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**FOSTERING SOCIAL JUSTICE THROUGH SERVICE-LEARNING  
IN EARLY CHILDHOOD TEACHER EDUCATION**

**PROMOVIENDO LA JUSTICIA SOCIAL A TRAVÉS DEL APRENDIZAJE-SERVICIO EN LA  
FORMACIÓN DE MAESTROS DE EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL**

**PROMOVENDO A JUSTIÇA SOCIAL ATRAVÉS DO APRENDIZAGEM-SERVIÇO NA  
FORMAÇÃO DE PROFESSORES DA EDUCAÇÃO INFANTIL**

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### Abstract

As early childhood teacher education programs have begun to place greater emphasis on standards and accountability, there has been less focus on working with the community, and especially working on important social justice issues (Kroll, 2013). In this paper we argue that integrating service-learning and teacher education is a strategy for increasing awareness of social justice issues for young children, age three to grade three. Through the use of questionnaires and interviews to collect our data, we found that implementing a cascading service-learning model in teacher education programs has a positive transformative effect on Pre-Service Teachers. Additionally, we examined the effects of social justice service-learning projects on young children. The results from the data indicated that implementing a social justice service-learning project with these participants had a great impact or transformation on them.

**Keywords:** Social justice, service-learning, teacher education, early childhood.

### Resumen

Como en los programas de formación del profesorado para la primera infancia han empezado a poner mayor énfasis en los estándares y la rendición de cuentas, se está haciendo menos hincapié en el trabajo con la comunidad, y especialmente en trabajos centrados en temas relevantes de justicia social (Kroll, 2013). En este artículo se argumenta que la integración del aprendizaje-servicio y la formación del profesorado es una estrategia para aumentar la conciencia sobre temas de justicia social con los niños pequeños, desde los tres años hasta tercer grado. A través del uso de cuestionarios y entrevistas para la recolección de datos, se encontró que la implementación de un modelo de aprendizaje-servicio en cascada en los programas de formación del profesorado tiene un efecto transformador positivo en profesores en formación. Además, se examinaron los efectos de los proyectos de aprendizaje-servicio de justicia social con niños pequeños. Los resultados de los datos indican que la implementación de un proyecto de aprendizaje-servicio de justicia social con estos participantes tiene un gran impacto o transformación en ellos.

**Palabras clave:** Justicia social, aprendizaje-servicio, formación del profesorado, educación infantil.

### Resumo

Os programas de formação do professorado para a primeira infância começaram a pôr maior ênfase nos padrões e a prestação de contas, dando-se menos ênfase ao trabalho com a comunidade, e especialmente em trabalhos centrados em temas relevantes de justiça social (Kroll, 2013). Neste artigo se argumenta que a integração do aprendizagem-serviço e a formação do professorado é uma estratégia para aumentar a consciência sobre temas de justiça social com as crianças pequenas, desde os três anos até o terceiro grau. Através do uso de questionário e entrevistas para a coleta de dados, encontrou-se que a implementação de um modelo de aprendizagem-serviço em cascata nos programas de formação de professores tem um efeito transformador positivo em professores em formação. Ademais, examinaram-se os efeitos dos projetos de aprendizagem-serviço de justiça social com crianças pequenas. Os resultados dos dados indicam que a implantação de um projeto de aprendizagem-serviço de justiça social com estes participantes causa neles um grande impacto ou transformação.

**Palavras-chave:** Justiça social, aprendizagem-serviço, formação do professorado, educação infantil.

For over a decade, the scope and pedagogy of teacher education programs in the United States (U.S.) has changed dramatically, in part because of the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001. As teacher education programs have begun to place greater emphasis on standards and accountability, there has been less focus on working with the community, and especially working on important social justice issues (Kroll, 2013). Faced with increasing pressures from district and state administrations, and the need to improve test scores and provide more intensive early intervention for children, beginning teachers are often forced to adopt didactic curriculum materials and pedagogical approaches, rather than look to the local community to provide invaluable collaboration (Lake & Winterbottom, 2009). This shift has been especially difficult for teachers who strive to use experiential methods or approaches that focus on issues closely related to social justice. In this paper, we examine the following two questions: 1) would preservice teachers, who were previously engaged in a social justice service-learning project, plan and implement service-learning or social justice service-learning projects with children the following semester, and 2) what were the transformative effects of the service-learning projects on preservice teachers and children?

## 1. TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

In the U.S. there are three widely used conceptions of teacher training pedagogues found in university educational programs: *knowledge for practice* (formal knowledge and theory), *knowledge in practice* (practical knowledge), and finally, *knowledge of practice* (use the classroom for intentional investigation) (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999). Knowledge for practice implies that knowing more leads to additional effective practice. For example, once preservice teachers (PST) have enough knowledge of theorists, methods, and subject matter they will be better prepared to enter a classroom and be good teachers. This construct identifies that the difference between novice and experienced teachers is based purely on the amount and depth of content or methods. Essentially, novice teachers do not have enough content or methods to teach effectively.

The second conception, knowledge in practice, focuses on practical knowledge stating that PST will learn while they are observing, collaborating, and reflecting on the practices of more experienced teachers. Lastly, knowledge of practice is “unlike the first two, this third conception cannot be understood in terms of a universe of knowledge that divides formal knowledge, on the one hand, from practical knowledge, on the other hand” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 251). It assumes that through inquiry, PST make their own epistemology and through problematic practice research ways of making pedagogy and implementation better for their school and community. It is our belief that teacher education programs should implement the knowledge of practice construct as a way to immerse their PST in communities of inquiry, which makes connections between the university and social, cultural, and political issues (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

Unfortunately, most states in the U.S. license teachers based on completion of knowledge tests rather than their performance in the classroom; thus, utilizing the knowledge for practice philosophy. Therefore, it becomes even more critical for teacher education programs to have their PST understand and reflect on the connection between formal knowledge and practical knowledge as they make “systematic inquiries about teaching, learners and lear-

ning, subject matter and curriculum, and schools and schooling” (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999, p. 274). We argue that integrating service-learning and teacher education is a strategy for increasing awareness of social justice issues for young children, age three to grade three.

### ***1.1. Social Justice***

Social justice begins with looking beyond oneself and seeing the needs of others. According to Bell (2007, p. 3), a socially just society is “one in which all members have their basic needs met.” This is a society in which all members are alike and given equal opportunity to reach their full capabilities. In order for this to take place, individuals need to feel a connection to others that is based on respect and trust (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011). When these connections or relationships are fostered, those involved are more likely to develop a feeling of caring and responsibility for their community and society (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011). Caring about a situation is not enough. There has to be actions such as questioning, challenging, making real decisions, and collectively solving problems (Bigelow, Christiansen, Karp, Miner, & Peterson, 1994).

The literature that links social justice to service-learning is limited. However, Cuban and Anderson (2007) state that service-learning can be an instrument of social justice with the “outcomes geared toward transforming systems and activating the social citizenship of disenfranchised groups” (p. 146). More specifically, Wade (2007) believes that for younger children, specifically those of elementary age, social justice needs to be relevant to their lives and must start with their lived experiences, which in turn forms a foundation that initiates actions that propagate social change. Therefore, social justice precedes social change.

Merging service-learning with social justice changes the focus from charity to implementing social responsibility (Kahne & Westheimer, 1996). This type of service sets up opportunities to develop, “empathetic concern, refine cognitive abilities, and reflect on social issues, processes that develop a richer ethic of social responsibility” (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011, p. 20). The development of social responsibility starts in childhood. When families, caregivers, and teachers of young children foster perspective taking through social conflict resolution, which requires listening to others’ needs and feelings, and encourage service experiences and reflection that foster direct relationships with those in the child’s immediate world, then values related to social responsibility and justice take root (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011).

### ***1.2. Social Justice in Teacher Education***

Given that the development of social responsibility starts in childhood, it is vital to integrate social justice education into teacher education at all levels so teachers can learn to be intentional in promoting and fostering social responsibility with their children in the classroom. The first step in addressing social justice in teacher education programs is to start with the pre-service teacher’s own sense of social identity. Social identity elements include discussions with PST so they can understand and describe perspectives of others who have diffe-

rent social identities, and helping PST see that there are different levels of social awareness, knowledge, and willingness to change (Adams, 2007).

Social justice is a concept widely discussed in teacher education (Marchel, Shields, & Winter, 2011). High quality social justice includes many of the components of what we know as good teaching, which includes being PST-centered, collaborative, experiential, reflective, and providing opportunities to engage in activism. Social justice educators facilitate a learning environment in which PST are encouraged to question what is, challenge the status quo, and work together to solve real life problems (Wade, 2007); which are also characteristics of knowledge of practice. Social justice teacher educators need to implement teaching methodologies that focus on underrepresented and targeted groups in education such as, students and teachers of color (Bolgatz, 2005; Delgado & Stefancic, 2001), children with special needs (Oyler, Hamre, & Bejoian, 2006), and children from low socioeconomic or rural homes (Collins & Yeskel, 2005; Lui, Robles, Leondar-Wright, Brew, & Adams, 2006). One of the main purposes for infusing social justice into teacher education programs is to, “instill learners with a sense of agency that will encourage them to become change agents” (Handbook of Social Justice in Education, 2009, p. 14).

Research shows that although a college students’ civic responsibility increases while in school, their propensity for enacting changes in society does not increase (Sax, 2000). Paradoxically, Sax (2004) states that PST, who are some of the least politically active students, will become the very ones who are responsible for educating others in their civic responsibility (Ayers, Quinn, & Stovall, 2009). Therefore, teacher education programs that are inspired by principles of social justice should help prepare PST to be actively and fully engaged in the democratic system (Villegas, 2007).

### ***1.3. Service-Learning***

An educational method that unites meaningful community service with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility would be one way to define service-learning (National and Community Service Trust Act, 2009). Another way to think of service-learning is to view it as the linking of academic curriculum to a service activity that addresses a community need and includes experiential learning and ongoing reflection (Cairn, & Kielsmeier, 1991; Ethridge, 2006).

Service-learning can be divided into four different approaches (Kaye 2004; Lake & Jones, 2008; 2012). Direct Service is an interaction that is person-to-person or face-to-face. Examples include working together with retired individuals to build a butterfly garden, while studying nature or working with a community group to collect used eye glasses to put new lens in them, while studying the sense of sight. Indirect Service on the other hand, offers service not to an individual but to the community. Projects might include raising awareness for hurricane relief for those who have lost their belongings due to the destruction, while studying about the weather or even focusing on empathy and helping others. Another example includes writing letters or drawing cards for the troops while working on communication skills and perspective taking. Creating awareness of public interest issues is the focus of Advocacy Service. Children might be involved in making and posting do not litter signs for their playground or writing a letter to the Governor about protecting an en-



dangered species specific to their state both of which address language arts standards. The last type of service-learning, Research Service, focuses on finding, gathering, and reporting information. Research service might look like children creating a book after researching and interviewing people who performed heroic acts after a local disaster, which included all forms of communication, planning, and organization.

The type of service-learning should always complement and extend the academic content, as well as match the developmental needs of the children involved. For example, direct service-learning is best for preschool and primary children as they are preoperational thinkers who benefit and learn most from concrete experiences that focus on only one dimension of an event (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Lake & Jones, 2012). Direct service-learning has a stronger impact on participants if they experience face-to-face contact, thus receiving immediate feedback. As children become concrete and abstract thinkers they will be better equipped for planning and implementing all four types of service-learning, however it is important to note that some forms of advocacy service and research service can be direct and concrete oriented. Older children are more capable of classifying objects and events, asking and answering what if questions, and thinking abstractly.

No matter the type of service-learning to be engaged in, the goal should be to meet most, if not all, eight of the service-learning standards. The National Youth Leadership Council finalized these standards and released them in 2008. The standards include:

- **Meaningful Service:** Service-learning actively engages participants in meaningful and personally relevant service activities.
- **Link to Curriculum:** Service-learning is intentionally used as an instructional strategy to meet learning goals and/or content standards.
- **Reflection:** Service-learning incorporates multiple challenging reflection activities that are ongoing and that prompt deep thinking and analysis about oneself and one's relationship to society.
- **Diversity:** Service-learning promotes understanding of diversity and mutual respect among all participants.
- **Youth Voice:** Service-learning provides youth with a strong voice in planning, implementing, and evaluating service-learning experiences with guidance from adults.
- **Partnerships:** Service-learning partnerships are collaborative, mutually beneficial, and address community needs.
- **Progress Monitoring:** Service-learning engages participants in an ongoing process to assess the quality of implementation and progress toward meeting specified goals, and uses results for improvement and sustainability.
- **Duration and Intensity:** Service-learning has sufficient duration and intensity to address community needs and meet specified outcomes (The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse, 2009).

Many persuasive reasons for using service-learning as pedagogy with young children exist. Recommendations for best practices by the National Association of Education for Young Children (NAEYC) are consistently followed by high quality service-learning projects (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This organization highlights the importance of direct and meaningful experiences for children; that is, the type of learning exemplified by service-learning, which allows teachers to design instruction for young children in developmentally appropriate ways. Additionally, service-learning is a form of differentiated instruction and allows teachers to design curricula using methods such as thematic, project based, or content integration. Possibly, the most convincing reason for implementing service-learning in the early childhood classroom is that it can fortify learning. Beyond supporting the teaching of academic subjects, service-learning also contributes toward broader school goals such as character education.

Research shows that academic learning, social and moral development, civic skills, and character development are all supported when children engage in service-learning projects (Lake & Jones, 2012). In fact, an overarching goal of service-learning is to create opportunities in which to develop citizenship by integrating theory and practice in order to nurture a lifelong involvement where children will give attention to social issues and public life (Iverson & James, 2010; Meyers, 2009).

#### ***1.4. Service-Learning in Teacher Education***

Service-learning has emerged as a praxeology that has considerable potential to support and improve teacher education programs in the United States. It is also an effective approach to use in facilitating active citizenship in teacher education (Ethridge, 2006), as well as an instructional strategy that helps teachers and teacher educators meet a wide variety of child needs, while at the same time meeting academic expectations (Jacoby, 1996). Additionally, as a response to new 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teaching Standards and enhanced field experiences, PST throughout the U.S. have become highly engaged in academic service-learning projects, which offer the opportunity to increase content mastery and reinforce pedagogical skills through authentic community experiences. In recent decades, service-learning has gained recognition as an effective pedagogy for involving children of all ages in their communities; strengthening links between the classroom and real-world settings (e.g. Freeman & Swick, 2003; Lake & Winterbottom, 2009).

Teacher educators working with PST have been long been aware of the importance of building relationships and making connections with all learners, peers, families, and the local community. As an approach to erudition, service-learning allows teacher education programs to emphasize both content and social skills in ways that increase the learning potential of all PST. Through service-learning, children are challenged to grow as learners and citizens, which prepares them to be stronger professionals in their academic field. Service-learning also encourages and models action-learning, an approach that is established in community-university collaborations in which PST provide services that simultaneously address community identified concerns and academic learning objectives (Seifer, 1998).

Recent studies have highlighted the benefits of service-learning as a pedagogy with PST (Lake & Jones, 2008, 2012; Vogel & Seifer, 2011), and many teacher education institutions

have already begun to fully integrate service-learning as an essential program component (e.g. The Florida State University, The University of Oklahoma, and the University of South Carolina). The task of transferring the epistemology from learned coursework to the praxis of teaching presents a universal challenge for all PST. After a short time in the field, PST often fall back on *cookie cutter* recipes seen by their more experienced peers or even *folkways* learned from their own educational experiences (Faircloth & He, 2011). Conversely, the work of teacher educators trying to provide PST with experiences designed to develop the necessary skill sets and demands of trying to meet the recent Common Core Standards is correspondingly difficult. This is why it is even more important for universities to introduce service-learning in teacher education programs.

Pre-service teacher education programs need to help PST address individual community needs that are approachable and doable in comparison with designing service-learning that is a larger, community social problem (Root, Callahan, & Sepanski, 2002). To effectively implement service-learning, PST need professors to guide their efforts with structure and support. Eyler and Giles (1999) discovered that students benefit from structured, support systems when they engage in new settings. Service-learning is new to most PST, especially service-learning with a social justice component embedded in the project. Wade and Anderson (1996) recommend professors coordinate the projects in ways to make them successful while at the same time monitoring the efforts of the PST in order to achieve desirable outcomes.

The nature of the relationship between the professor and the PST impacts the service-learning projects in a powerful way (Spencer, Cox-Petersen, & Crawford, 2005). PSTs who can use the professor as a safe base to discuss ideas will be more effective when they interact with and implement their service-learning project with their own students. When PST enter classrooms with service-learning as a foundation to their pedagogy, they will most likely continue using service-learning as a way of teaching when they transition to the lead role of planning curriculum engagement with children. In addition, PST acquire autonomy by developing curriculum supportive of the children and community in ways that may be different than the traditional model (Erickson & Anderson, 1997). This will allow for self-understanding, expansion of knowledge, increased action, consideration of the community, and focused attention on learning differences (Boyle-Baise & Langford, 2004).

Given that constructivist, experiential, and integrated instructional practices strive to make learning meaningful for the individual child, we argue that service-learning projects and activities should be integrated into the early childhood curriculum. This is because in an early childhood classroom, the development of the learner and knowledge taught through service-learning are encouraged through the use of investigations and minds-on/hands-on activities (Lake & Jones, 2008). High quality service-learning projects foster critical thinking and analysis (Dinkelman, 2001).

Pre-service teacher education programs can implement a cascading model, which involves the university instructors teaching service-learning pedagogy to the PST who are actively involved in service-learning in local schools and community. Consequently, the PST then implements service-learning with the children in their field placement classrooms. Subsequently, the children teach others about service-learning through their community efforts



and projects. This model aligns itself with the national reform efforts that emphasize curriculum restructuring and establish even closer links between all types of curriculum, instruction, and assessment (Lake & Jones, 2008).

Furco (2003) believes that one of the greatest challenges in the study of service-learning is the absence of a collective, universally accepted definition for the term. Moreover, integrating service-learning at the primary level or at the university level can be difficult due to the lack of a common definition of the phrase (Lake & Jones, 2008). We define service-learning as an experiential pedagogy that (a) includes children in service that meets community needs, (b) is coordinated mutually by a school and the community, (c) fosters civic responsibility, (d) is integrated into the curriculum, and (e) provides evidence for reflection (National and Community Service Trust Act, 2009).

### ***1.5. Transformations***

Kendall (1990) strongly states that service-learning experiences need to move beyond simple acts of charity in order to delve deeper and look at root causes of systemic social inequality. Mental transformations will begin taking place when children are engaged in quality service-learning projects. It is through reflection that transformations often become evident (Ethridge, 2006); these reflections should occur before, during, and after service-learning (Hill & Pope, 1997).

Britt (2012) described a framework for service-learning that delineated between three types of approaches: 1) skill-set practice and reflexivity, 2) civic values and critical citizenship, and 3) social justice activism, while at the same time acknowledging that they can be blended together at times too. She states that service-learning is not a singular pedagogy and that the type of service-learning depends on what the goals and outcomes are for each project. In early childhood education, one cannot separate the experiential, concrete nature of learning from pedagogy. Additionally, social responsibility is often grounded in civic values at this age; therefore, social justice activism has to revolve around issues that are meaningful to children.

Young children often have a great ethic of care and a sense of passion when it comes to social issues. For example, they may want to make their playground more inviting for the whole school and be very passionate about working to make that happen. Children often feel empathy toward vulnerable animals and will make a case for helping them. The key to implementing social justice with young children is to let them share their voice, ideas, and work to make a difference in the world that they know. Learning experiences such as these often lead to transformations in children's perspectives and beliefs about their ability to make a difference and about their own perceived social responsibility.

The purpose of social justice education is to offer transformational experiences regarding issues of oppression and power imbalance. It is our contention that service-learning is an educational means of addressing social justice activism in schools. While not a new asser-

tion, we have yet to find information and research on age appropriate social justice activism using service-learning with young children age 3 to grade three.

## 2. METHODOLOGY

### 2.1. Program Overview

The teacher education program for this study was located at a large research university in the southeastern United States, and has an established collaboration with the local school district. The structure of the program required a large amount of time in field-based classrooms. In March of their sophomore year, candidates applied to the early childhood program; thirty applicants were selected and admitted to the program for the following fall semester. Once admitted, the preservice teachers' classes are sequenced and they travel together as a cohort for the next four semesters, or blocks, until graduation. The PST were made aware that they were accepted into a program that integrated academic content and service-learning using a cascading knowledge of practice model (Verducci & Pope, 2001).

A cascading knowledge of practice service-learning model is one where the teacher educators teach service-learning pedagogy to the PST who are actively involved in service-learning. The PST then teach service-learning to the children in their field placement classrooms via the implementation of service-learning projects. Subsequently, the children teach others about service-learning through their community efforts. The integrated cascading approach offers children an opportunity to learn in a way that is most natural to them, as opposed to a segmented approach stressing isolated skills and concepts (Verducci & Pope, 2001). This model aligns itself with the national reform efforts that emphasize curriculum restructuring and establishes even closer links between curriculum and community.

Block I goals of the teacher education program were three-fold: 1) teach the pedagogy of service-learning, 2) engage in service-learning as a cohort or as groups within the cohort and, 3) expose the PST to underrepresented, targeted groups in education using direct interaction and personal stories so they would have to confront biases of advantage, privilege, and color blindness (Adams, 2007). Goal 3 was achieved through the collaboration with the local homeless coalition. The volunteer representative of the homeless coalition, Denise, met with each group of PST to discuss community needs that required direct contact and interaction. She discussed needs that the PST had never heard of, nor considered, such as: working with local farmers to accept food stamps and to participate in a farmers market where food stamps would most likely be used, sponsoring a girls group home to plan and celebrate sweet 16 parties for the girls turning 16, building a children's playroom in the local homeless shelter, and creating audiobooks for sick children in the local hospital.

In Blocks II and III, the PST worked with their cooperating teacher to design and implement two service-learning projects that emerged from their field placement curriculum. Many of the PST planned the service-learning projects together and several of those who were in the same school collaborated on their projects. It was not a requirement that the service-lear-

ning projects in these two Blocks include social justice themes; however, we were hopeful that many of them would.

## ***2.2. Participants and Data***

The total number of PST participating in this study was 90, out of total of 92 students. Their demographic breakdown includes: 2 males, 88 females, 69 Caucasian, 5 African Americans, 5 Hispanic Americans, 1 Indian American. Each Block, the PST provided written consent to participate in the study and IRB approval was updated annually.

At the end of Blocks II and III, all of the participants provided copies of their service-learning projects including the PST Evaluation, which asked them to respond in writing to 11 questions that targeted the effectiveness of their project, concepts and skills taught, children's academic and social benefits of participating in the project, how the project supported the state standards, and the carryover effects (or transformation) of the project on their classroom and/or on their children (See Appendix A for PST Evaluation). Three years of PST Evaluations for Block II comprised the data for this study. We were especially interested in Block II evaluations since these were the service-learning projects planned and implemented the semester following the social justice service-learning collaboration with the homeless coalition.

The data was organized by years. Two professors and two doctoral students worked together and read the evaluations, decided if the projects were exclusively service-learning (SL) or service justice social learning (SJS�) based on Wade's (2007) definition of social justice for young children. The data were then coded for evidence of classroom, child, and PST transformation, and then entered into a spreadsheet. Using SPSS, frequencies and correlations were run and analyzed. Additionally, qualitative examples were pulled from the original PST Evaluations to provide further description and support for the quantitative findings. To protect confidentiality, pseudonyms were assigned to the PST.

## **3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### ***3.1. Social Justice Service-Learning***

The first research question asked if preservice teachers, who were previously engaged in a social justice service-learning project, would plan and implement service-learning or social justice service-learning projects with children the following semester. We found that, of the 90 PST participating in the projects, 56% completed a social justice service-learning project, with 44% conducting a project with no discernible social justice components. Furthermore, the service-learning projects the PST completed fell into one of six categories: Gardening/Community Beautification; Helping Others; Environment Awareness; Endangered Species; Pollution/Recycling; and giving thanks to the Military (See Table 1).

Table 1.

*Social Justice/Service-Learning Project and Type of Project*

	Gardening/ Beautification	Helping Others	Military Thanks	Endangered Species	Pollution/ Recycling	Environmental Awareness	Total
Social Justice & Service- Learning	7%	20%	0%	4%	22%	2%	56%
Service- Learning Only	4%	21%	3%	7%	5%	4%	44%
Total	11%	41%	3%	11%	27%	6%	100%

*Note:* This table compares the type of projects the PST completed and whether or not they had a service-learning project or a social justice service-learning project.

The most frequent types of service-learning projects conducted by the PST were those that involved helping others (41%) in some capacity. These types of projects included writing cards to the elderly, or collecting toys and other items for sick children at the hospital. Of the 41% of PST who chose to conduct a project that involved helping others, half of those were identified as SJSJ. Moreover, participants who conducted SJSJ projects primarily focused on pollution/recycling causes or helping others.

While all the projects were relevant to the lives of the children, more than half of the PST used their service-learning projects to transform systems and activate social citizenship (Cuban & Anderson, 2007), thus making them social justice service-learning experiences. Following the cascading model of service-learning, the early childhood program coordinated the classes and field work to create a successful environment for the PST service-learning projects. This coordination is described by Wade and Anderson (1996) as critical in order for PST to achieve desirable outcomes. The successful implementation of the service-learning projects with children, also reinforce the knowledge of practice construct utilized by the program, which made connections between the university and social and cultural issues (Cochran-Smith & Lyttle, 1999).

In our undergraduate program, service-learning was a first step; PST were required to participate as educational advocates surrounding issues of social justice in their first semester only. In this semester they participated in SJSJ as group, with much scaffolding from their university professor and homeless coalition coordinator. In the corresponding university class, PST engaged in ongoing discussions that challenged their biases and heightened their awareness of issues surrounding poverty and homelessness. In subsequent semesters, PST

introduced service-learning to their young children, who were more than capable of participating in SJSL and do not display hesitancy regarding social justice issues.

### 3.2. Transformation

The second question focused on transformative effects and we were interested in knowing how many of the projects provided transformational experiences for PST and children. Of those children participating in a SJSL project, 37% exhibited either helping or caring behaviors after the projects were complete. This is particularly interesting as only 17% of the children who participated in a SL only project exhibited the same behaviors. Nine percent of the PST who worked on a SJSL project commented that their children began to work more collaboratively with their peers in the classroom, but only 4% of PST who conducted a SL only project made a similar comment (See Table 2). When asked if they would use service-learning in their future classrooms, 95% of the PST indicated that they would, suggesting that both SL and SJSL had a transformative impact on them.

Table 2.  
*Social Justice/Service-Learning Project and Child Transformation*

	Collaboration	Motivation	Caring Behaviors	Helping Behaviors	No Comments	Total
Social Justice & Service-Learning	2%	7%	21%	16%	10%	56%
Service-Learning Only	2%	2%	13%	4%	22%	44%
Total	4%	9%	34%	20%	32%	100%

*Note:* This table compares the type of transformation the children had and whether or not they had a service-learning project or a social justice service-learning project.

#### 3.2.1. Caring and helping behaviors.

As stated in the literature review, social justice begins by looking beyond oneself and seeing the needs of others. The qualitative data describes transformative child behaviors that continued after participating in the assigned service-learning projects. Several of these focused on caring or helping behaviors towards their peers. “As a result of the SL Project the children are helping one another more when they have trouble with their work. They are caring about each other’s’ feelings and are happy to be helping the community” (Roberta). Roberta explained that her children “respect each other a lot more, and do not pick on each other as much... They are more willing to share with one another, and play with kids in their class that they normally do not play with... They have been better to one another, not saying any mean comments or laughing at someone else” (Susan). PST described how children wanted “to do more to help” and were observed including everyone during their outside play time... It is interesting though because when they feel that they have more food than someone sitting next to them they want to share” (Jane).

*The children have been more attentive to each other’s feelings throughout the time since they have done the Service-Learning Project. Also, the children ask*



*how the people who got the pots are doing. The children have been more kind to one another. This has been occurring with sharing with one another during centers and free time. Also, when a child is crying or does not feel well they have gone up to them to make sure they are alright. The children have seemed more enthusiastic about helping others, even when it is just straightening up the classroom or completing a task. The children have been more eager to help [the teacher] and myself since the learning project. Also, when a peer is struggling at a center they have been more prone to help the struggling peer finish his/her work (Alana).*

Many PST wrote about the change that occurred in their class culture. “I think that the children are more selfless. The class as a whole has grown closer” (Jane).

Additionally, the PST noticed that the children discussed and behaved in a more caring manner towards people who were different from them. Frances cited that:

*Her kids are more giving now and they are definitely more accepting. We read a book the other day about people being different and they went into a tangent that ‘even though the kids are poor, now we can still be their friends (Frances).*

Renea further detailed that:

*Her children have become more appreciative of their daily lives and have become aware of others and their situations. Children are able to relate better to others and understand that everyone has different situations in life. They are more thankful for the things they have and the opportunities that they are presented with in daily life. The children have learned to sympathize and are now more willing to give of themselves to help others (Renea).*

Children participating in the service-learning projects also showed caring, sometime, over-caring behaviors towards animals and the environment. “The children are really concerned about any animal or insect they see. They feel that all of them will become endangered or harmed if they don’t clean up their trash” (Eileen). “The children...were compelled to water and check on their plants daily” (Chloe).

*After performing the hands on recycling activity, the children have been picking up trash around school and being knowledgeable of where they throw their trash. Children have been more caring towards the way they treat their Earth... They also asked [their teacher] to keep the recycling bins in the classroom so they can continue recycling. They have asked their parents to start recycling at home because they know it will benefit the Earth (Rosalyn).*

### 3.2.2. Motivation and collaboration behaviors.

The data also clearly highlighted that children’s intrinsic motivation was transformed through the meaningful and engaging service-learning projects, especially when they connected civic responsibility and a sense of justice.. This was evident in many ways; for example, several of the PST commented on the children’s “increased awareness of the value of

saying thank you” (Lisa), increased desire to “make gifts to thank their parents for all they do” (Krystal), and increased enthusiasm for “keeping the world beautiful” (Carol).

*I think my childrens’ attitude and behavior towards each other changed as a result of the service-learning project. I saw more children willing to share, and more willing to work with other children. I believe the children’s motivation has significantly increased since this service-learning project (Gabrielle).*

Academic engagement was also impacted by increased motivation due to the children studying something of interest that they cared about and related to a meaningful purpose.

*The children think deeper into subject matter as well as thinking about extending lessons and projects they can do in the classroom. Children were more motivated to participate in these types of lessons because they knew participating in this service-learning project helped something they cared about (Kayla).*

*This has made them more engaged during lessons throughout the entire day because they have something solid to go with the lessons. They are all more enthusiastic about their new unit and seem more motivated to complete their work so that they can observe their bird feeders so see if birds come and visit. The children are more concerned and speak about how they hope their bird feeders help the birds and help the birds take care of their babies (Farah).*

Collaboration is a key element of service-learning, which was apparent in the data collected. Several of the PST referenced the children being more unified after the service-learning projects. Working together as a group created a bond that impacted their sense of community and ability to work together to make a difference.

*The children are more willing to work together and are excited about letting others know about their work and involving the community in supporting their cause. The children have become more motivated to find things that need improvement, and they are more willing and enthusiastic about working together and forming a team to solve problems and promote a solution. They learned to collaborate with each other and to share and feed off of each other throughout the project (Heidi).*

These finding support Kendall’s (1990) assertions that service-learning experiences that delve deeper and look at root causes of systemic social inequality, can have a transformative effect on participants. Children were observed making mental transformations and changing behavior after engaging in quality service-learning projects. However, it was through PST reflection that these transformations become evident (Ethridge, 2006).

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

While this study explored service-learning with early childhood PST, service-learning can be effective for PST in any teacher education program. Data from this study has indicated that implementing a cascading service-learning model, using knowledge of practice field experiences (Cochran-Smith & Lyttle, 1999), has a positive transformative effect on PST.

Inherent in the cascading model is coordination among the program and professors, crucial elements in PST successful implementation of SL projects (Wade & Anderson, 1996).

Service-learning can be the first step for teacher education programs to begin addressing social justice issues. Often, PST are resistant to become advocates (Sax, 2004), so starting with service-learning can be an entry point that is safe and provides a foundation for future social justice experiences. However, along with Mills and Ballantyne (2010), we are cognizant that some PST may never commit to teaching using a social justice lens, despite the best intentions of their teacher educators.

Overwhelmingly, the PST in this study stated they would continue to use service-learning as an instructional approach. We believe so many of them answered this way because of the careful scaffolding within the program and the full integration of service-learning throughout their coursework. If we only required service-learning in one semester, we do not believe that so many PST would have answered positively to this question, therefore, the cascading model of service-learning, following the knowledge of practice construct (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999) had a great impact on our PST, who will continue to provide transformative experiences to the children they teach.

Additionally, more than half of the projects implemented with children could be considered social justice service-learning experiences, which demonstrated greater impact or transformation effects. Therefore, focusing on service-learning with PST does appear to provide a foundation for social justice (Wade, 2007). As Root et al. (2002) stated, teacher education programs should scaffold PST to address community needs that are approachable and doable, thus allowing them to experience success and change which provides the impetus to continue implementing service-learning.

The data supports the notion in the literature that social responsibility is different from social justice but they can go hand in hand (Britt, 2012). For example, cleaning up the trash on the playground was a social responsibility but the children took it further by cleaning up trash in other parts of the school as well as at home. These actions indicate that transformations occurred and therefore social responsibility turned into social justice.

The data also demonstrated that direct service-learning projects showed greater child transformation than those projects that were indirect or advocacy orientated. This finding confirms earlier studies (Lake & Jones, 2012; Lake & Winterbottom, 2009), which indicated that the face-to-face interaction and immediate feedback from completing direct projects is incredibly beneficial for both the community and the children. In essence, Lake and Jones (2012), Lake and Winterbottom (2009), and Root et al. (2002) all make the same assertion: direct SL projects benefit participants (both PST and children) the most.

## 5. LIMITATIONS

One limitation of this study was the inability to examine the data by grade level. While most of the data included the name of the PST or other identifying information, many did not. These reflections were originally uploaded to the course Blackboard site that identified the individual student, and then downloaded to a hard drive. The professor has since changed

universities and can no longer review the original Blackboard cite in order to match the reflections that do not have enough identifying information. Permission to access the site has been requested, but due to time restraints on the revisions, this process is still in progress.

A further limitation of the study is the response of the PST who did not respond with a positive comment regarding the service-learning. Rather than comment with a negative assessment on the service-learning projects, the PST left no comments at all. However, given the overwhelming positive responses from the PST it was still difficult to quantify if the PST did not think the projects were worthwhile or they simply did not comment.

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX A: PST EVALUATION

#### EVALUATION OF THE EARLY CHILDHOOD SERVICE-LEARNING PROJECTS PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS

1. Tell us about your Service-Learning Project.
2. Describe any involvement of community members or organization?
3. How effective was the SL Project for your class?
4. How did your K, K/1, 1 students benefit from the Service-Learning Project.
5. What changes in student's knowledge and performance have occurred as a result of the SL Project?
6. What changes in students' attitudes and behavior have occurred as a result of the SL Project?
7. What changes in students' enthusiasm/motivation have occurred as a result of the SL Project?
8. Describe any changes in the ways that students talk about their SL project or the subject area of their project.
9. Describe three specific student products and compare the quality of those products with other work by those students.
10. How did SL project support the SSS?
11. Are you planning to use SL in your own instruction?
12. What have been the major barriers to students participating in this Service-Learning Project?

Thank you!