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9

SYNTHESIZING FORMAL AND EXPERIENTIAL CONCEPTS IN A SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE

Peter Smagorinsky, Lindy L. Johnson, and Christopher M. Clayton

In this chapter we describe a course, *Service-Learning in Teacher Education,* taught by this chapter's first author at The University of Georgia since 2008. Unlike most of the chapters in this volume, we do not describe a "methods" class designed to provide a set of teaching practices to preservice teachers. Rather, *Service-Learning in Teacher Education* is an undergraduate course, typically taken by sophomores prior to their methods courses, which now meets the "foundations" requirement for students majoring in English Education. It was recently granted this status because of its attention to issues that, in our conception, are essential in understanding students and their life circumstances that may mitigate against their positive engagement with school.

We designed the course to address a problem often evident in state namesake universities: the admissions process favors students from relatively affluent families and communities whose grades and test scores reflect the advantages their circumstances provide for them. These students tend to be White and what some call "identifiers" with school: those who feel at home in school both academically and socially and whose home heritages and social practices are reflected in the means of teaching and conducting school more broadly speaking. These aspiring teachers, however, may have little contact with kids for whom school is an alienating, hostile, and awkward experience. In their practicum placements, the teacher candidates often express shock at such students' behavior, literacy skills, motivation, attendance, and other conduct that is so dramatically different from what they know from their own school socialization in advanced classes. This, in turn, frames their anticipation of the students they will teach in their jobs. As new faculty, however, they usually find that teachers with seniority will teach advanced courses in more exclusive tracks of schools while new hires must wait their turn and teach students who, in many cases, "hate school."

This service-learning course prepares our students to understand students from diverse backgrounds who are alienated by schooling. Our course involves prospective teachers in mentoring and tutoring relationships in conjunction with their reading of scholarship that attends to issues that their field placements raise for them. In doing so it models some teaching methods and requires students to plan and lead the class in discussions of their chosen books. Through these activities, course instructors coach preservice teachers about the dynamics of classroom interaction and teacher actions that can foster greater participation from students in discussions.

Theoretical Framework

We next frame our presentation of the service-learning course with two bodies of work. The first reviews service-learning pedagogies as a way of introducing readers to an approach that has yet to gain widespread application in teacher education. The second reviews Vygotskian notions of concept development, which Peter has mapped across a variety of publications on teacher education that have influenced the course design.

Service-Learning Pedagogy

Service-learning "integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities . . . by combining service objectives and learning objectives, along with the intent to show measurable change in both the recipient and the provider of the service" (Learn and Serve Clearinghouse, n.d.). Toward this end, students put their classroom learning in dialogue with a community-based project that contributes to the quality of local people's lives and provides unique, often transformative experiences for students who engage in the service. Service-learning is thus different from charity, such as food drives during the holidays. Service-learning relies on reciprocal relationships, rather than viewing students as advantaged and service recipients as disadvantaged and in need of *noblesse oblige*. Instead, through genuine engagement with local people's lives, students learn something essential to their education through their practical experience with the community members. The hyphenation of the term service-learning is a semiotic sign indicating the reciprocity between service and learning, and students and the beneficiaries of their service.

The scope, extent, and conduct of service-learning projects may vary widely, but includes the fundamental component that the experiences provide service to people, often in the local community, whose own resources might limit their opportunities. Simultaneously, the field work complements students' formal education with instructive experiences that enhance their classroom learning with practical involvement in the issues under discussion in class. Service-learning

may be undertaken in any academic discipline; we focus here on service-learning in the arena of literacy teacher education (see Kinloch & Smagorinsky, 2014).

Service-learning is distinct from typical teacher education field experiences. Field experiences, according to a NCTE Conference on English Education Position Statement (2005), "expose candidates to the widest possible variety of students, teachers, schools, and communities. They allow candidates to observe many different teaching styles, and to begin to develop their own teaching 'voice' through active participation in the classrooms and other learning sites they visit." Field experiences are thus focused on learning through exposure, observation, and gradual participation in teaching. They are also tied to schools, especially classrooms, although they can also involve other school experiences.

In contrast, service-learning may take place in any setting and typically involves more engaged activity than the observation and apprenticeship to established practices that characterize field experiences. It may have a more subversive goal than the more bibulous field experiences, such as understanding students' lives outside school so that teachers can change practice to accommodate diverse students. Further, service-learning is designed to promote an ethic of addressing social inequities and contributing to stronger communities overall, especially those in one's immediate surroundings. It thus avoids the problem of reinforcing the *status quo,* which we regard as a primary problem of conventional field experiences, by deliberately placing prospective teachers in circumstances that may alter their views of how effectively schools serve the broad range of students they enroll.

We see conventional field experiences as often reinforcing the *status quo,* an outcome that appears to be in line with the priorities of NCATE (National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education), which views extensive field experiences as far more important than university classrooms in which such practices might be critiqued. NCATE president James G. Cibulka observes that "In the past, accreditation wrapped clinical experience around coursework. The new approach will reverse the priority, encouraging institutions to place teacher candidates in more robust clinical experiences, and wrap coursework around clinical practice" (2009, p. 2). As an example of this *"robust clinical preparation, including educator preparation in school settings,"* he describes The Tennessee Board of Regents Teacher Education Redesign, which "eliminates traditional university classroom seat time for teacher candidates, streamlining these experiences into participatory, student directed learning in authentic school settings" (p. 4; emphasis in original).

NCATE's priority of indoctrinating teacher candidates into existing school practices through extensive field experiences is at odds with service-learning opportunities in which teacher candidates learn about teaching and learning through the eyes and voices of disaffected youth who might reject the conventional educational structures that serve them poorly (Darling-Hammond & Bransford, 2005). Service-learning, in contrast, has specific features that enable

more critical perspective from the ground up rather than the top down (Butin, 2003; Ginwright & Cammarota, 2002; Hart, 2006; Maybach, 1996), including the following:

1. Service-learning is based on a synthesis of hands-on, experiential learning and activities designed to serve a local community's needs. As such, it often has a social justice emphasis, given that communities' needs tend to be centered on their marginalized, or least advantaged, citizens. Service-learning contributes to relationships between universities and their host communities and is designed to dissolve status differentials through mutually enriching and meaningful social interactions.
2. Service-learning should synthesize formal academic learning and experiential learning through service-based activities. Service-learning links scholarly theory and research with the everyday realities of community life. Service and learning have equal weight, are reciprocally related, and assume that participants learn through service.
3. Students engaged in service-learning activities have responsibilities that require them to take more proactive roles than are typically available in field experiences. These roles give participants agency to advocate for change, a stance that is often discouraged in field experiences in which offending host teachers can result in low evaluations or outright dismissal from the assignment.
4. Students discuss their learning experiences from a critical perspective during formal class discussions, and do so from a position of agency given the expectation that they are seeking to improve conditions rather than replicate them.
5. Service-learning involves formal reflection on experiences in the field and in the university classroom. Students' reflections on their learning occur throughout the course of study, rather than only at the end, and contribute to the faculty member's evaluation of the course, with assessment of the initiative's impact a continual and multi-perspectival aspect of implementation.
6. Service-learning often relies on partnerships with community agencies to mitigate against hierarchical relationships that privilege the university. Community-based partners have an equal say in the design, conduct, and evaluation of the project and its activities. Students involved in service-learning activities need to understand and respect the values and practices of the site so as to strengthen the relationships with the initiative's community partners.

In addition to these features, Smagorinsky and Kinloch (2014) argue that undertaking a service-learning initiative is not simply a matter of writing a curriculum and including these elements. Rather, service-learning relies on the establishment and cultivation of personal relationships with stakeholders, an effort that cannot be underestimated in the design of an effective partnership with a community entity.

Concept Development

Our approach to *Service-Learning in Teacher Education* also has been influenced by Vygotskian notions of concept development. Placing students' experiential knowledge in dialogue with formal academic knowledge draws on Vygotsky's (1934/1987) distinction between what have often been translated as *scientific* and *spontaneous* concepts. Scientific concepts are formal and academic in presentation, as is often the case in school and other sites of instruction. Developing a scientific or academic concept involves learning a set of rules that enable the extraction of a concept's principles from its original context of learning and applying them to new situations. In teacher education, for instance, an instructor might begin with an abstraction such as "authentic assessment" or "new literacies," provide a formal definition established by theorists, and then point to examples. Often, the distinction between school and the "real world" follows from education's tendency toward abstract verbal representations at the expense of any material engagement with the world based on those ideal notions.

Spontaneous concepts, in contrast, are not learned under the supervision of a teacher, coach, or other instructor. Rather, they are learned in situated, everyday practice. As a result, they are applicable primarily in contexts where the everyday circumstances and practices resemble those of the original context of learning. The dilemma with which we open this chapter illustrates the limitations of spontaneous concepts. A beginning teacher, for instance, might be apprenticed to education through the exclusive settings of honors and advanced courses, without engaging with curriculum, instruction, and students from other areas of a school's tracking system. This limited exposure leaves prospective teachers with projected images of their teaching in which they stand before an attentive class, sharing their knowledge of Shakespearean arcana, as students dutifully record notes that will serve their college aspirations by enabling them to do well on tests and essays. Their rude awakening in their initial field experiences often jolts this conception to the bone and forces a reconfiguration of both their career plans and their grasp of the difficulty of the profession.

Vygotsky (1934/1987) emphasized the need to integrate spontaneous and scientific concepts. Formal instruction in principles alone, he argued, will not result in the development of a durable, useful concept. Rather, abstract knowledge must work *in conjunction with* experiential knowledge. Abstractions are of little value without application, and applied knowledge is of local, limited utility when it is not situated in a broader context that enables the generation of abstractable governing rules. Service-learning opportunities, which explicitly place classroom abstractions in dialogue with worldly action, potentially integrate the two conceptual fields to satisfy Vygotsky's imperative for synthesis.

This interplay between formal knowledge of principles and knowledge gained through everyday activity enables people to think about problems beyond their range of experience through their imagination, which relies on the accumulation

of experience in order to enable practical projections in relation to real and anticipated problems. In that sense, a strong concept enables one to anticipate how the future will unfold, in that the conception involves abstracted principles tested by empirical understandings that in turn help to modify the features of the abstraction (Smagorinsky, 2011). Without this capacity to anticipate the future in a reasonably possible way, prospective teachers might be caught in the dilemma we have provided in which they may believe that their literary insights may enthrall their students, who in turn may find the material tedious and the monologue oppressive, and who may thus feel more captive than captivated.

Service-Learning in Teacher Education: The Course Structure

The course syllabus (http://smago.coe.uga.edu/SL/SLSyllabus.htm) outlines the means by which prospective teachers engage with both students and ideas in order to develop a more powerful conception of educational persistence, population diversity, teaching approaches, and other issues that are involved in teaching effectively with disaffiliated students. The class relies on three primary means of mediation through which to promote students' conceptions of effective schooling for disenfranchised populations: tutoring and mentoring a student at the city's alternative high school, which is populated by students who have either voluntarily or forcibly left their schools of origin and who are attempting to complete their degrees in a different sort of setting; the reading of three books of their choice from the course menu, all of which deal with diversity-related issues; and in-class book club discussions through which they initially explore the books' contents in relation to their tutoring and mentoring experiences and ultimately lead their classmates in a discussion of those issues.

Service-Learning in Teacher Education meets on campus weekly for sessions that run between one and three hours, depending on the week's activity. Simultaneously, the students must spend roughly one hour a week (minimum of 15 hours over the semester) working one-on-one with a student enrolled in the city's alternative high school, which is known as "the PLC" due to its original status as a Gates Foundation Performance Learning Center, an educational approach that relies on individualized, technology-based learning. The students, as one of the school's teachers reports, usually hate "having an adult in their face," and the setting is designed to enable them to work individually on reading or watching video lectures or other informational films and then taking tests on them via a computer-based learning network. We do not necessarily endorse this method, especially given how frequently our university students comment on how tedious it appears and how readily the students learn how to bypass the material to pass the test, often listening to music through headphones while the required lecture plays on the screen. That, however, is how the school operates;

we are more interested in having our prospective teachers learn about the kids than learn about this teaching method.

In class, the university students, after an early orientation to how the course functions, form book clubs and select books from a menu on the syllabus that is organized categorically, with each set of texts focusing on an area of difference—race, citizen status, sexuality, and so on—or aspect of schooling, such as assessment, bullying, urban education, etc. (See http://smago.coe.uga.edu/SL/SLBookClubs.htm for a complete list of categories and books, and for procedures for running the book clubs.) For the remainder of the semester, the students work with their book clubs in three 3-week cycles. In each cycle, the first week is devoted to a general discussion of the book, the second week continues that discussion while also involving the group's planning of how to lead a whole-class discussion on their book, and in the third week the group leads the class in a discussion. In a class with four to five groups, there are two weeks for these whole-class discussions (that is, in the first week two groups lead discussions, and in the second the remaining groups lead the class discussions). With the spring semester usually losing one week to the Martin Luther King holiday and one to the AERA conference, the book club discussions occupy the whole of the semester after the first week of class, with one final session at the professor's home, social in nature, concluding the semester.

The book club and whole class discussions thus expose each student in the class to a variety of books and issues. Each club has the choice of which topics to discuss. They may focus on areas relevant to their field service. If, for instance, each student is White and is tutoring and mentoring a Latin@ immigrant student with a baby in the school's in-house daycare center, they might select a book on immigration, one on Latin@ issues, and one on family structures. Or, they may simply want to learn more about an area in which they feel they should be more knowledgeable. The choice is theirs.

The final dimension of the course is the writing component. Each student is required to write one paper that synthesizes their learning for the course. In its original design, the course assumed that each university student would have one PLC student to mentor throughout the semester, a belief that fell apart quickly when the erratic attendance of the students came into play, along with the fluid enrollment of the alternative school in which students transferred in mid-term, dropped out, were dismissed, and otherwise contributed to the flux of the population. The sole task on the original 2008 syllabus was for students to write a case study of their mentee. (Course assignments are detailed at http://smago.coe.uga.edu/SL/SLCourseProjects.htm, with links to student projects.)

Since then, students have recommended two additional types of papers. One would enable them to write more generally about their experiences at the school, particularly if they tutored more than one student; and the second would allow them to maintain an ongoing blog of their experiences across the span of the semester. The first author has further tweaked the assignments to allow for

students to fictionalize their experiences into one narrative (or multiple narratives), to create websites through which they document and depict their experiences, to use multimodal affordances to produce their course synthesis, and to continue to invite recommendations about additional possibilities for how to compose accounts of their experiences. These papers should further integrate understandings from the book club discussions and text selections to inform their observations from the alternative school.

The course is deliberately structured to help students integrate their formal academic knowledge from their book readings and discussions with their experiences at the PLC and put them in dialogue with one another. The goal of this synthesis is to enable them to begin developing a conception of effective teaching with diverse populations. We would never expect fully robust conceptions of teaching to be available within the confines of one semester early in their university education. Rather, the goal is to provide the groundwork for the development of such a conception over time, including the remainder of their university teacher preparation and their ultimate teaching experiences throughout their careers.

We do not see concept development as a smooth progression toward a clearly defined concept around which there is universal consensus because conceptions of effective teaching are *social conceptions* that rarely meet with widespread agreement (Smagorinsky, 2013). One principal's well-run class is a radical professor's hegemonic panopticon, and often beginning teachers are caught between these two belief systems in a *two-worlds pitfall* (Feiman-Nemser & Buchmann, 1985) that positions pragmatic school values against the more ethereal beliefs that are obtained in universities. Our own studies have expanded this notion to *multiple-worlds pitfalls,* given that there are often many more than just two competing influences for guiding teachers' practice (Smagorinsky, Rhym, & Moore, 2013).

We see this course as one critical stage in beginning teachers' *twisting path of concept development* (Smagorinsky, Cook, & Johnson, 2003), one that routes them through many sources of mediation: the varied examples from their apprenticeships of observation; their exposure to media images of teaching; the different values imposed from teacher education faculty who might emphasize cognitive, sociocultural, poststructural, or other paradigms that may conflict with one another; the models and guidance of field-based mentors; enduring beliefs about the role of character and ethical conduct and its relation to schooling and learning; mandates from school, district, state, and national policy groups that may or may not align; ongoing reading of professional books and participation in professional organizations composed of subgroups with competing values; public rhetoric about how schools should or should not be conducted; and much more. Indeed, in more recent work we have questioned the degree to which a single pathway is being traversed, given that the endpoint may be continually shifting as the contours of the path respond to different influences (Smagorinsky, 2013).

Synthesizing Concepts in Book Club Discussions

In a longitudinal study that is following four volunteers from those enrolled in the course in 2009—a year in which all book club discussions were recorded and are currently undergoing analysis—one recurrent remark offered across participants in response to the service-learning course is that it provided them an "eye-opening" experience. The combination of tutoring and mentoring students at the alternative high school with reading and discussing books on educational diversity has enabled many students to understand youth from marginalized groups or other forms of alienation as interesting, intelligent people whose struggles in school follow from disaffecting experiences rather than problems originating in the various "deficits" that have often framed the beliefs with which our selectively enrolled university students have entered the course.

The readings that the students pick have played a strong role in their development of a conception of diversity education. Because each group is responsible for selecting its own readings, the building of the book list is a key component of the instructional task. This list began with a list of books suggested by colleagues and harvested from the first author's own collection. The first author participated as a Service-Learning Fellow in a year-long program sponsored by UGA's Office of Service-Learning, in which the course was planned. This opportunity provided a budget that was dedicated to the purchase of many books included on the initial list; and a follow-up grant from the Office of Service-Learning allowed for additional book purchases, all of which are stored on a wheeled cart that accompanies the instructor to each class session so that students may preview the texts prior to selecting them.

This initial book list and portable library included a lot of "classic" texts, some dating to the 1980s and 1990s. The students reported finding them dated and hoped for more current works, and so the list has been continually updated with new titles. When possible, they are accompanied on the book list by book reviews, either found online or written by students from the class, to provide additional information to help with the selection process. At the same time, when students find a book unstimulating or problematic (e.g., racist or classist in its deficit assumptions), it is removed from the list. What is especially fascinating about how students respond to the readings is that they are disappointed when books don't challenge their thinking. We have often heard from colleagues that education students are resistant to hard, challenging reading that is oriented to theory and research. The setting of this class seems to ratchet up their expectations for what educational reading can accomplish for them; and students who have selected books from the list that they saw featured on Oprah or other programs that sounded interesting to them have often reported regretting choosing these texts because they were too light and not challenging enough to inform their engagement with youth at the

alternative school or push them to the insights available to students whose book choices caused them to question their beliefs.

The students' course projects have, as mentioned, evolved organically along with the students' experiences in the class. The opportunity to produce an ongoing blog has become popular among students because it enables them to write reflectively throughout the semester rather than having one big paper to write at the end of the semester when all of their other courses require major papers. It further provides a way to include a technological dimension in a preservice teacher education course, one that is often overlooked (Johnson & Smagorinsky, 2013). The blogs come across as very personal and enable the instructor to follow the students' struggles and breakthroughs, which is informative and satisfying.

Typically, a university student enters the alternative school with some trepidation, not quite sure how to approach a youth from a radically different background and orientation to school. Often the student assigned to be tutored is resistant to and incommunicado with the visitor, and the university student must find a way to establish common ground. This effort often comes through conversations unrelated to schoolwork, such as talk about music, sports, hobbies, family, and other shared interests and experiences. The role of the course instructor is to prepare the university students for this process and to recommend patience and persistence in developing a good working relationship. The process of approaching teaching relationally is often new to students who have succeeded in school by adapting to their teachers' personalities and expectations; here, they must reconceive teaching to include adaptations that teachers must make to students and their ways of being in the world.

This conceptual, pedagogical, and relational reorientation of highly successful students in their nascent teaching experiences is among the course's most remarkable outcomes. What might surprise some is how small a role the instructor plays in enabling the course to succeed. Much of the course's effects come from the design of a setting, structure, and set of experiences that enable university students to follow their own interests in their reading selections, learn about effective teaching from disaffected students, and work through ideas in discussion. The course works best when the instructor accepts course design as a teaching behavior and primarily presides over student-led discussions, both in the initial small group settings and subsequently in whole-class discussions led by each group. Indeed, the greatest challenge of teaching such a course is to hold back from participating in discussions that the students undertake that are so engaging and provocative that it can be difficult to withhold commentary and allow the students do their work.

Conclusion

Courses such as this one can be difficult to establish (see Kinloch & Smagorinsky, 2014, for a variety of challenges in developing service-learning courses that are sustainable over time). They can, however, provide prospective teachers with a

sort of community-based experience through which they learn what school looks like from a disaffected student's point of view. Initiatives such as the Common Core State Standards strive for standardization of teaching and learning; yet, as students in the course inevitably learn, youth are far from standard in their experiences, orientations, speech communities, identities, and much else—particularly those who hate school.

We have found using service-learning early in our students' education to provide a rich foundation for their subsequent studies and field experiences, with lessons that they have learned invoked two years later as seniors in their formal preparation for teaching English. The development of rich conceptions of issues surrounding educational diversity can never begin soon enough, especially with students whose own education has occurred in the monoculture of advanced classes. Rather, through this course prospective teachers begin raising fundamental questions about deficit conceptions of learners, the conduct of conventional schooling, the distribution of privilege across cultural groups, the responsibilities they have in teaching diverse populations, and other topics that will continue to vex and challenge them throughout their careers.

Although the course is not a teaching methods course, it does have methodological components. Most students experience book clubs as pedagogy for the first time, a method they may employ later and one that disrupts their conception of what teaching can and should involve in any setting. The opportunity to produce their course projects through a variety of forms also provides them with choice and an occasion for experimentation, with the blog option, the possibility of fictionalizing their impressions, and other means of expression helping to expand their repertoire of pedagogical means. Finally, they see first-hand how students do and do not engage with one instructional approach, individualized learning on computers, and typically provide stinging critiques of the limitations of such a pedagogy in engaging with school, even as computer-mediated learning grows in stature among policymakers as a solution to the perception that most teachers are incompetent. In contrast, the students who enroll in this course consistently find that through their intensive relationships with students while they are learning, they begin to see ways of reaching alienated students that are culturally and personally responsive and that they build into their own growing tool kit of instructional means.

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10

GENERATIVE CRITICAL PEDAGOGY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS METHODS FOR URBAN SCHOOLS

Tonya B. Perry

The University of Alabama–Birmingham is located in the largest urban center in the state, and the English Language Arts Methods courses I teach address the concerns, needs, and expectations of an urban population. My teacher-candidate students are 90% White and female. The first methods class in our sequence builds a foundation in teaching English Language Arts with texts, articles, field experiences, lesson planning, and a few community-connecting opportunities. The capstone methods course for graduate pre-service students focuses on the application of the learning from the first course and a close examination of teaching practice. In both classes, I organize field placements for students in diverse schools (50% or more culturally diverse) because I believe that we teacher educators should insist students have meaningful teaching experiences in diverse contexts. My approach in this chapter is based in "generative critical pedagogy" and a set of competencies that UAB has developed to prepare teacher candidates for urban schools (Voltz, Collins, Patterson, and Sims, 2008).

Generative Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is central to understanding the learning foundation of our urban teacher education programs. Based on the work of Freire (1970), education currently has a system of "an act of depositing, in which the students are the depositories and the teacher is the depositor" (p. 72), or as Friere calls it, a "banking" system for education. The more the students accept the deposits, the less likely they are to question or analyze what is given to them or question the world around them that structured their learning so passively. Without ever developing their critical consciousness, the oppressed will continue to