they experienced the benefits and changes associated with a liberatory service learning experience. We will also examine the data comparatively to see if one implementation model seems to have more benefits for implementation than the other. Program recommendations will follow from these analyses.

Liberatory service learning should support strengthening participants in seven areas: 1) helping them make links between theory and practice (T & P); 2) applying critical thinking and problem solving capabilities (CTPS); 3) preparing them for a lifetime of informed and participatory citizenship and various personal and educational challenges (PFAL); 4) challenging them to think more deeply about day-to-day resource distribution and acquisition, the environment, fairness, justice, etc. (CPT); 5) having a long-term impact (LOI); 6) providing opportunities to engage in distinctly different communities to create understanding and tolerance (OTE); and 7) preparing them to develop social values, knowledge and skills to live in a diverse democracy (PPT). If our students indicated agreement or strong agreement with these items, we can cautiously conclude that the value of their service learning placement was liberatory in these respects. Therefore, when the relevance of the seven areas of liberatory service learning were considered, sets of items from the overall survey are re-categorized according to these indicators of liberatory service learning, with data from both campuses combined. Following these tables, an analysis of the differences between the two campuses will be undertaken to determine if one model of implementation was perceived to be more effective than the other in supporting these liberatory outcomes.

Liberatory Outcomes for an Alternative Teaching Practicum

There were 37 relevant items in the survey that related to Chambers' (2009) conception of liberatory service learning. These items were sorted into groups that reflect each outcome and are reported in Table 6. Data were charted and measures of statistical significance that allowed for comparison between campuses were calculated (see Table 7). Appendix 1 provides the entire set of items as they appeared on the survey.

Table 6: Liberatory Outcomes

Liberatory outcome	Item from the survey	Home campus responses	Regional campus responses	Average of responses across the two campuses
Linking theory and practice	Gained information	72.1%	81.3%	76.7%
	Increased responsibility for own learning	60.5%	70.9%	65.7%
	Helped define own strengths and weaknesses	62.8%	85.4%	74.1%
	Helped enhance own leadership skills	62.8%	83.0%	72.9%
	Helped apply skills in real life situations	53.5%	75.0%	64.2%
Bringing critical thinking and problem solving capacities of the curriculum alive	Using course materials in alternative settings	69.8%	87.6%	78.7%
	Skill building	55.8%	79.2%	67.5%
	Worked with people from diverse backgrounds	83.8%	85.4%	84.6%
	Completed tasks independently	88.4%	98.0%	93.2%
	Good relationship with supervisor	95.4%	89.6%	92.5%
	Enhanced real world communication skills	60.5%	77.1%	68.3%
Preparing students for a lifetime of informed and participatory citizenship and various personal and educational challenges	Had important duties	60.4%	87.6%	74.0%
	Had challenging tasks	48.9%	72.9%	61.4%
	Other professionals took an interest in me	90.7%	91.7%	91.2%
	Had a variety of tasks	69.8%	85.4%	77.6%
Challenging pre-service teachers to think more deeply about day-to-day resource distribution and acquisition, the	Had important duties	60.4%	87.6%	74.0%
	Had challenging tasks	48.9%	72.9%	61.4%
	Had interesting tasks	74.4%	89.6%	82.0%

Liberatory outcome	Item from the survey	Home campus responses	Regional campus responses	Average of responses across the two campuses
environment, fairness, justice, etc.				
Having opportunities to engage in distinctly different communities: Developing understanding and tolerance	Had interesting tasks	74.4%	89.6%	82.0%
	Interacted with those being served	90.7%	91.7%	91.2%
	Learned how to become more involved in community service	67.5%	75.0%	71.3%
	Service learning placement benefitted the community	67.5%	81.2%	74.4%
	Increased awareness of needs in the world	58.2%	70.8%	64.5%
	Comfortable working with diverse people	80.9%	83.3%	82.6%
	More awareness of own biases and prejudices	34.9%	50.1%	42.5%
Preparing teacher candidates to develop social values, knowledge and skills to live in a diverse democracy	Skill building	55.8%	79.2%	67.5%
	Made a contribution	67.5%	87.5%	77.5%
	Was free to develop and use my own ideas	76.8%	91.7%	84.3%
	Increased awareness of needs in the world	58.2%	70.8%	64.5%
	Will include service learning in future plans	68.2%	85.4%	74.1%
	Helped enhance own leadership skills	62.8%	83.0%	72.9%
	Enhanced real world communication skills	60.5%	77.1%	68.3%
	Helped apply skills in real life situations	53.5%	75.0%	64.2%

Note: Longevity of Impact items were found to lack internal consistency and thus were eliminated from further analysis.

These data showed positive trends in perceptions of the value of service learning to support teacher candidates in developing social values, knowledge and skills to live in a diverse democracy. The set of indicators assessed knowledge, the match between needs and personal skills, and the perception of students' ability to address needs with appropriate levels of independence. Teacher candidates indicated the value of these experiences in all three connected areas of this measure.

Significance of the Quantitative Data

When grouping the items from the survey into sets to examine their validity in relation to the liberatory items being examined, it was necessary to determine the internal consistency of each set of items. Measures of internal consistency identify the strength of the set and the extent to which each item in the set is measuring the same thing. Related items for each of the sets of participants' belief statements were then analyzed using quantitative methodology. Measures of internal consistency for each set of items were determined, and means and standard deviations were calculated. Sums were used because there was variability across the scores. Table 7 displays the program comparison data for each of the scales used to assess participants' beliefs about the value of their service learning experiences.

Table 7: Program Comparison for Each Scale Assessing Service Learning for Home and Regional Campuses

Scale	Internal consistency	N items	Possible range	Response range	Home campus (n = 43) M (SD)	Regional campus (n = 46) M (SD)
T&P**	0.82	6	6-30	11-30	21.5 (4.8)	24.1 (4.3)
CTPS	0.71	6	6-30	17-30	23.6 (3.7)	24.5 (3.4)
LOI	0.55	2				
CPT*	0.84	3	3-15	4-15	11.1 (3.1)	12.4 (2.4)
OTE	0.83	7	7-35	16-35	26.9 (5.3)	27.9 (4.7)
PPT*	0.87	8	8-40	13-40	29.9 (6.4)	32.4 (5.1)
PFAL	0.83	4	4-20	8-20	15.6 (3.4)	16.7 (3.1)

Note: T&P = Links between theory and practice; CTPS = Critical thinking and problem solving capacities; CPT= Challenges pre-service teachers to think more deeply about day to day resource distribution and acquisition, the environment, fairness, justice, etc.; OTE= Opportunities to engage in distinctively different communities: developing understanding and tolerance; PPT=Preparing pre-service teachers to develop social values, knowledge, and skills to live in a diverse democracy; PFAL= Preparing for a lifetime of informed and participatory citizenship and various personal and educational challenges. Significant group differences * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

The reliability (Cronbach's alpha) of each scale was investigated prior to group comparisons. Two groups were compared on each of the prompt scales. As can be seen in Table 7, no group mean differences were found on the TPS, OTE and PFAL scales. Mean group differences were found on the T&P ($t(2, 81) = -2.552$, $p < .01$), CPT ($t(2, 87) = -2.231$, $p < .05$), and PPT ($t(2, 86) = -2.069$, $p < .05$) scales. Further analysis revealed that significant differences were between the home campus and regional campus for each of these three scales, with the regional campus reporting higher mean scores.

Both groups of teacher candidates showed strongly positive outcomes in the areas of critical thinking and problem solving capacities, opportunities to engage in distinctly different communities, developing understanding and tolerance, and preparing for a lifetime of informed and participatory citizenship. However, as can be seen in Table 7, three of the scales showed significant differences across the two groups of participants. These differences were in the areas of links between theory and practice ($p < .01$), challenging pre-service teachers to think more deeply about day-to-day resource distribution and acquisition, the environment, fairness, justice, etc. ($p < .05$), and preparing pre-service teachers to develop social skills, knowledge and skills to live in a diverse democracy ($p < .05$).

Discussion

The data collected for this study provide evidence in support of the perceived value of alternative service learning practicum placements for teacher candidates in concurrent teacher education programs. Table 5 identified several anticipated outcomes of service learning for the participants. These outcomes for teacher candidates included: developing more substantial awareness of links between theory and practice; having new opportunities to apply critical thinking and problem solving capacities; having preparation to participate as more informed citizens, and developing skills to address various personal and educational challenges; students having opportunities to think more deeply about day-to-day resource distribution and acquisition, the environment, fairness and justice, and the needs of others; having opportunities to engage in distinctly different communities to develop understanding and tolerance; and having situated learning to help them develop the social values, knowledge and skills to live in a diverse democracy.

Of the indicators of the effectiveness of the alternative community service learning experience that we measured with this survey, teacher candidates were strongly positive about all but two of the measures that were grouped as outcome indicators. This trend was evident for both campus groups of participants. The measures that were less positive about the experience included: making connections between course materials and the alternative practicum community service learning experience (33.5%); and the appropriateness of the timing of the alternative service learning experience in the concurrent program, particularly among the regional campus participants where this part of their program happened in year 4 (41.7%).

When considering the results related to participants' intentions to continue work with the service learning organization (only 51.1% of home campus participants), we realized that this aspect of the study might be influenced strongly by geography. Teacher candidates may have been providing service in areas where they might not ultimately live or teach as their careers advanced. When we consider responses that showed that participants did not see a strong connection between their alternative community service learning practicum and the courses in their BEd program, there are several possible acknowledgements that can be made. We recognize that the alternative practicum is not currently connected to course materials in any direct way (i.e., their degree does not include a course about service learning). It may be valuable to consider this as an optional or a required course. Since virtually all graduates will serve diverse communities if they continue to teach in public school systems, such a course might offer a deeper understanding of issues and supports in such situations. Course-embedded preparation might also support teacher candidates' opportunities to examine their own biases and prejudices (41.5%) prior to engaging in diverse communities.

With its structure running over a number of undergraduate and BEd study years, concurrent programs can allow for practicum blocks that are several weeks long and are not typical of consecutive programs. These additional weeks provide the flexibility to introduce alternative service learning placements and still provide teacher candidates with the time in traditional school placements that is required to meet local degree mandates. Since this study has shown that alternative service learning opportunities in concurrent education programs have perceived value in many areas of professional development, it may be of value to consider ways to include alternative service learning in other pre-service delivery models as well.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that participants in this study reported perceptions of differences in three areas of liberatory service learning across the two campuses. In each of these three areas, regional campus participants reported stronger perceptions of the impacts. While we initially hypothesized that teacher candidates might find one model of implementation to be more valuable than another, our data did not consistently support this hypothesis. Three of the six areas of liberatory impact showed no significant

differences across the two groups of students, while three areas did show significant differences. It may be that regional campus participants reported stronger perceptions of impact in three areas of liberatory outcomes for a number of reasons that were highlighted in the qualitative findings. These teacher candidates may have had more opportunity to engage with their sponsoring organization and with those whom they served because they were in the placement over an extended period of time than the home campus participants (i.e., over a school year rather than concentrated during one four-week block). Also, the regional group returned to campus after their service learning and had opportunities within courses to discuss their perceptions of their experiences. This processing and course-embedded reflection time was not available to the home campus group because their service learning experience was placed at the end of their program, with no course work following their service learning placements. Regardless of the group to which participants belonged, they were able to provide many suggestions to improve the value of their alternative service learning practicum while simultaneously recognizing the value of the setting they had experienced.

Since each alternative service learning placement in this context was required to include a significant teaching component, it is also interesting to note the broad range of community organizations in which teacher candidates found such teaching opportunities (see Table 2). This breadth of exposure may have also contributed toward many participants' observation that this alternative service learning placement allowed them to consider many other ways in which they could use their teaching degree to find employment.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Two models for including service learning in teacher preparation programs were examined in this study. Participants provided their perceptions of the effectiveness of each model in relation to their development as teachers. In one model (home campus) the teacher candidates participated in a four-week block of service learning in the final year of their program. In the other model (regional campus) the teacher candidates participated in the same number of hours of service learning (120 hours) configured in a suitable format across the fourth year of their program. This study had two research foci, centered around the following two questions: 1) How do teacher candidates perceive the intended value of service learning when it is engaged as an alternative to traditional classroom practica?; and 2) How do teacher candidates' perceptions of the effectiveness of service learning in achieving the intended outcomes differ between implementation models?

Participants indicated that the intended value of service learning was realized. Both qualitative comments and quantitative data support this conclusion. However, it was also evident from the qualitative data that participants felt that the benefits of service learning to their professional growth and development as teachers were strongly dependent on the type of service learning placement they had organized. Generally, those who served in positions that allowed them the most opportunity to use their teaching skills and to interact with those being served were perceived as providing the most valued outcomes. This was also the case where participants had experiences that helped expose them to career options and provided them with strong support to ensure successful placements.

Although our survey items were unable to provide reliable measures of participants' perceptions of the value of their service learning experience over time (i.e., longevity of impact), six other anticipated outcomes of service learning were reliably measured by our survey. We examined: the teacher candidates' perceptions of the learning value of their placement; the teacher candidates' perceptions of the value of the tasks in which they engaged during their service learning placements; teacher candidates' views of themselves as contributors to their communities; and teacher candidates' sense of their personal growth through service learning experiences. To assess these areas of potential growth, we examined: perceptions of links between theory and practice; development of critical thinking and problem solving skills; the opportunities provided to

challenge the teacher candidates to think more deeply about day-to-day resource distribution and acquisition, the environment, fairness and justice; opportunities to engage with distinctly different communities and thereby to develop understanding and tolerance; the development of personal social values, knowledge and skills to live in a diverse democracy; and opportunities to prepare for a lifetime of informed and participatory citizenship and face various personal and educational challenges.

Our findings showed that our participants perceive that service learning placements are providing them with many opportunities for growth as teacher candidates. The majority of indicators derived from this survey of teacher candidates were strongly positive about the benefits of this form of alternative practicum. No significant differences were found in perceptions in three of the six liberatory measures used in this study that can be attributed to the different ways in which the service learning requirement was implemented on either campus. We can cautiously conclude that the requirement to engage in service learning has a positive impact on the professional development of teacher candidates. However, since significant differences were also found in three other areas of liberatory service learning, we conclude that this may be an opportunity to re-examine the structure of service learning placements. Of note, some qualitative data indicate that a considerable group of participants from the regional campus group felt that the location of the service learning placement in year 3 of their program would be more beneficial to them than the current placement in year 4, as this would help them to maintain strong ties to traditional school settings closer to the time when they would be applying for jobs. Ways to improve communication and support for the arrangement of suitable service learning placements and strategies to embed reflection opportunities into the experience of participants may be needed to realize the full beneficial potential of this alternative practicum.

Further research should investigate the longevity of impact of service learning on professional practices and personal choices regarding volunteer engagement in the community. Our survey would need to be adapted to include more questions related to this outcome, as the internal consistency of existing items to measure this aspect of potential impact was inadequate. Based on trends evident in this study, it may also be of value to redesign the entire survey to provide prompts that reflect the range of service learning contexts that are most likely to be of interest to teacher candidates. This would allow researchers to be more specific about the potential learning outcomes for service learning related to specific placements and perhaps allow the university to adjust the requirements for the types of placements that relate to the strongest outcomes. It would also be interesting to examine qualitative differences in the types of service learning chosen by different genders of participants and the types of experiences available in both urban and rural contexts.

This study has demonstrated the broad range of positive outcomes that may be realized for teacher candidates who engage in alternative service learning community-based practicum experiences, regardless of the model used to implement this opportunity. While participants had many suggestions to strengthen and enrich their service learning experience, specifically as related to the supports available to arrange and monitor their placements, generally they felt that this was a beneficial experience that broadened their perceptions of their professional career options. They seemed to develop a broader and more inclusive sense of what it means to teach and the potential contexts in which teaching can happen. In an economic and professional environment where jobs in traditional teaching may not be readily available to these individuals, the opportunity to expand their perceptions of career options alone may make this a worthwhile alternative practicum in other pre-service contexts.

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