

The Student as Teacher Educator in Service-Learning

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Abstract

To prepare preservice teachers (PSTs) to work with diverse populations of PreK-12 students, teacher educators are incorporating a variety of field-based experiences into teacher preparation. Service-learning courses can provide PSTs with additional field experiences beyond formal student teaching. This study is concerned with the experiences of a group of undergraduate PSTs as they tutor in an alternative school as part of a service-learning course. To make sense of their experiences at the alternative school, these PSTs compared their own PreK-12 experiences and those of the students they tutored. In this study, the students at the alternative school served as the most influential contributors to PSTs' developing conceptions of teaching and of schools—a finding that has implications for teacher preparation.

Keywords

service-learning, teacher education, field experience

Unlike other professionals, like lawyers or engineers, teachers enter their field with years of previous experience. Lortie (1975) referred to the K-12 schooling of preservice teachers (PSTs) as the *apprenticeship of observation*, at least 13 years of school experiences that inform what teaching, students, and classrooms look like to PSTs. So many years in classrooms before entering teaching may make PSTs overly confident in their abilities and their knowledge of teaching (Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Such confidence can be especially problematic as many PSTs' experiences in schools before teacher education provided them with few cross-cultural experiences from which to draw as they envision and plan for future students (Sleeter, 2008). The disconnect between PSTs' own PreK-12 schooling and the schools they may enter as teachers becomes particularly salient as the demographics of U.S. schools continue to diversify,

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with projections that fewer than half of PreK-12 students will be White in the years following 2014 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). The demographics of the majority of both elementary- and secondary-level PSTs—White, middle class, heterosexual women—do not mirror this PreK-12 population (Petrovic & Rosiek, 2003; Szalacha, 2004). Teacher education programs have recognized the importance of introducing PSTs to diverse and authentic schooling practices before they enter teaching. The incorporation of required practicum hours into PSTs' coursework is a common approach to preparing novice teachers for these diverse classrooms, as well as for the sociocultural differences that may exist between a PST's school experience and the classrooms they may work in as teachers (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001; Ball & Forzani, 2009; Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Imig, 2001; Sleeter, 2001, 2008).

Simply equating experience with education can be problematic, as many unstructured practicum experiences actually cement preconceived, and often stereotypical, assumptions of others (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Gomez, 1996; Haberman & Post, 1992). Practicum experiences that seek to expand PSTs' perceptions of and experiences with diverse populations of students and school settings should be *educative* (Burant & Kirby, 2002; Dewey, 1938; Feiman-Nemser, 2001). Educative experiences lead "to new discoveries about oneself and the world, personal and professional growth, and the ability to take informed action" (Knight-McKenna, Darby, Spingler, & Shafer, 2011, p. 208). Educative experiences, as well as the teacher preparation program as a whole, should be grounded in a sociocultural approach to learning and development (Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Vygotsky, 1933/1935). Such an approach allows the teacher educator to recognize that the PSTs' developing conception of students, schools, and teaching is an ongoing conversation between new experiences (in this case, those in the practicum setting) and their own past school experiences, their familial and cultural backgrounds, and their personal dispositions and beliefs.

Service-learning courses have the potential to provide PSTs with educative field-based experiences beyond formal student teaching. Service-learning experiences are typically course-based and require students "to participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs" and to simultaneously "reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995, p. 103). Reflection is often considered the bridge between theory and practice in service-learning, helping students to apply their academic knowledge to their experiences in the service setting, and leading to more complex and nuanced understandings of both academic material and society (Ash & Clayton, 2004; Brookfield, 1995; Mitchell, 2008).

The integration of service-learning into teacher education coursework provides PSTs with the opportunity to grapple with multiple and often conflicting approaches to education and schooling through concrete experiences (Hallman & Burdick, 2011; Mitchell, 2008). For instance, Hallman and Burdick (2011) incorporated service-learning "early-field experiences" into their secondary English education program to provide PSTs with the opportunity to observe and work in rural, urban, *and* suburban schools—rather than relegating PSTs to only one school environment through the

more formal and singular practicum experience. It is essential, however, that students' service happens at the guidance of the community members themselves. Rather than students (or the university instructor) identifying the needs of the community, the community-partner must identify and articulate their own needs (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Bortolin, 2011; Duncan & Kopperud, 2008).

This study is concerned with how a group of PSTs enrolled in a teacher education service-learning course made sense of their service experiences. Specifically, I am interested in the potential of participation in a service-learning course to contribute to a more nuanced and complicated understanding of teaching, as guided by PreK-12 students. After reviewing sociocultural theory and the ways that it can and does inform service-learning in this study, I provide an overview of the context within which this research took place. I analyze the comparisons participants made between their own PreK-12 school experiences and those of the students they tutored as part of the service-learning course. Specifically, this study addresses the following questions:

Research Question 1: What sociocultural challenges to teaching and learning do participants identify as they complete the service and coursework associated with a teacher education service-learning course?

Research Question 2: How do participants respond to these challenges?

Theoretical Framework

This study situates learning and development within the cultural-historical psychological tradition attributed to the work of Alexander Luria, Alexsei Leontiev, and Lev Vygotsky (Moll, 2014). Unlike behavioral psychologists who considered development to be linked to biological factors, like age (Piaget, 1924), a cultural-historical psychological, or sociocultural, approach takes into account the confluence of social and societal influences from across the life span (Van der Veer, 2007). Specifically, I understand sociocultural theory from a Vygotskian perspective, which recognizes the role of mediational tools, namely the act of speech, as integral to individual development and learning (Moll, 2014; Smagorinsky, 2007). The development of the mind and brain is influenced by culture, which, along with speech, includes personal experiences, training or formal education, and age (Van der Veer, 2007). The acquisition of cultural tools, then, does not occur simply through developmental maturation but is also reliant on formal instruction.

To contribute to the student's ongoing learning, instruction "should not follow mental development . . . but create it" (Van der Veer, 2007, p. 84). This creation occurs within what Vygotsky (1933/1935) termed the zone of proximal development (ZPD)—the space between what is and what could be. With guidance from a more intelligent partner (like a teacher), the student is able to traverse the ZPD, albeit not without challenges, to move toward the next level of development. Thus, a cultural-historical approach contends that mental development is influenced by a number of cultural and social factors over time that will vary according to the individual.

To more explicitly examine the role power plays in learning and in schools, I draw from Lewis, Enciso, and Moje (2007) and Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) to consider a critical approach to sociocultural theory and to pedagogy. Lewis et al. (2007) articulated a view of critical sociocultural theory that explicitly considers issues of power, identity, and agency in learning and development. They define power as “produced in and through individuals as they are constituted in larger systems of power and as they participate in and reproduce those systems” (p. 4). Such a view of power is particularly salient to a discussion of schools, as individual students and teachers are implicated in and constantly participating in a power-laden system.

Duncan-Andrade and Morrell (2008) viewed schooling “as a cultural and historical process in which students are positioned” (p. 23). More specifically, critical pedagogy recognizes that students are positioned “within asymmetrical relations of power on the basis of specific race, class, and gender groupings” (p. 23). It is within these asymmetrical power relations that students construct knowledge about the world and themselves.

A critical approach to pedagogy calls teachers to “engage in an ongoing analysis of the relationship between power, knowledge, and curriculum” (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p. 32). It is this collective interrogation of the social world and the ways that that world infuses and guides the work of schools that introduces an element of criticality and a consideration of social justice themes to a sociocultural approach to education and learning. Together, sociocultural theory and critical pedagogy allow me to at once recognize that PSTs are developing their own individual concept of what it means to be a teacher as they individually experience and make sense of the various spaces, people, and activities that constitute their program of study *while also* recognizing the social, historical, and political influences that surround that sense making.

Similar to mental development, the process of learning to teach has been described as a “twisting path” (Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003) with many contributing factors (or mediators), such as the apprenticeship of observation (Lortie, 1975), teacher education coursework, and field-based practicum experiences. Ultimately, however, the “twisting path” metaphor suggests that all students will arrive at a singular endpoint. To challenge this overly simplistic conception of learning to teach, the “twisting path” analogy has since been revisited. In their study of what PSTs reported learning in three different teacher education programs, Barnes and Smagorinsky (forthcoming) found the process of learning to teach to be influenced by a number of mediating factors, lacking a unitary endpoint.

Service-Learning as Mediator

In this study, I consider participation in a service-learning course to be another mediating factor in PSTs’ developing conception of teaching. Many PSTs enter their teacher education coursework with a singular view of teaching—often based on their limited PreK-12 experiences. As the students in U.S. schools become increasingly diverse racially, ethnically, and economically, teacher education accreditation organizations have required the incorporation of a greater number of diverse field experiences into

teacher preparation (Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, 2013). The incorporation of a variety of field experiences in teacher preparation, thus, could help PSTs learn more about the diversity of their students as well as the cultures and communities that infuse their classrooms (Feiman-Nemser, 2001; Lazar, 1998; Richards, Moore, & Gripe, 1996; Ross & Smith, 1992; Sleeter, 2001, 2008). Service-learning courses provide another layer of field experience to the more formal practicum and student teaching, further contributing to the knotty process of teacher preparation. Service-learning courses, moreover, encourage students to learn from and with the community. The community, then, contributes to PSTs' developing conception of schools and teaching, while helping them to see the influences that society, culture, and history can have on learning. In this way, service-learning courses are simultaneously founded on and contribute toward a sociocultural approach to learning and development.

One of the stated goals of the particular service-learning course I observed here was to provide students with experiences that would complicate their understanding of teaching and education. Through both the organization of the course readings and the multiple response options offered to students (details that will be delineated in the Method section), the instructor articulated his expectation that students would not arrive at a clear endpoint by the end of the course. Instead, the instructor's cultural-historical approach to course design encouraged students to "wobble" as they progressed through the assigned readings, presentations, and service. Fecho (2008) has described wobble as "that moment when there has been a 'shift in balance' in one's belief system" (p. 1) that demands attention. Like the ZPD, the concept of wobble suggests that there will be moments of struggle for students as they move from what is known and familiar through the, sometimes knotty and less secure, process of development. In this study, I consider strategies the PSTs employed to help them make sense of the wobble they experienced during their participation in a service-learning course.

Method

Context and Participants

At the time of data collection, all participants were enrolled in the undergraduate service-learning elective course offered through the College of Education in a state university in the U.S. Southeast. The self-identified racial groups, years in school, and intended majors of all participants are outlined in Table 1.

Each week for 11 weeks, the PSTs tutored students in an English language arts classroom at the local alternative high school for 1 hour and attended class on campus for approximately 2 hours. This alternative high school was originally founded by a partnership between the county school district, Communities in Schools (CIS), and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in response to the county's low standardized test scores at the high school level. The school is open to any secondary students below the age of 22 who are interested in receiving their high school diploma within a smaller

Table 1. Study Participants.

Name	Racial/ethnic identity	Year	Intended undergraduate major
Amanda	European American	Junior	English and English education
LuAnne	European American	Junior	Middle grades education
Joshua	European American	Junior	English
Caren	European American	Freshman	Undecided
Janine	African American	Junior	Early childhood education
Lucy	European American	Freshman	English
Christopher	African American	Junior	Middle school education

learning environment. The school also provides traditional, online, and blended approaches to learning, boasts of a low student/teacher ratio, and offers child care and credit recovery opportunities to students.

During their tutoring time, participants completed a variety of tasks—for example, helping a student review for a test, helping a student to prepare for and/or write a paper, or discussing a text with a student. The on-campus class was organized around the reading of three student-selected texts,¹ resulting in small-group discussions and student-led mini-lessons. The approximately 15-week semester, thus, was divided into three, 5-week sections. During each 5-week unit, students worked in small groups to select a text from a list of instructor-provided recommendations to read, discuss, and then teach to the class. The texts were meant to encourage students to consider the ways that race, class, language, gender, sexuality, and/or mental dis/abilities influence schools and education. In addition, the instructor was open to student text recommendations. For many students enrolled in the class, the book presentations were their first experience preparing and teaching a lesson to others. As students led their mini-lessons, the instructor would periodically interject to point out the affordances and drawbacks of certain pedagogical choices. Such commentary was typically followed by the instructor's verbal recognition that learning to teach is a process, and that his goal was to help them through this process.

For their final assignment, students submitted personal reflections on their entire service-learning experience. Students were expected to use these personal reflections to consider what happened at the service setting, what it meant to them, and possible future implications of their work. To help guide students, the instructor provided a list of 15 optional questions that they could consider. In their reflections, students were expected to speak to both their experiences in the service setting and their university-based coursework as they articulated their learning.

Data Collection

Because I was not the instructor and my only relationship to these students and this course was as a researcher, it was not until after gaining consent from seven of the eight students enrolled in the course that I began to attend each class, maintaining field notes and collecting students' reflections at the end of the semester. I also conducted

1-hour interviews with each student. During these interviews, I inquired into participants' experiences with school and volunteer work growing up, their interest in becoming a teacher, their reasons for taking the service-learning course, and their experiences in the service-learning course so far. These interview transcripts were shared with participants at the close of the semester as a form of member checking. I also communicated with participants during data analysis to ensure that my interpretations and use of data aligned with participants' intentions. Finally, I did not play a role in the design of the course or assessment of student work.

Data Analysis

The particular focus of this study is the interview data from each of the seven participants. I began data analysis by reading through each of the participants' interview transcripts to get a sense of the overall topics they discussed and to look for similarities or patterns of talk across the interviews. After reading all seven transcripts, I then returned to the interviews and began tagging statements (Miles & Huberman, 1994), giving longer stories/explanations shorter identifiers that I could return to later and compare with other similarly labeled statements across the interview transcripts. Once I read and tagged all seven interviews, I then considered my research questions to determine appropriate codes that could help me categorize the tags throughout the interviews.

The following codes were identified to organize the tagged statements: (a) What does the participant purport to know or believe about teaching, students, schools, learning, and/or parents? (b) To what experience does the participant attribute having learned or honed that knowledge or belief? After coding all of the seven interviews, I looked at participants' knowledge statements and determined that their knowledge statements fell into one of five categories: students, schools/education, teachers/teaching, learning, or parents.

Known about students. Those codes categorized as "Known about Students" referenced participants' stated knowledge or opinions about students at any level of schooling. These statements pertained to student development, their needs from teachers and schools, student dispositions, and their out-of-school lives (i.e., family, friends, community).

Known about schools and education. Those codes that fell into the category of "Known about Schools and Education" included participants' statements about the more general landscape of education and of schools. Specifically, this category referred to what participants reported knowing about the resources available in schools, the differences that exist among schools, and the overarching roles and responsibilities of schools and of education.

Known about teaching and teachers. Codes in this category included participants' belief statements about teaching as a profession and also what teachers are or should be responsible for in their interactions with students and one another.

Known about learning. Codes in this category included participants' statements about the process of learning, where learning occurs, the purposes of learning, and schools' and teachers' roles in learning.

Known about parents. This category included those codes referring to what participants reported knowing about the role that parents and/or families play in a child's education and learning.

Across all of the data, participants' interviews were coded for knowledge of students, schools, and teachers with similar frequency, with far fewer codes for learning and parents. For this reason, I focused my analysis on what participants purported to know about students, schools, and teachers only.

Within each category, participants attributed their knowledge almost equally to personal experiences and the service-learning course. What was of particular interest were those instances where participants directly compared what they saw or experienced as part of the service-learning class (service, reading, or in-class discussions) with their own previous school experiences. In my findings, I explore participants' use of comparisons as they worked to make sense of or convey their knowledge of schools, students, and teachers.

Findings

The apprenticeship of observation plays a powerful role in PSTs' developing conception of schools and teaching. The participants in this study did not challenge Lortie's (1975) assertion. Throughout the interviews, the participants were candid when sharing their beliefs of and knowledge about students, schools, teachers, learning, and parents—and grounded their knowledge in their own PreK-12 experiences.

While participants did attribute their knowledge of learning and parents almost entirely to their own experiences, their knowledge of students, schools, and teachers could not be so neatly categorized. Across the three categories (knowledge of students, knowledge of schools, and knowledge of teachers), participants were concerned with the differences between their own experiences as middle or high school students and the students and school environment they were working with at the alternative high school. Across the interviews, participants invoked comparisons between their own secondary school experiences and those they were witnessing at the alternative high school for three primary reasons: to help them articulate a mission for schools and/or teachers' responsibilities to students, to discuss a challenge facing schools, and to recognize the ways that schools and/or teachers address the diverse needs of students. I organize the findings around these three areas. While at some point in their interviews or reflections, each of the seven participants made comparisons between the service-learning course and their own life experiences for one of these three reasons I use participants' individual experiences and stories to illustrate the themes and patterns I saw across the data.

To Articulate a Mission

Many of the participants drew comparisons between their own learning experiences outside of the service-learning course and their course-based service, reading, and discussions to help them articulate a personal mission or a series of belief statements about the purpose of schools or teachers' responsibilities to their students.

Schools. Throughout his interview, Ricky remained focused on the responsibility that schools have to graduate students who can see how "the world works." For Ricky, students should leave high schools understanding that their identities "intersect very much, you know race relations with gender and sexuality relations, with class relations, class conflict." Ricky drew from his own experiences as a high school student, admitting that it was not until his senior year of high school and his early college classes that he really started to see how race, gender, and socioeconomic status interconnect and influence "education and colleges and the business world." Drawing from his own recollections from high school, as well as the diversity that he was seeing in the students he was tutoring, Ricky was able to articulate his belief that schools should not "let students leave high school and go into the workforce and the modern world thinking that everyone's being judged just based on their character." While Ricky focused on the mission he believed should guide the field of education, other participants honed in on the responsibilities of teachers, in particular.

Teachers. Joshua's developing relationships with the students he tutored at the alternative high school was of particular importance to him throughout his interview and subsequent written reflections for the course. Toward the end of his interview, Joshua recalled himself as a high school student and the myriad things going through his head at the time, unrelated to the literature his teachers wanted him to be thinking about. When he considered his own high school experiences in light of his work with students at the alternative school, Joshua was able to articulate his desire to "work on being able to build relationships with students" and to focus on "getting students to trust me to feel like I'm not just there to perform because I'm getting paid." In effect, Joshua wanted the students he was tutoring to understand that he was personally interested in them as people and not just with the academic content.

Similar to Joshua, Caren recognized care to be a particularly important aspect of teaching. Caren spent the majority of her interview discussing a beloved high school teacher, Mr. B. Caren remembered Mr. B telling his students that "the good teachers don't just care about how you're being in school, but how you are as a person." Caren observed a similar level of care between the students and a particular teacher at the alternative school: "I've seen her pull students aside and be like, it's never like blaming for not showing up to class or skipping, it's like 'what can we do to get you to graduation time?'" After comparing her own high school interactions with Mr. B to the student-teacher relations she was seeing at the alternative high school, Caren shared that "it's important that you [teachers] should be there if you need to, as another mentor-type. I think it's important also to stand up for your students." For Caren, like Joshua,

the teacher's responsibilities extended beyond the curriculum to include the relationship between teacher and student as well.

To Discuss the Challenges Facing Schools

In other instances, participants drew on their own experiences in high school to help them describe how their understanding of education was becoming increasingly complicated. Some participants shared that they were learning that there are many different types of schools to serve the different needs of student populations, that students learn in different ways, that students' home lives complicate teaching, and that teachers must vary their teaching methods depending on school's resources and the student population.

Lucy's first day at the alternative school helped her identify challenges that individual teachers face as they enter schools. In her first week at the alternative school, Lucy sat with a student and listened to her as she cried about a lost friendship and also broke up a fight between two students. During our interview, Lucy shared that she left her first tutoring day feeling terribly unprepared. Not only had the service-learning course not prepared her for what would take place during her first tutoring day, but Lucy was unable to draw from her own experiences as a high school student to give her an idea of what to expect at the school or how to respond. Lucy went on to compare her feelings on her first day of tutoring to how she believed many novice teachers might feel as they enter schools. Lucy found that her experience was not unlike the challenges facing most novice teachers and concluded that "I do feel unprepared, but it's the kind of unpreparedness where I know it can only be addressed through experience." It is noteworthy that at no point did Lucy refer to a teacher at the alternative high school as helping her to understand the challenges facing teachers. Instead, Lucy limited her reflection to interactions with students.

Tutoring helped LuAnne to see the diversity that exists among schools in terms of resources, approaches to teaching, and expectations of teachers. Classifying the alternative school as "rough," LuAnne shared that tutoring showed her "how good I had it in my schooling." LuAnne recognized that the teachers at the alternative school were struggling and exhausted. In her interview, LuAnne never mentioned a specific reason for this exhaustion. Rather, she fell back on negative characterizations of the school as a whole as explanations for any teacher burnout. LuAnne also thought back to her own high school teachers, believing that they never had to work as hard as the teachers she saw at the alternative school. LuAnne's tendency to characterize her own school experiences as positive in comparison with the more negative and "rough" alternative school illustrates one of the critiques of service-learning as cementing, rather than challenging, preconceived and often stereotypical notions of others.

Like LuAnne, Joshua's personal experiences in high school and tutoring at the alternative school helped him consider the challenges faced by the field of education. Specifically, Joshua drew from his course-based reading of *Savage Inequalities* (Kozol, 1991) as he shared, "You wanna say that you'll teach at the poorest of poor high schools and the school that needs your help the most." However, Joshua was

finding that choosing a school to work in as a teacher was fraught with its own set of concerns:

I want to make the world a better place and I want to affect students' lives but at the same time I wanna help pull up the students that don't have the advantages of a lot of other students—but at the same time I kinda want to work at a nice high school that can pay good money.

When thinking abstractly, it was simple for Joshua to articulate a clear mission for himself as a teacher (“to affect students’ lives”). However, as Joshua learned more about the challenges facing schools through the service-learning course and his personal experiences as a student he struggled with how he could make his abstract goal a reality.

To Address Student Diversity

Christopher often compared his service-learning work with previous volunteer-based interactions with students. During his interview, Christopher noted that before taking the service-learning course “I never really considered high school, I never really considered alternative school.” He found that the purpose of the class, for him, was to expose him to “a different route in education or environment in education” and that by tutoring at the alternative school he was coming to “recognize that when we talk about providing quality education for all students, that includes those who are in the untraditional settings.”

Christopher went on to explain the importance of recognizing the diversity of students within different school settings. Christopher was primarily concerned with the ways that teachers differentiate their instruction based on students’ learning styles and needs. Specifically, Christopher referenced the classroom teacher with whom he worked at the alternative school. He recognized that by coming in to tutor certain students, he was freeing the teacher up to “focus in on the rest of the class.”

Ricky shared that through his service-learning work and his readings for class, he was coming to understand that not all students were like him, and that their experiences in schools may be very different from the classes he took as a high school student. Specifically, Ricky shared that tutoring “definitely makes me um, consider students that were, are different than the, like the mainstream, the usual.” Ricky then transitioned into what this student diversity could mean for his teaching: “I’m gonna have students who don’t wanna be there or aren’t um at the grade level and so you know being at these classes makes me think about what I’ll do in those situations.” Both Christopher and Ricky realized that teachers must constantly shape their instruction to fit the diverse needs of students.

Tutoring at the alternative school encouraged all of the participants to more closely analyze the students with whom they were working. To make sense of their observations and interactions, participants often drew on their own PreK-12 experiences and used these reflections, coupled with their service-based student interactions, to consider the implications for teaching.

Discussion

When incorporated into teacher education programs, service-learning can encourage PSTs to name and challenge inequitable schooling practices, to cultivate their identities as future teachers, and to consider schools and classrooms that may be very different from the ones they experienced as students (Breunig, 2005; Hallman & Burdick, 2011; Krummel, 2013; Mitchell, 2008; Sleeter, 2008; Smagorinsky & Kinloch, 2013). The PSTs in this study, arguably, experienced many of these benefits of service-learning. Specifically, the service-learning course in this study contributed to PSTs' sense of wobble as they were introduced to unfamiliar schooling practices, environments, and students and worked to make sense of them through the lens of their own PreK-12 school experiences. As the participants reflected on the course and their service, they often did so through the use of comparisons—using their own experiences in PreK-12 schools to help them navigate, problematize, and understand the students, approaches to teaching, and overall school environment they were experiencing at the alternative school. Through comparisons, the PSTs in this study positioned service as a mediator between the apprenticeship of observation and formal teacher education coursework. The comparisons also allowed the participants to recognize the importance of context in teaching and learning how to teach, as well as the ways that power influences teachers' choices and interactions with students.

Feiman-Nemser (2001) referred to the experiences and beliefs that PSTs bring with them to the classrooms as filters “for making sense of the knowledge and experiences they encounter” (p. 1016). Without being specifically cued to do so, the participants in this study relied on comparisons to help them make sense of the alternative school. As participants began to consider their conceptions of teachers, schools, and students, as honed through the apprenticeship of observation, in terms of their new experiences in the alternative school, they began to experience wobble. For instance, Lucy experienced wobble when she felt unprepared and uncertain on her first few days of tutoring. Participants' preconceived notions of schooling and expectations of teaching were disrupted by their service-learning experience. In this way, the service component of the service-learning course served as a mediator between the PSTs' own PreK-12 school experiences and their more formal teacher preparation coursework. Rather than neatly replacing one view of teaching with another, the service work complicated participants' conceptions of teaching, thus contributing to the sense of wobble.

In both their interviews and reflections, the PSTs referred back to the specific people and spaces they associated with their own learning and considered them in terms of the people and spaces they were interacting with at the alternative high school. As the findings demonstrate, the most educative interactions participants experienced at the alternative high school were those they had with students. Throughout their interviews, participants most often referenced the needs, interests, and behaviors of students as they considered their responsibilities as future teachers.

The PSTs' consideration of students and varied school contexts, however, often contributed to more complicated and personal discussions of teaching. For instance, Joshua considered the tension he felt to work in a well-funded and resourced school

and also to teach where he could do the most good. Over the course of the semester, this tension was heightened as Joshua was able to see and experience firsthand the challenges associated with teaching in an alternative and high needs school and simultaneously work with, learn from, and build relationships with particular students within the school. Ricky experienced a similar tension as he recognized that students, himself included, leave schools unaware of the ways that power along raced, classed, and gendered lines influences education, the “business world,” and U.S. society at large. Like Joshua, the individual students Ricky was meeting and building relationships with at the alternative school contributed to his sense of wobble regarding his roles and responsibilities as a teacher.

Through their comparisons, the PSTs tried to orient themselves to students—both themselves as PreK-12 students and the students they tutored. More specifically, through service-learning the participants shifted students into the role of educator, rather than recognizing their university-based teacher education courses or the apprenticeship of observation as most influential in preparing them to teach. Students, in essence, became teacher educators. Through their interactions with the students at the alternative school, participants were able to cultivate a sense of what students need, want, and enjoy in and outside of school. Simply learning about the students, however, was not enough for these PSTs. The participants went on to consider how the students were similar to or different from themselves as high school students, how these students either were or were not served by the school’s approach to literature instruction, and also the ways that the students’ cultures, familial backgrounds, and out-of-school interactions could and were influencing their experiences at school.

The comparisons participants made between their own PreK-12 schooling and the alternative school were guided by their interactions with the students they were tutoring. These comparisons helped the PSTs to articulate missions for schools and teachers, to identify challenges facing schools, and to address student diversity—contributing to and significantly complicating the PSTs’ developing identities as teachers, identities honed by interactions with students. It is important to note, however, that the small number of participants in this study cannot account for the experiences of all PSTs in service-learning courses. However, the purpose of this research is to understand the social world through the experiences of participants who are implicated in the ongoing process of constructing it (Wolcott, 1990). In other words, the purpose of this study and its findings was not to establish generalizable principles but to describe, interpret, and understand the experiences of seven participants within one very specific context.

It is not ground breaking to suggest that educational practices cannot be guided by theoretical knowledge alone (Schwab, 1971). Without experience with the concrete, with practical educational settings, PSTs will struggle to consider issues of “time, place, person, and circumstance” (p. 494). In this study, however, I argue that it is not enough to simply pair formal teacher education coursework with field-based experiences to prepare PSTs to teach. Teacher educators must also reconceptualize the role of PreK-12 students in the preparation of teachers. For the PSTs in this study, students played a pivotal role in developing their understandings of education—in terms of

both teachers' pedagogical choices and the overarching challenges facing schools. Through the incorporation of field experiences beyond formal student teaching, teacher preparation programs can provide opportunities for PSTs to learn from and with PreK-12 students and to consider teaching from the perspective of the students they may serve.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Note

1. The instructor of the course provided students with a list of more than 70 texts from which to choose. Texts were divided into categories such as gender/sexuality, race, immigration, and defectology. Some of the texts for students to choose from included *Savage Inequalities* (Kozol, 1991), *The Reason I Jump* (Higashida, 2013), *Whistling Vivaldi* (Steele, 2011), and *Teaching to Transgress* (hooks, 1994).

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