Citzenship, Curriculum, and Critical Thinking beyond the Four Walls of the Classroom:
Linking the Academic Content with Service-Learning

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Introduction

President Obama, along with several of our country's previous leaders, have repeatedly spoken of the need to actively engage all citizens, even our youngest, in service to our local communities and beyond. This call to service coincides with the recent focus on 21st century learning outcomes and the vital need to prepare teachers who are equipped to engage and inspire all learners to be creative and critical thinkers, not only for the good of their individual futures, but for the good of the future of the nation (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2006). For teachers, this means learning to use innovative approaches to engage students as thinkers

and problem solvers so they may be successful global citizens and leaders of the 21st century.

Since civic competence is one of the primary goals of social studies (National Council for the Social Studies, 1994) then it makes sense to link service-learning and civic education to create opportunities for students to solve problems and make meaningful connections in a real world context. Research has shown that engaging students in civic education through service-learning encourages collaboration and communication among students as they work together to learn and use academic skills to solve real-world problems (Kelshaw, Lazaruus, & Miner, 2009; Schultz, 2008). Most schools today still have mission statements that list civic education as a top priority, but with the push for higher test scores, civic education is often "left behind" (Parker, 2008). This is true even in the face of a growing body of evidence proving that service-learning assists students in learning content on deeper and more meaningful levels, thereby increasing achievement, particularly in reading and math (Soslau & Yost, 2007). In addition, student motivation and interest toward school and learning increases as evidenced by increased attendance in classrooms that integrate service-learning into the curriculum (Boyle-Baise, & Zevin, 2009; Soslau & Yost, 2007).

If school is where children are going to acquire the required skills for life in the 21st century, then it is crucial for teacher educators to help classroom teachers become knowledgeable citizens who are capable of implementing a curriculum that will prepare students to be civic-minded, global, creative, and critical thinkers. Unfortunately, the curriculum in many schools has been sharply narrowed to focus on mathematics and language arts since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (2001). As a result, content areas such as social studies are often eliminated from the elementary classroom curriculum (Hinde, 2005; Rock, et al., 2006; Van Fossen, 2005; Zhao & Hoge, 2005). Real world experiences and meaningful curriculum projects are often obsolete because their format does not support the test preparation regimen mandated by their school districts. As a result, any request to deviate from a script that is focused on skill and drill strategies is often met with resistance from the administration (Hilliard, 2000; Santman, 2002).

The following article explores how 12 classroom teachers, enrolled in one of the author's graduate social studies methods course, used service-learning as an instructional tool to help students practice active participation in their community and beyond, while also recognizing the relevance of academic coursework as they applied their knowledge and skills to meaningful issues and contexts beyond the four walls of the classroom.

Theoretical Framework

Experiential Learning
Learn and Serve America's National Clearinghouse defines service-learning

as a "teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities" (para. 1). In an attempt to revive meaningful curriculum and reaffirm its role in the preparation of 21st century global citizens, we determined that teachers must first experience and reflect on the complex task of integrating service-learning into their instruction. Since we believe that true learning is grounded in personal subjective experiences, we used David Kolb's (1984) cycle of experiential learning to frame and develop a service-learning assignment for one of the author's graduate social studies methods courses. Kolb's experiential learning theory is based on the idea that "learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience" (1984, p. 38). The cycle has four distinct phases related to learning: concrete experience, reflection, forming abstract concepts, and active experimentation.

At the beginning of the course, the teachers enrolled in the course are prepared for the concrete service-learning experience by examining multiple perspectives related to civic knowledge, skills, dispositions and participation. Next, the teachers are provided with a framework to help them co-construct a service-learning project related to a social justice or eco-justice issue identified by their elementary students. The classroom teachers are encouraged to follow the teachable moments that are born out of their classroom discussions, and to allow students' interests to guide the direction of the project. The natural curriculum connections to language-arts, mathematics, science, and social studies emerge as students are immersed in a service-learning project that encourages civic participation and decision-making through thoughtful deliberations. Ultimately, the elementary students in these graduate students' classrooms are responsible for identifying issues of concern, thinking critically about the issues presented, selecting one class issue to explore, and developing a plan of action to address the issue.

To help students engage in structured decision-making activities and examine multiple sides of an issue, teachers are encouraged to use strategies such as PMI (plus, minus, and interesting) charts, decision-making trees, and weighted sum charts (Guillaume, Yopp, & Yopp, 2007). Before, during, and after implementation of the project, the teachers are required to document, reflect, and analyze the process of allowing the curriculum to develop. At the end of the course, teachers are encouraged to form abstract concepts and consider how to integrate meaningful service-learning opportunities that enhance and make natural connections to the mandated curriculum, while still meeting the state academic content standards. The overall goal is for teachers to continue active experimentation with service-learning pedagogy in the classroom long after the graduate course has ended.

Civic Identity & Participation

According to Youniss and Yates (1997), there are three factors that promote the formation of civic identity: (1) Opportunities to act on the issues that plague society;

(2) Collaboration with other people to respond to societal issues; (3) Reflecting on and discussing the relationship between what is actually happening in society and what should be occurring. Since civic identities can be examined and shaped through different levels of involvement, we explored Westheimer and Kahne's (2004) three categories of citizenship: personally responsible, participatory, and justice-oriented. Personally responsible citizenship requires individuals to act responsibly in the community. Such action involves the individual: working, paying taxes, obeying laws, recycling, and volunteering. Participatory citizenship centers on organizing community outreach for those in need. These citizens are active members of community organizations and work to accomplish collective tasks. Finally, justice-oriented citizenship focuses on critically assessing the social, political, and economic circumstances surrounding the surface conditions. These types of citizens seek to identify areas of injustice in the world. They have knowledge of democratic social movements, which informs how these citizens effect systemic change.

While all three types of citizens are necessary to sustain a democracy, we challenged our teachers to engage their students in activities that would require active civic involvement on a participatory or justice-oriented level. We wanted our teachers to move beyond projects with a narrow focus such as a charity donation or a one-time volunteering event. Instead, we encouraged them to provide opportunities for their students to critically examine the root causes of specific problems in society and to develop their own plan of action to inform or to influence others. A strong emphasis was also placed on the importance of reaching out to the community to explore and determine their needs, rather than developing projects based on their own ideas.

Review of Research

Research suggests that service-learning as an experiential instructional strategy can help students develop a sense of self-efficacy, increase motivation, enhance academic achievement, improve social skills, and develop civic mindedness (Schultz, 2008; Soslau & Yost, 2007; Wade 2001; Werner, Voce, Gaufin, & Simmons, 2002). Facilitating service-learning and action based experiences in the classroom allows students to actively participate in their community and discover how one person, even a young person, can make a difference and connect to issues within their community. In looking at empirical research whose foundations of service-learning were deeply rooted in the theoretical base of integrating service with academic curriculum, student designed projects, and student reflection; a pattern of enhanced self-esteem, positive affective learning, increased academic achievement, as well as continued community involvement emerged.

Conrad and Hedin (1982) conducted a national study to examine 27 service-learning education programs' social, cognitive, and psychological effects on adolescents. Cited widely in the 1980s service-learning literature, this study opened the door

for further examination of service-learning and its positive gains on self-esteem, moral reasoning, and affective learning.

More recently, Soslau and Yost (2007) discovered that service-learning, even in the elementary grades, could be a practical instructional strategy to increase student learning and motivation. After conducting a study with an experimental and control group in two fifth grade classrooms taught by the same teacher, the results of this study showed that the group of students exposed to service-learning were fifteen percent more likely to make real-world and authentic connections in their journal writing assignments than those students who received traditional instruction. The group of students engaged in service-learning curriculum also made overall greater gains in reading and math on the benchmark tests administered by the school district. Additionally, attendance rates were also higher for the experimental group and incidents of suspension decreased when compared to the control group. Anecdotal records from the classroom teacher also supported increased motivation and eagerness among the students involved with the service-learning project.

Notah and Johnson (1999) were also interested in learning more about the benefits of service-learning as an instructional tool. They designed a mixed-methods study with 156 eighth grade students enrolled in a science class with a service component to determine if service-learning could enhance self-esteem and responsibility. The researchers collected data from sources such as a self-esteem inventory, a motivation scale, reflective journals, concluding narrative essays, student interviews, and field notes. Changes in self-esteem and responsibility were not statistically significant on the quantitative measures; however, modest changes in mean score were evident. The qualitative findings were significant. Students did not mention one negative comment about the service-learning experience in their journal entries, essays, or interviews. Interestingly, the interview data contradicted the quantitative results. The researchers determined that the language used on the quantitative measures could have resulted in comprehension problems. Overall, every participant recommended the service-learning assignment for future students. The qualitative results indicated that service-learning could enhance self-esteem and responsibility.

In findings from the research of Reiner and Youniss (2006), service-learning with high school student volunteers that involved direct contact with disadvantaged people led to greater volunteerism and civic engagement. This longitudinal study demonstrated a measured, fundamental difference between the personally responsible citizen (e.g. donating cans, clothing drives) and the participatory citizen (e.g. creating programs to shelter the homeless) such that the student volunteers who came in direct contact with those in need developed a greater sense of self-awareness when contributing their time and energy, and thus an increased sense of efficacy, helpfulness, and self esteem (Reiner & Youniss, 2006).

In examining the non-cognitive benefits of service-learning, Youniss and Yates (1997) conducted a case study of a parochial school that investigated the level of continued community involvement of graduates from the program. 160

high school juniors enrolled in a yearlong social justice program in which they reflectively thought about and posted to discussion questions, questionnaires, and made observations before and after active participation. Although visits to a soup kitchen did not create "instant activists," it did trigger "political awareness, agency, and a gained awareness of responsibility regarding social issues" (Youniss & Yates, 1997, p. 82). Journal entries and discussions indicated that students' attitudes toward homeless people had also changed throughout the year from negative to concern. Over one-half of the participants visited the soup kitchen more than the required visits, which suggest that students were actively engaged with the service activity (Youniss & Yates, 1999). Eighty percent of the students indicated that they planned to participate in future service over the summer, and eighty-two percent stated that they would continue service after graduation. After contacting the graduates from the program, Youniss and Yates (1997) discovered that forty-four percent had participated in service while in high school, forty-five percent had performed service after high school, and thirty-two percent were still actively engaged in service activities.

With similar conclusions, Metz, McLellan, and Youniss (2003) analyzed the personality dimensions of 367 high school students, who were active in volunteerism, using the Multivariate Analysis of Covariance (MANCOVA). Through their findings, they discovered that students involved in social issue type service, within the definition of service-learning, showed more social concern over the course of the school year. Alternatively, those students who were involved in standard volunteerism actually declined in social concern. There was a significant covariate effect of the active personality dimension reflecting that the students involved in service-learning were more likely to vote in the future, and future intentions to volunteer declined significantly for students who were not involved in the service-learning. Those involved in the service-learning kept their original intentions to remain active within their community (Metz, McLellan, & Youniss, 2003).

Although there are limited numbers of longitudinal studies reflecting future community engagement, there are a few that display encouraging results (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999; Beane, Turner, Jones, & Lipka, 1981; Eyler, 2002; and Giles & Eyler, 1994). At the college level it has been shown that students who participate in service-learning projects are more inclined to continue service engagement after graduation (Astin, Sax, & Avalos, 1999), ascertained by Eyler (2002) that "past behavior is a good predictor of future behavior and community connections established during schooling may well lead to community action after graduation" (p. 15).

There is a plethora of research related to teachers' beliefs, how beliefs shape classroom practices, and whether or not these beliefs can be changed or developed over time through education and experience (Brownlee, Purdie & Boulton-Lewis, 2001; Chan & Elliott, 2004; Ozgun-Koca & Sen, 2006; Woolfolk-Hoy et al., 2006). Some scholars believe that teacher education can be one of the factors that influence or shape teacher development and growth (Huber-Warring & Warring, 2006; Marra, 2005). Others, such as Sunal, Kelley, and Sunal (2009), discovered that

very few of the 109 pre-service teachers they studied moved beyond a superficial understanding of citizenship education after a social studies methods course. In an attempt to understand how civics was presented and understood by pre-service teachers in elementary social studies methods courses, Lewis-Ferrell (2007) conducted a mixed-methods study with four elementary methods instructors and 125 pre-service teachers enrolled in their courses. The students were interviewed, observed, and surveyed to explore the actual implementation of a civics-based social studies methods course and the understanding of civic education that resulted from participating in the course. Results showed that important gains were made in the comprehension of civics concepts, however many students did not gain the skills or the confidence to actually implement a civics curriculum in their future classrooms. Students attributed this to the fact that the courses focused on readings and class discussions, rather than actual civic participation in the community and beyond. Action appeared to be the missing link in these social studies methods courses, hence the need for the current study.

The Present Study: Phase One

Overall, a large body of literature related to service-learning and civic education support changes in civic beliefs, increases in academic achievement, meaningful connections to the real world, increased motivation, future community involvement, and enhanced self-esteem and responsibility. In an attempt to explore the connections classroom teachers make as they confront their beliefs and attempt to translate their civic knowledge into practice, we developed a service-learning assignment that requires classroom teachers to actively integrate civic education and democratic principles into their classroom. The following research question guided our study: What are the experiences of classroom teachers who use service-learning as an instructional tool to promote active citizenship and a civics-centered curriculum? The teachers' experiences with service-learning are discussed in the next section.

Method

This study is separated into two distinct, but related phases. Phase 1 includes data collected from the twelve teachers enrolled in one of the author's graduate social studies methods course. First, we present the methodology, findings, and conclusions for phase 1 in a sequential manner. Next, the data for phase 2 is presented, which emerged from one of the graduate student's projects discussed in phase 1. Phase 2 includes data collected from the classroom teacher's 4th and 5th grade students and uses narrative inquiry to tell the story of how the project developed and the impact it had on the students.

Research Design

Since we were interested in understanding how the participants constructed

meaning from their experiences (Sherman & Webb, 1988) we chose to use qualitative research methods for this phase of the study.

Participants and Context

Phase One of the study occurred in a graduate class; the 12 graduate students enrolled in the course held multiple subject teaching credentials and were working toward a graduate degree in education. Eleven were female and one was male. The participants had between zero and 25 years of teaching experience and taught a variety of grade levels from kindergarten through eighth grade.

The participants were enrolled in a course taught by one of the authors called Graduate Studies in Elementary Education: Social Studies. The class met once a week for 2-and-one-half hours for a total of 15 weeks in the spring semester. The stated objectives of the course included creating a democratic classroom to support students' development of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions; effectively designing and teaching lessons for the elementary grades; and analyzing and reflecting on social science education teaching practices, research, and materials.

The major assignment for the class was a service-learning project. This project provided steps for the participants to involve their students in a service-learning project while documenting connections between their academic learning and their civic knowledge, dispositions, and skills related to their involvement with the project. To introduce the assignment and prepare the teachers for the concrete experience (Kolb, 1984), we shared a clip from the movie *Pay it Forward* (Leder, Abrams, Carson, Levy, McLaglen, Reuther, & Treisman, 2000). In the featured movie clip, the teacher introduced social studies to a group of 7th grade students on the first day of class by asking them to identify their roles and responsibilities as citizens of the world. To encourage the kids to become active citizens, the teacher introduced a social studies assignment for the whole year that challenged the students to think of a way to change the world and put it into action.

After watching the clip, the teachers were asked to reflect on the assignment presented in the movie and discuss how it connected to their personal definition of social studies. This led to a discussion about dimensions of citizenship education (Parker, 2008), which include community service, voting, deliberation, knowledge, skills, and dispositions, and their connections to social studies. Next, the teachers were asked to define the characteristics of a good citizen. After examining the categories of citizenship defined by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), the teachers were challenged to engage their students in activities that require active civic involvement on a participatory or justice-oriented level. After sharing examples of different projects completed by elementary students, the classroom teachers were provided with the following model to guide the facilitation of a service-learning curriculum project in their classrooms: (1) Increase awareness, look, and listen; (2) Deliberate, choose an issue to investigate; (3) Become an expert; (4) Build partnerships and devise a plan of action; (5) Get busy. The model was based on

the steps recommended by Project Citizen (The Center for Civic Education, 2006) and Take Action (Kielburger & Kielburger, 2002).

The teachers were also provided with continuous support throughout the semester and activities were conducted in class each week related to topics including, but not limited to, deliberation, patriotism, historical inquiry, community involvement, and global interdependence. Students were encouraged to consider the voices of those who are oppressed and marginalized in our society and consider multiple perspectives, while actively participating in the on-going struggle for equality, tolerance, and respect for all groups of people in our world. Without considering these dimensions of citizenship, activities such as service-learning projects can be limited to a focus on volunteerism and charitable action without developing an understanding of the political conditions that give rise to injustice and inequality.

Data Sources

Since experiential learning theorists believe structured reflection and active engagement are critical to the development of intellectual components such as knowledge, skills, and cognitive development (Dewey, 1938; Eyler, 2002; Eyler & Giles, 1999; Kolb, 1984), teachers were required to reflect on the learning process and outcomes at four different points. Eyler (2002) states, "one of the assumptions of experiential education is that students will be surprised by exposure to situations and information that conflicts with their assumptions of the world and they will be challenged to explore further" (p. 8). To create a method for this claim Eyler (2001) developed a reflection map to guide reflection before, during, and after service. For the purpose of our research, we decided to adapt the reflection map and require students to reflect at four different stages of the project. During stage one, teachers were asked to reflect on their prior experiences with civic involvement, identify their hopes and concerns, and plan an outline for implementation. During stages two and three of project implementation, teachers were asked to make two additional on-line posts to encourage teachers to reflect on the process, assess students' progress, and summarize their overall reactions. During stage four, the teachers completed a final post to analyze findings from their service-learning assignment, reflections on the process, and implications for future practice.

Results

The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze the reflective posts and service-learning data in search of recurring themes or common responses. As patterns emerged, passages were highlighted and numbered to code the data. After themes were identified, the researchers went back to the literature in an attempt to ground the themes that emerged from the study to theoretical foundations.

At the conclusion of the project, teachers were asked to reflect on the experi-

ence of implementing a service-learning project and form abstract concepts (Kolb, 1984). The following themes emerged from the reflections: (1) curriculum and real world connections emerged and standards were met through the project, (2) student leadership was critical to the success of the project, (3) partnerships with members of the community strengthened the project, and (4) the project increased overall student motivation.

Meaningful Curriculum Integration and Real World Connections

In terms of meaningful curriculum integration, all 12 teachers reported that natural connections emerged through the project in multiple subject areas. Laney,[1] a 6th grade teacher stated, "The project took on a life of its own after the ball started rolling." Anna, a 2nd grade teacher, commented, "Incorporating it into the curriculum was much easier than I thought. Natural connections were made to science and language arts standards through our project." Missy, a 5th grade teacher, was delighted that her students were able to write a persuasive essay about their issue, conduct research, and design and analyze a survey without opening a textbook. All 12 of the teachers agreed that the curriculum connections were natural and meaningful. Reading and writing took on a new life in these teachers' classrooms. In all of the projects, students were applying valuable language arts skills to communicate with an audience, which ultimately provided the students with a meaningful purpose for learning. Unfortunately, two teachers struggled with a lack of support from their principals so they felt that their connections were severely limited because of the test-pacing guides that drove their instruction. Even in spite of this obstacle, both teachers reported in their post reflections that they recognized multiple opportunities to connect service-learning to other content areas and saw the value of these connections.

A few teachers also reported evidence of students applying civic responsibility to other areas of the curriculum and real world issues. For example, a 1st grade student in Lisa's classroom shared with the class his concern for the polar bears and started a donation campaign to save this species. Students in Jane's 8th grade class made connections to their own awareness and responsibility for social justice when reading the book *Dream Giver* in class. Likewise, students in Mindy's 3rd grade class suggested that they exercise their voice at a local rally to protest the recent budget cuts which resulted in teacher layoffs at their school. Ali, a kindergarten teacher, reported that she was, "thrilled with reactions from the students in other areas of the curriculum. Their interest in historical figures took on a new meaning because we connected their civic action with our service-learning project.

Student Leadership

Next, all 12 teachers agreed that student leadership was critical to the success of the project. Mindy, a 3rd grade teacher stated, "Teachers must give up control, be flexible, and let the children make the decisions." In terms of decision-making,

all of the teachers reported opportunities for student collaboration led to deliberation, critical thinking, and problem solving; all of which are 21st century learning outcomes. Andrea, a kindergarten teacher, echoed the importance of collaboration and teamwork when using service-learning curriculum. She stated, "Deliberation was a key component of this project. It was very important to let students use their voices and work together to make decisions." Laney, a 6th grade teacher, said that the biggest lesson she learned from this whole project was to "step back and let the students make the decisions because this ultimately leads to responsibility and ownership of the project." Jane, an 8th grade teacher, agreed. She stated, "If you give children a chance, with some structure and guidance, they will show you amazing things."

However, it is important to note that the idea of allowing the students to lead the project was not easy for her or many of the other teachers in the beginning. Jane candidly discussed her reluctance to give up control during one of her earlier posts, but stated that she quickly realized her students would rise to the occasion and take ownership if she would allow them to use their voices and make decisions. She came to these conclusions when her students started making connections to social justice issues, their project topic, and their responsibilities as citizens after reading a story during language arts. Another teacher, Sally, realized that she was not giving her students enough opportunities to be the leaders of the project after she read one of her reflection posts for the assignment. In the beginning, she reported that she made most of the decisions related to the project. She felt that as soon as she was able to relinquish some control, the project took on a new life.

Community Partnerships

Eight of the 12 teachers mentioned the importance of building partnerships beyond the classroom to extend support for the project. Examples such as working with other classes, communicating with parents and administrators, informing the district office of the project, reaching out to local community and government officials, writing letters to businesses, and alerting the media were cited as positive partnerships that supported and extended students' projects. Tim, a 5th grade teacher, attributed the success of the project to the multiple groups of people involved with the project. The project his students created included parent volunteers, a community animal shelter, community members who participated in the survey, and the local media. Ali, a kindergarten teacher, said, "Increased communication between the classroom and community from start to finish was exciting to discover. It was fun to build partnerships beyond the classroom."

Student Motivation

Finally, all 12 teachers discussed an increase in student motivation and enthusiasm for school. Melissa, a 6th grade teacher, stated, "My students begged to work on the project. They didn't even realize they were learning!" Jane, an 8th grade

teacher, reported that her students insisted on extending their project to address a second issue after the first issue had been addressed. Teachers' comments also repeatedly reflected their genuine dismay with how motivated students were to work on the project before school, after school, on the weekends, and during valuable free time such as lunch or recess. Tim, a 5th grade teacher, reported that eleven of his students volunteered at a local event on a Saturday because it supported their project. Lisa reported that this project was a powerful learning experience for her first graders. She said that her students consistently demonstrated a "great sense of pride and accomplishment by channeling their energy and ideas to help others." Overall, the students were motivated and willing to do whatever it took to solve the issues identified for their projects.

After analyzing their service-learning reflections, the teachers were asked if they would use service-learning curriculum again in their classrooms. Active participation and reflection indicate that the likelihood of active experimentation beyond the course assignment is high (Kolb, 1984). All participants in this study recognized the benefits associated with service-learning and reported that they would use it again in their classrooms. Ten of the teachers said they would definitely implement this curriculum again in the future without any reservations. Ali, a kindergarten teacher said, "Now that I have experienced it first hand, I am more confident and will definitely use it again. I learned as much about civic competence and active citizenship as my kids." Tim, a 5th grade teacher, echoed Ali's enthusiasm commenting, "This type of curriculum will be the center of my classroom instruction. It is a great way to integrate a project-based constructivist approach to education and deliver integrated instruction. I also believe it prepares students to be knowledgeable, responsible, and active citizens."

The two teachers who had the most concerns during the project said they would implement the curriculum again, if all conditions were favorable for support. These teachers specifically stated that if their principals were completely supportive, then they would absolutely consider implementing a service-learning project. Missy, a 5th grade teacher, said, "I would be willing to do it again…if it were earlier in the year when testing was not in the way…and if I had complete support and approval from the administration." Mary, a 6th grade teacher at a different school site also stated, "I think service-learning is a very valuable tool to use in the classroom. However, considering my circumstances, I would not do it again if I had to face the same restrictions from my principal. I was disappointed that my students could not go through the process and decide what they really wanted to address. I hope to be able to use it again."

Conclusions

The teachers involved in the service-learning projects evolved through reflecting on the process of implementation. Based on the findings in the previous section, we conclude that the teachers in this study gained the skills to: (1) effectively integrate civics-centered curriculum and meet state content standards through service-learning

projects, (2) facilitate student-led instruction in a democratic classroom, (3) increase effective communication and build partnerships beyond the classroom, and (4) use structured reflections as a tool for growth and evaluation. Based on reactions from their respective students, the teachers were encouraged by student leadership, collaboration, motivation, engagement and meaningful learning experiences. Unlike the teachers in our previous study, all 12 teachers in this study reported improved teacher dispositions and increased confidence regarding the implementation of a civics-centered curriculum.

Ultimately, with evidence in place that teacher education courses involving service-learning could positively affect teachers' capabilities and desire to include civic participation as a part of their curriculum, student learning and experiences in the elementary classroom became the final arc for our investigation.

Phase Two

The next section of this article describes a service-learning project that developed in one of the 12 teacher's classrooms as a result of this assignment. Not only does it document the elementary students' civic experiences, it also provides rich examples of how this classroom teacher facilitated the project in her classroom.

Method

The data for Phase Two is presented in this section. The inception of this phase of the research began after one of the teachers from phase one asked for our support in the classroom a few months after the graduate class had ended. As evidenced in this section, the service-learning curriculum project turned into more than an assignment for a graduate class, it became an example of active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). The classroom project lasted for two years and became the focus of our research during the second year. Phase Two includes data collected from the classroom teacher's 4th and 5th grade students and uses narrative inquiry to tell the story of how the project developed and the impact it had on the students.

Research Design

Since we were interested in understanding how the participants constructed meaning from their experiences (Sherman & Webb, 1988) we chose to use qualitative research methods for this phase of the study.

Participants and Context

During the second year, data collection took place within the naturalistic setting of Morgan's classroom from September to April. Classroom observations took place four times a month for approximately two hours each visit. We recorded field notes documenting students' responses to the teacher's lessons, as well as student

interactions during these lessons. Eleven elementary students also participated in individual interviews that lasted approximately 30 minutes.

During the first year of the project, Morgan, a fourth and fifth grade combination classroom teacher, launched a service-learning project with thirty students. The following year, fourteen fourth grade students who were a part of the project during the first year remained in Morgan's combination classroom for fifth grade. Due to the structure of a combination classroom, twelve new fourth grade students joined the fifth graders, and the project continued for a second year.

Data Sources

A variety of known methods were employed to collect data for this study. In an attempt to reconstruct our experiences and to tell the story about the development of this project, we used the classroom teacher's reflections from her service-learning project, our reflections after teaching our weekly graduate classes, surveys, field notes from classroom observations, interview transcripts with the elementary students, and transcriptions articulated from the students' perspective via a video documentary.

Results

We use narrative inquiry to tell the story of how the project developed. Connelly and Clandinin (1988) define narrative inquiry as "the making of meaning from personal experience via a process of reflection in which storytelling is the key element and in which metaphors and folk knowledge take their place" (p.16).

The constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to analyze the interview transcripts in search of recurring themes or common responses. As patterns emerged, passages were highlighted and numbered to code the data. In an attempt to triangulate the data, the interview transcripts were read, coded, and compared by the researchers and the classroom teacher. Responses to survey statements were tallied and categorized. Common themes from the interview transcripts were used to support responses on the survey.

Narrative Inquiry

Morgan, an elementary teacher enrolled in the social studies methods course, reported on the first night of class that her students were not motivated and she was willing to try anything to capture their interest. After discussing the types of citizenship presented by Westheimer and Kahne (2004), and components of democratic classrooms (Parker, 2008) during the second week of class, Morgan reported in her pre-assignment reflections that she was intrigued by the possibilities of the project and decided to design a service-learning project with her students.

Morgan started the project with her students by sharing examples of the different types of citizenship through reading children's literature selections and making connections to active civic participation throughout history. Next, she asked the students if they could pick one problem to solve in their community, what would

they choose? After several brainstorming sessions, one of the students in the class brought up the idea that a toddler in their community needed money for a very expensive surgery. As they continued investigating, they came to understand that the family's health insurance denied surgery because it claimed the procedure was cosmetic. This outraged the students and prompted them to take action to help the family raise money.

Over the next six months the students worked on an action plan that led to the development of a school-wide recycling program that encouraged students, teachers, and members of the community to get involved and to raise money for their cause. The students conducted research and discovered that aluminum cans, plastic bottles, and glass could be recycled for money. The students decided to contact Waste Management Services in their city and ask for recycling bins to place in each classroom. Each week the students collected, sorted and coordinated a drop-off service to the local recycling center to redeem cash for their recyclables. This project raised funds to help pay for the toddler's much-needed surgery. Furthermore, the students made posters and hung them up around the school, and they wrote letters to local businesses, government officials, and organizations to ask for their support in the recycling campaign. They even spoke at the local City Council meeting to share their understanding of a citizen's responsibility in society and to thank everyone in their community for their support. The students' efforts also attracted media attention from local newspapers and television. This coverage encouraged more people to get involved and to donate their recyclables and cash to the cause. By the end of the second school year, the students had raised about $10,000 to help pay for the surgery.

Beyond Recycling and Raising Money

From the onset of this project, the students were determined to raise a large amount of money to support the toddler's surgery. However, during the second year of the project, Morgan pushed the boundaries of the initial project by incorporating environmental issues, connecting civic knowledge related to the history of democracy and the functions of government, and examining social inequity as a challenge to citizenship. Throughout the entire project, the students were involved in thoughtful deliberations that led to important decisions for the project. Students were also required to conduct research regarding issues associated with the project to become experts. The students asked questions about how they could affect change beyond their school site and community.

The students wanted to know how they could get more "powerful" people, such as politicians and other community members involved in their project. They wanted to see changes beyond raising money for the surgery. The following letter was written by one of the fourth grade students during the national primary election for President:

Dear Senator Hillary Clinton,

Here at Good Citizens Elementary School, the fourth and fifth grade combination class has been given a chance to write to a candidate. I picked you because you have many excellent ideas to help us and our world. I love your ideas about Universal Healthcare. Our class has been trying to raise money for a little girl's operation; she has a rare disease called Moebius Syndrome. This disease affects the sixth and seventh cranial nerves, which means she cannot smile or make any other facial expressions. She is only 3 years old and her insurance company thinks of this surgery as plastic surgery, so they won't cover the operation fee. Some countries cover the payment when you go to the hospital, so maybe you can change it and make sure everyone has health insurance at a reasonable price. We would really appreciate it if you would come to our school.

Sincerely,

Isabelle

Through these discussions, questions about democracy were raised and the students were interested in how people could get involved. Specifically, the students wanted to know if and how they could get involved with changing issues they did not like. As a result of this conversation, the students wanted to know more about the history of our government and the rights and responsibilities of all citizens. Morgan used the Constitution and resources such as *We the People*, to help the children learn more about the different levels of government, and their roles and responsibilities as citizens of the United States (Center for Civic Education, 1988).

The students were fascinated by the Constitution. At first, Morgan brought in replicas of the document to spark interest. Next, they attempted to read the actual document. Since the language was difficult to understand, the students deconstructed the text in the Constitution and rewrote it in kid-friendly language to help them understand the ideas presented. The students also conducted inquiry through the exploration of primary documents, and deliberated the difference between individual rights and the common good. The students learned about which government official or agency they should contact if they wanted to propose a change or to address an issue in their community or state. This knowledge was meaningful to the students because it confirmed that the students' voices could make a difference.

After gaining new knowledge about the government and their rights as citizens, the students were eager to take action at the state level. After learning about the Bill of Rights and how a bill becomes a law, they decided to propose an idea for a bill to their California representatives. At first, the students wanted to propose a bill related to healthcare using the toddler they had been raising money for as an example of social injustice. The students were even interested in challenging the health insurance company that denied the initial claim. However, the students had to shift gears after the toddler's family asked the students not to get involved with the legal aspect of the issue. As a result, the students had to reconsider the focus of the project.

Emerging Knowledge, Skills and Dispositions

More important than whether or not the students succeeded in persuading a representative to sponsor their bill, the students learned that they have the power to propose a change and elicit support for their concerns by writing letters, making phone calls, and sending emails to government officials from their district and state. The students also learned they can use their voices to start a grass-roots movement that can make a difference in the lives of others.

As evidenced in the letter written to the presidential candidate, involvement in the project also pushed the students to think beyond recycling and raising money for the toddler. This is an example of emergent curriculum (Beane, 2005; Schultz, 2008). Questions regarding injustices related to our current healthcare system became more prevalent in informal conversations and emails initiated by the students. One of the fifth-grade students sent us the following email one weekend after watching *Sicko* (Moore, 2007), a documentary that examines problems with the healthcare system in the United States:

Hi,
  I want to tell you about a movie that I just watched. The movie is called *Sicko*. Michel Moore is in the movie. The movie is about people and their heath insurance companies. These people have cancer and other sicknesses, but their health insurance rejects them. In the middle of the movie, Michel Moore goes to Canada and finds out that you don't have to pay to go to the doctor. I think you should watch this film so you can see how the toddler's family feels. I felt it too. Thank you!

Your Friend,
Lily

Survey and Interview Data

During the spring of the second year, 11 students were given a survey containing statements related to civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Students were asked to circle strongly agree, agree, disagree, strongly disagree, or not sure, based on their understanding and feelings toward each statement. Surveys were followed up with interviews to elicit more in depth responses. Responses to select survey items and interview data are discussed below.

Citizens can do more than pick up trash and follow the rules. Six students strongly agreed with this statement, four agreed, and one disagreed. When asked during the interview to elaborate on the definition of citizenship, initial responses included following the rules and laws, making the community a better place, not littering, recycling, helping the poor, and being kind. Even though ten of the eleven students agreed that citizenship included more than being personally responsible (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004) their initial responses did not reflect this belief. When asked to expand upon a citizen's responsibilities, responses such as organizing projects, writing letters, and encouraging others to help out were also common. These responses support participatory citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

For example, Janie said, "Being a good citizen also includes identifying and fixing problems in the community, which can be done by forming a committee." All the students agreed that more could be accomplished when you have a team working together than when trying to solve a problem alone. Students also stated that forming a team is beneficial because other people may have solutions to a problem that you might not be able to think of on your own. Students also reiterated that listening to others ideas is very important. Jackson said, "When you come up with a solution, you have to make a plan of action, which also includes listening to others and sharing ideas." Students reported that the Internet, experts in the community, and friends could be likely sources of knowledge. Several students also emphasized that it was important to consider multiple perspectives and options before making a decision. Nick said, "It's not just about what you think. You have to give everyone a chance to talk and listen to the group. You have to think about the good and the bad together before you make a decision."

I know what to do and who to contact if I am concerned about a problem in my community. When students were asked if they would know what steps to take in order to solve a problem in their community, five of the students said they were confident in their ability to address a problem, three students said they would not know what to do, and three were not sure. During the in-depth interviews the three students who originally responded that they were not sure what to do in order to enact change in their community stated that their actions would depend on the issue and the magnitude of the problem. Next, students were presented with the following hypothetical scenario: What would you do if you noticed that drivers were speeding in your neighborhood where young children were playing and riding bikes? Common responses included actions such as: recruiting other people to help, conducting research about the issue, talking about the problems with other people to see if they might have other ideas before making a decision, and contacting the mayor or speaking to the city council to elicit support. Some students talked about promoting awareness through the use of signs, petitions, and letters. Overall, the students felt that they would have more success solving a problem when working with a team than alone, again referencing their work on the class service-learning project as an example.

Citizens should always agree with the government and the decisions they make. Five students disagreed and three students strongly disagreed with this statement. One student strongly agreed, one agreed, and one was unsure about their position. However, during the one on one interviews, one student who agreed with the statement and one who was not sure at first changed their initial responses to disagree with the statement. The student who strongly agreed with the statement maintained the position that citizens should always follow the government's lead. Some of the students' responses to support their position included comments such as Jake's statement, "When you do not agree with the government, you should peacefully

protest and voice your opinion." Other examples suggested petitioning and writing letters to government officials about their beliefs and concerns. Vivian stated, "The government represents the people's concerns. There will always be problems so it is our job to be aware of the issues and make others aware too."

Children are capable of making big changes in the world. When asked whether or not they believed children were capable of making big changes in the world, all eleven students agreed with this statement. Overall, the students were able to clearly link their understanding of civic responsibility to their class service-learning project. During one of the interviews, Christian, a 5th grade student stated, "Our responsibility is the same as adults. We have a voice and we can make a change in our environment and our community too. I have learned how to stop global warming and all the ways to recycle. I have learned about the Constitution and the three branches of our government. And most importantly, kids have a voice and they can make a difference in this world." Lex echoed Christian's ideas when he said, "I have learned about the levels of citizenship…we, the people, have a voice to make a change in this world."

Students also reported that they felt better than ever about themselves because of what they had done to help the young girl in their community. One student said he enjoyed doing a project that helped someone in need. Ellie stated, "This project taught me that everything is not all about me." Students also mentioned that recycling for the project taught them how they can help the environment. One student shared that she thinks about every item thrown away in her household, and how it should be properly disposed. The classroom teacher even reported that at one point during the study, she hastily threw papers and various items found on the classroom floor in a trashcan. Later that day, she saw one of the students quietly go to the trashcan and pull out those same items and place them in their proper recycling bins in the back of the classroom without saying a word.

Conclusions

Findings from the second phase of the study suggest that projects that are situated in a real-world context focusing on community needs and student interest can impact students' level of involvement and sense of agency. These results are consistent with previous research (Schultz & Oyler, 2006; Wade, 2001; Werner, et al., 2002). The data from this study suggest that the students in Morgan's classroom gained valuable civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions as a result of their engagement in this project. This growth was demonstrated in the students' successful efforts to raise the money, their developing interest in issues outside the immediacy of the project, as well as, their responses during class discussions and interviews.

Service-learning projects may have a catalytic ability to motivate students into using active democratic skills to better their surrounding community. In regards to

the use of service-learning projects, we concur with Westheimer and Kahne (2004), and support the claim that teachers can develop "civic commitment by exposing students to problems in society and by creating opportunities for students to have positive experiences while working toward solutions" (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004, p. 265). Through this project, students came to realize that civic engagement is not a private endeavor. They learned how to initiate and develop projects that are informed by their civic ideas, skills, and strategies. These students were engaging in participatory and justice-oriented citizenship (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004).

The nature of student-led projects allows the curriculum to evolve and transform beyond its original intent. As a result, students are deeply connected to the material and are key partners in the development of curriculum that is meaningful. 21st century skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and collaboration are developed and applied. Engaging in the process of working toward a solution for a meaningful cause often creates opportunities for students to delve into more complex issues that would otherwise be hard for students to understand with a relatable context. The letter to Senator Clinton and the email about the healthcare documentary shared earlier are both excellent examples of how the students connected the toddler's personal healthcare struggle with the broader issue of inadequate healthcare in our country. This move toward a discussion of healthcare happened organically, and was generated through the project as it was happening.

Summary

According to Schugurensky and Myers (2003) the attainment of civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions is a "long process that starts early in life and is reshaped over time with every new learning experience" (p. 325). Our findings parallel Schugurensky and Myers' (2003) ideas that we build our civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions from a "hodgepodge of ideas and learning experiences" (p. 326). We propose that this transfer into adulthood may be more likely if authentic civic experiences are consistent throughout schooling. Similarly, 21st century skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, and collaboration can only be developed through consistent and meaningful practice over time. Since the classroom is a perfect microcosm of society in which to give students the opportunity to prepare for their role as global citizens in this world, then experiential learning strategies such as service-learning are likely instructional choices that can be used to address 21st century learning goals and connect learning to real-life experiences.

Clearly, we have witnessed the positive effects that opportunities for active civic involvement can have on the classroom teachers and their young pupils. Ultimately, working to close the loop between theory and practice, as well as the process for defining and understanding citizenship is messy and complex, however, we wholeheartedly believe that the journey is the reward. Although the projects discussed in this article started as assignments for a graduate class, many of the teachers reported in their post-assignment reflections that the projects quickly

grew into something much larger than they ever expected. These teachers and their students' service-learning projects encapsulates how posing a simple question and providing students with the opportunity to become actively involved with the curriculum can turn into a life lesson in citizenship, the common good, and student learning beyond the four walls of the classroom.

Implications for Future Studies

Our participants were limited to one single university course and one public elementary classroom. It is not clear if the results would be the same in a secondary education classroom or in a different university setting. Future studies could involve a control group, quantitative measures, or a larger and more diverse sample.

Another noteworthy point to consider is the nature of the issue selected by the students in this particular study. Often teachers are reluctant to discuss or address political issues that cause tension in the classroom or community. The issues that the students explored in this study were relatively safe in terms of political charge. If students had selected issues related to immigration, sexual orientation, or religion, results and reactions might be different. Future studies could explore how teachers support students who are interested in exploring topics and engaging in civic projects that are controversial in nature.

Note

[1] All names are pseudonyms.

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