

Exploring World Language Pre-Service Teachers' Perceptions of Their Service-Learning Experience: An Action Research Project

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Abstract

This article focuses on a qualitative action research that explores the alignment of a service-learning project, as an intervention strategy, with course standards in a single multicultural foundation course in the teacher education program at a medium-sized university in Alabama. Findings suggest that the multicultural service-learning experience can help in supporting the achievement of course “diversity-related” outcomes. Implications of this study suggest a foundation for using multicultural service-learning as an instructional method in World Language teacher education, in order to: (1) enhance professional effectiveness; (2) maximize assessment opportunities; and, (3) ensure alignment with the intended program learning outcomes. Implications of this study could, therefore, be of interest to educators and scholars investigating the benefits of service-learning in World Language teacher education.

Keywords: Action research, pre-service teacher self-efficacy, service-learning, world languages

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1. Introduction

This qualitative research project explores how a service-learning experience in an undergraduate multicultural education course meaningfully prepares pre-service teachers for a World Language classroom. The data from this study came from a larger action research project that sought to evaluate the alignment of service-learning with multicultural education course standards in a teacher education program at a medium-sized university in Alabama. The course was foundational in that it introduced pre-service teachers to major theories and practices that support diversity in the classroom. Youngs and Youngs (2001) state that educators who have had coursework in foreign languages and/or multicultural education are better positioned to work with culturally and linguistically diverse learners. Since this course was required for pre-service teachers seeking a World Language endorsement, the authors sought to focus their exploration here in order to identify how the pre-service World Language teachers perceived their service-learning experience and how their understanding of diversity was impacted by the course material/objectives, their self-reflective papers were used as the main data source for this study.

1.1 Background of the Study

This undergraduate level course was developed and led by the first author. It included diversity-related topics that challenged the students' opinions of critical issues in education such as stereotyping, perspective-taking, bias, and racism. The course also confronted social norms, as reflected in course assignments and classroom discussions. The first author noted a need for creating a culturally safe classroom environment to help ensure student engagement in cross-cultural class discussions. These observations prompted her to find new ways to teach about diversity in order to improve students' understanding and increase college student motivation to participate (Chesbrough, 2011). She developed the "Multicultural Service-Learning Project" to help address these challenges. Additionally, an action research project was conducted in order to study the effectiveness of its implementation, and find ways to improve the project for future practice (Mills, 2018). The project also investigated whether the service-learning experience was a meaningful way to meet diversity course standards for the State of Alabama as described below:

“The teacher candidate demonstrates understanding of the value of community for teachers when working with students from diverse backgrounds; they are able to identify community assets/resources and to incorporate them into instruction by designing activities framed within the principles of multicultural education.” (2k)

Interestingly, the authors of this article noted how this course standard was also related to two main goal areas in World Language education, “Culture” and “Communities,” (ACTFL, 2020). How students connect multicultural education coursework and experiences within the context of their World Language educational pathways is not well studied. Thus, they sought to investigate the ways in which a service-learning experience in an undergraduate multicultural education course can meaningfully prepare pre-service teachers for a World Language classroom context.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

- 1) In what ways can service-learning contribute to a depth of understanding with regards to cultural and linguistic diversity?
- 2) What diversity knowledge, skills, and dispositions do World Language pre-service teachers report they have achieved from their service-learning?
- 3) What indicators of teacher identity and self-efficacy development are evident in pre-service World Language teachers’ reflective practice?
- 4) How would World Language pre-service teachers describe the importance of using community resources to promote diversity in their future World Language classroom?

The findings indicate that service-learning provided multiple benefits. It provoked meaningful contributions for the general pre-service teachers of the larger multicultural education course while also providing culturally responsive content for pre-service World Language teachers that intersected with the standards for World Language learning guided by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). This study focuses on the reflection essays collected from the six pre-service “World Language” teacher candidates in the course and the intersections we discovered while reviewing the data.

2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework

Early definitions of service-learning are rooted in John Dewey’s philosophy of engagement and the theory of experiential learning (Dewey, 1938). Later, Jacoby (1996), defined it as a form of experiential education in which students engage in activities that address human and community needs together with structured opportunities intentionally designed to promote learning and development” (p. 5). According to Furco (1996,p. 25), service-learning seeks to “engage individuals in activities that combine both community service and academic learning. Because service-learning programs are typically rooted in formal courses (core academic, elective, or vocational), the service activities are usually based on particular curricular concepts that are being taught.” Today, defining service-learning can be challenging due to the overlap of some of its characteristics with other practices, such as volunteerism and community service (Chong, 2014). As a result, The National Service-Learning Clearinghouse (NSLC) 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” (as cited in Bandy, 2011, para.1).

The NSLC further defines service-learning through three key characteristics: The first characteristic focuses on “Community Need and Meaningful Service”. It involves planning, preparation, and community engagement. The second characteristic includes the achievement of “Academic Objectives” that combine both service and learning with wrapped objectives identified prior to the start of activities. The third characteristic is “Self-Reflection” or what the NSLC describes as providing students with opportunities to connect their activities with specific academic objectives then meaningfully reflect on their experience.

These characteristics were built into the “Multicultural Service-Learning Project” to provide pre-service teachers the opportunity to develop critical thinking and a deeper understanding of course content and related concepts. In this way, we understand service-learning to be more than volunteerism or community service. As defined by NSLC, service-learning is a process that involves linking a service (activity or project) with academics to address a specific issue or a community need, while students learn through active participation and self-reflections. Instead of bringing together students as volunteers to accomplish a general goal, service-learning, this project sought to motivate students to participate in the service activity or project, in order to achieve specific course objectives as related to multicultural education.

Wade (2006), a leading researcher in the field of service-learning and teacher education, argues that “field experiences with a service-learning component offer pre-service teachers and community members exciting opportunities to work together on needs or goals important to the community” (p. 22). As a result, this course included a field-based service experience informed by the needs of partner schools. An additional component, as described by NSLC, was student self-reflection, which will be detailed in the next section.

2.1 Self-Reflection as a Bridge between Theory Practice

One of the strongest components of this service-learning experience was the implementation of student self-

reflection. In this study, self-reflection provided a bridge between theory and practice, and helped students to construct new knowledge. It linked the service experience to course content and learning objectives as described by Bringle & Hatcher (1999) and Laughter (2011).

According to Laughter (2011), group discussion can be used to facilitate conversations about various multicultural topics, such as equity, diversity, and racism. These discussions were also an important element of the “Multicultural Service-Learning Project” which is the object of this study. It was through group and partner discussions that this study’s authors discovered there was an urgent need for community resources regarding diversity. This issue was at the heart of the “Multicultural Service-learning Project”. The focus centered on searching for and sharing community assets and multicultural resources with our partner school to promote diversity in the classroom.

This is important because insufficient resources and underexposure to multicultural assets can contribute negatively to teachers’ perceptions about diversity and make it more difficult for them to facilitate an inclusive classroom space (Younghusband, 2005). Similarly, McKenna, et al. (2004) found that many K-12 teacher educators endure high levels of stress from increasing demand and shrinking school resources (p.76). Having the students in the project search for educational resources that they could gift to local schools provided an opportunity to personally engage and learn directly from diverse community members and agencies.

Additionally, students were asked to complete two self-reflective practice papers about their experience. These papers provided additional data that heightened our understanding of how students in the World Language endorsement program used multicultural course objectives and content when considering future teaching and learning strategies.

3. Methodological Framework

In this project, an action research methodology was used to examine how service-learning activities aligned with course standards to promote an effective diversity intervention strategy in a single multicultural foundation course. Action research can be considered a professional development opportunity, because it can be used to examine a new instructional strategy or to evaluate an existing teaching method, such as the new service-learning component developed for the course. The term “action research” was coined in 1933 by Kurt Lewin to describe how the researcher and participants collaborate to solve a specific issue or problem. In this study, there was a need to connect teachers to diverse community assets which served to address a need identified by the partner school. Additionally, a microethnographic approach was utilized in the action research. Microethnography strives to explore educational environments in order to describe how participants create context and sense making through community-based involvement (Fetterman, 2010; Tracy, 2013). Considering that this study investigates the impact of service-learning experiences on World Language pre-service teachers’ perceptions of diversity through community-based and naturally occurring activities, such as talking with people in diverse community settings, a microethnography appropriately fits the action research parameters (Fetterman, 2010).

3.1 Participants

Participants of this study were undergraduate, freshman, pre-service teacher education students enrolled in a university “Multicultural Education” course. Out of thirty-three (33) students enrolled in the course, twenty-five (25) students voluntarily participated in the larger study, representing predominantly White females over 18 years of age. Six of these students were seeking a World Language endorsement, and they were the central focus of this study.

3.2 Implementation

As part of the course requirements, the participants engaged in the following two service-learning project activities:

- 1) Cultural Events: Each academic year there are many university-sponsored events organized in collaboration with diverse student communities which serve to acquaint students with the cultural richness and resources available locally and on campus. Participants were asked to select two campus-based cultural events with the goal of collecting and sharing multicultural resources that related back to classroom applications. The events that lined up with the course timeline were the international culture day and the annual international food day.
- 2) “Diversity Training Project:” Participants were then asked to work in small groups according to subject areas, such as science, math, language arts, world languages, art, music and technology. There were seven groups total and approximately 4-5 students per group. Each group needed to conduct research and find multicultural classroom resources sourced from the local community. They were then required to create interactive booths where they could share activities, literature and manipulatives with in-service and veteran teachers. The interactive booths were to be part of a community event at one public “Elementary” (pseudonym) school in Alabama (community partner). A guest speaker from

the partner school discussed the need for diversity resources and the lack of multicultural resources in mainstream classrooms. The discussion created a heightened awareness and understanding of the need to equip classroom teachers with the necessary skills to incorporate culturally responsive practices (Gay, 2018; Ladson-Billings, 1995) in the classroom (identified as a community need).

World Language student self-reflections of their service-learning experiences were used as the main data source of this study, which linked directly to the “course-specific” learning outcomes (e.g., diversity & community involvement). The participants were required to write a series of reflection papers, before, during, and after each service-learning experience based on Borton’s Development Framework (1970) on reflective practice (see Figure 1). This framework is simple and effective which allowed students to identify growth areas and check understanding of various concepts discussed in class as attributed to each event, using three main questions: (1) “What?” To provide a description of the service event and/or finding; (2) “So what?” To foster a space for analysis and interpretation of the service experience; and (3) “Now what?” To promote self-awareness and synthesis for future classroom applications, reflecting on the totality of their growth and experiences in the course.

3.3 Analysis Procedures

Though no assignments were intentionally created for the current action-research project, the reflective course essays provided a meaningful opportunity to better understand how the service-learning experience shaped teacher identity, efficacy and the disposition of the World language students, which were questions that prompted this study. All participants’ reflections were de-identified prior to review. Descriptive data analysis techniques were utilized to summarize data points across essays. Qualitative content analysis was used to condense data into categories and descriptive coding was employed to summarize the themes of the qualitative data into words or short phrases (Saldaña, 2009, p. 70). This coding system was developed by using Excel software, and it was designed to elicit consistent categories and subcategories based on themes that were color coded to highlight intersections across both multicultural education standards and World Language standards, according to ACTFL.

Guided by the research questions, nineteen intersecting categories emerged from the essays representing the unique ways that students filtered their understanding and stated impact. These categories included: 1) Self Efficacy, 2) Concept application, 3) Identity, 4) Diversity Influences, 5) Community Exploration, 6) Teacher Dispositions, 7) Communication, 8) Making Connections, 9) Pride, 10) Advocacy/Agent of Change, 11) Visioning/Developing Philosophy of Education, 12) Meaningful Growth, 13) Shifts of Thinking, 14) Engagement and Problem-Solving, 15) Contextualizing Language Instruction, 16) Expanding Teacher Tool-Kit, 17) Collaborative Learning Environment, 18) Resourcefulness, and 19) Happiness. We share these categories to demonstrate the breadth of impact and learning achieved by the World Language students throughout the service-learning process. From these broad categories, we centered our analysis on the following themes: (1) Reinforcing Self Efficacy; (2) Enhancing application of course concepts; (3) Promoting professional teacher identity; (4) Developing a deeper understanding of culture and diversity; (5) Exploring community resources; and (6) Happiness.

These six themes (except happiness) were selected based on the high number of students’ comments for each of these five themes (Luborsky, 1994). It is important to emphasize that the comments were not made in isolation of the other themes. In the findings section we will share the complex nature of student thinking and how themes were often interrelated. Lastly, we decided to include the theme: “Happiness” even though it did not have as many touchpoints as the other themes. We felt it was important to highlight “happiness” given our current post COVID-19 pandemic context and the teacher shortage due to stress and unhappiness in the profession.

4. Findings and Data Analysis

The findings demonstrate the “Multicultural Service-learning Project” not only helped to achieve the course objectives by motivating participants to make meaningful connections through self-reflective essays as noted by Crane (2016). We also found the unique ways that multicultural education outcomes supported the growth of the six world language endorsement students in the course and how this growth was aligned to two main goal areas in World Language education, “Culture” and “Communities,” (ACTFL, 2020). The first theme we would like to share is “Reinforcing self-efficacy and beliefs” with regards to World Language teaching and learning.

4.1 Reinforcing Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Self-efficacy describes how one is able to visualize success and execute a desired outcome (Bandura, 1977). Findings showed that the “Multicultural Service-Learning Project” helped to enhance participants’ sense of self-efficacy through reflective practice. It helped them to rethink different ways of teaching their future students effectively.

In service-learning, it is important to design assignments that complement each other. We learned that asking the students to go into the local community to engage and discover existing cultural and linguistic resources was

essential to the creation of a meaningful service-learning experience. They could not talk to the veteran teachers without first building their own understanding of what is out there, what is needed and without having their own ideas for how to use the resources they found. In this way, the two assignments, (1) the culture events and (2) diversity project, did not function in silos, rather they each complimented and reinforced growth with regards to confidence in teaching and community engagement and how these skills can be used to address the barriers faced by culturally and linguistically diverse students. The participants noted their ability to feel growth in these two areas which we determined increased a sense of self-efficacy.

These findings are reinforced by the work of Psychologist Albert Bandura who described self-efficacy as “a belief in one’s own ability to be successful in particular circumstances. Self-efficacy attitudes governed how prospects and hindrances were observed and affected not only people’s choices, but how much they were willing to strive and persist until they were successful” (as cited in Rhew et al., 2018, p. 3). In the current study, students described four different ways that their self-efficacy was impacted by the service-learning experience.

They described how *effectively communicating with veteran teachers boosted confidence and increased their motivation* to share knowledge and resources. For example, out of six students, there were nine different mentions of the positive impact of their work with veteran teachers. The mentions described how the experience was “eye opening” and enhanced their ability to: (1) provide valuable diversity resources and materials in their future world language classrooms, (2) effectively answer questions, (3) suggest advice and guidance for how to organize the classroom, and (4) model culturally responsive values and beliefs. Several students noted how the activities were “eye-opening.” One reflected on how it was “really cool” to be able to effectively impact the knowledge of veteran teachers that came to their informational booth during the project:

This event was eye-opening to me in the manner that it showed me that even experts always have room to learn and grow. It is really cool that we, as future educators, can come together to present our ideas and actually suggest things they [the veteran teachers] can do in their actual classrooms. I love the collaborative partnership here and hope that one day I can participate in a similar event from their perspective.

The other student reflected on the impact of the experience and how it opened their eyes to future instructional possibilities, stating:

We were able to experience first-hand the frustration many teachers may experience with the lack of resources or time. This event really opened my eyes to what I want to implement in my future classroom. I know that I want my classroom environment to be one that is free of stereotypes and stigmas. It needs to be a classroom that is fun, safe, inviting, and just. I was able to take away that a teacher’s role in the quality of education that is provided to students is very important. It is not simply about planning activities but taking into account the students, community, and cultures that are a part of the classroom.

The students also noted how they experienced “self-growth” via generating new ways to use materials and resources. They made various observations, such as: “I learned valuable techniques.” and “I received so much valuable information.” and “Diversity is everywhere. It is beautiful to tap into” and “It broadened diverse thinking and ability.”

In particular they noted how the service-learning activities pushed them to engage in new ways. One student even described how they learned a “new way of life”, saying, “Each of the events helped me to establish a definition of culture and growth that turned into a *new way of life* for me.” Student reflections also centered on the growth they experienced, saying, “The course allowed me to *grow*” and “I have *grown* so much” and “This course has given us a great head start in our career.”

4.1.1 Recognizing Barriers in the Classroom and Ways to Overcome Them

Through the service-learning experience, students were exposed to many different cultural communities, teaching strategies, diverse resources and activities, as well as scholarly literature. This allowed them the opportunity to confront their own biases and stereotypes and helped them to analyze the educational barriers and injustices occurring in schools. We found many examples of this in their self-reflective papers. For example, one student reflected on their experience and connected educational barriers to “cultural discontinuity” theory as described in the course textbook and how it can lead to cultural shame, stating:

Based on my service-learning there are many issues I encountered such as the watering down of curriculum” and “cultural discontinuity” by Nieto and Bode (2018, p. 21/2) - it helped me understand the plight of those who are outside of mainstream culture as many are made to feel ashamed of their cultural identity while at school.

All of the students described how diversity engagement enhanced their understanding of teaching for justice. Below are quoted statements that explore how culturally responsive content came to life for them, creating “aha” moments regarding barriers and bias in teaching linguistically diverse students:

The summation of my experience in this class helped to see the proper way to educate. I should teach with all backgrounds in mind, instruction should never benefit some students over others.

Embracing the differences rather than expecting students to abandon who they are leads to more success for

both students and teachers alike.

I have a growing understanding of teacher frustration with lack of resources and how this is connected to issues of social justice.

Now we are able to model positive educational beliefs and values for our students and be prepared for these open, honest conversations about confronting personal bias.

I have been able to see firsthand the implications of James Banks' Theory about the Five Dimensions of Multicultural Education that relies on equity pedagogy. This pedagogy relies on teachers remodeling their teaching and curriculum to include a variety of teaching strategies and approaches that reach all students, mainstream or culturally and linguistically diverse (Nieto & Bode, 2018, p. 7). Each part of our service-learning experience had us practice this equity pedagogy; in the future we should be prepared to do very similar things in our own classrooms.

Recognizing barriers to learning in the language classroom and exploring effective ways to overcome them are two key findings that helped to better understand the many ways that students experienced an enhanced form of self-efficacy. It is important to highlight how this theme intersects with the “enhancing the application of course concepts” theme as many of the barriers noted above were also described within the context of a multicultural education framework or theory taught in the class. Thus, enhanced self-efficacy is not learned in a silo but rather an enmeshed result understood within a wide array of factors unique to each student as further demonstrated via the remaining themes.

4.2 *Enhancing the Application of Course Concepts*

This theme further demonstrates the participants' integration of multicultural coursework with the service-learning experience centering examples of meaning-making from the self-reflective essays. Findings showed that participants were able to demonstrate retention, connection, and application of course concepts that tied specific learning goals to community needs. According to Simonet (2008, p.1), “service-learning should be thought of as a process that creates greater student engagement, which in turn results in the product of student retention.” Students were notably excited about the projects they engaged in which in many ways enhanced their commitment to the field of teaching. Making connections by having to locate multicultural resources in the community and having the space to apply culturally responsive theoretical frameworks enhanced the importance of school and community collaboration and how this kind of engagement can be utilized in their future classrooms.

Throughout the multicultural education course, Moran's (2001) theory of culture in the world language classroom was discussed. This theory emphasizes that teachers of language and culture should not just *define* culture, but more importantly, as Moran stresses, it is important to teach teachers and their students how to *experience* culture. Based on these reflections, a participant noted:

The “Cultural Event Project” shows us that something as simple as food [product] and the recipe [practice] or story behind it [perspective] can be a multicultural resource for the [World Language] classroom, [and] that everyone has a culture and there is always something to be learned from them... The “Diversity Training” Project shows us how collaborative relationships between a school and the community around the school—and between pre-service teachers and teachers—can combat the lack of multicultural resources that teachers face...

Numerous definitions of culture exist, but Moran (2001) argues that because of the great diversity of culture and cultural contexts, language teachers should focus on how to help students experience culture in a meaningful way, as was done in this course with the service-learning project. Thus, we feel that service-learning should move beyond defining culture to allow students to “experience culture”, as noted by Moran (2001).

Another finding, is that service-learning should “shift principles of multicultural education from abstraction to reality” as noted by Boyle-Baise (2002, p. 7). The following participant excerpts show how students took abstract concepts taught in the course, like “identity” and “critical thinking” and “invisible minority” and were able to translate them into real world situations as a result of the service-learning project. For example, in the reflective practice activities, students explained how the “concept of not allowing students to practice language is stripping them of identity”. This statement demonstrates an emerging understanding of subtractive schooling concepts articulated by scholars such as Valenzuela (2010); Gonzales (2015); Gainer and Larrota (2010) who argue that “subtracting” student culture, language and identity from the classroom is a barrier that harms students and families while also interfering with social and academic success. Students' essays also noted how, “Academic achievement can improve with something so simple as getting to know your student's culture” which is also reinforced by the above noted scholars.

Students were also able to practice critical thinking as exemplified in the following reflection quotes: “Why is anything diverging from regular European American curriculum automatically considered soft?” and “Another aspect I learned through collaboration was the concept of invisible minority.”

Likewise, they were able to extend concepts taught with regards to media and art into World Language

teaching strategies. For example, one of the participants provided the following example of how to use Art in the World Language classroom in order to raise cultural and linguistic awareness:

I am a foreign language major, but art can be incorporated in foreign languages. Art does not have a specific “language” as it is a language of its own. I decided to use Day of the Dead as my way to incorporate art with foreign languages. Day of the Dead or Día de los Muertos is a Mexican holiday that celebrates and honors the people who have left us. One common or popular way to honor the dead is to build an altar for them. For this event I decided to go the craft route and make a shoe box altar. The teachers seemed pretty impressed by it and I explained how they could utilize this idea in their classroom...

The examples listed above provide evidence of the role service-learning plays in helping World Language pre-service teachers move the “abstract to reality” (Boyle-Baise, 2002) and apply course concepts while reflecting on their learning experience and practice.

4.3 Promoting Professional Teacher Identity: Lessons Learned

The students in the course designed a series of educational booths which they set up at a local public school in order to provide multicultural resources to veteran teachers in the field. This allowed them to not only share resources but also to practice teaching methods that they had learned in the multicultural education course. Our findings indicate that these opportunities increased student confidence and strengthened their teacher identity. It provided a scaffold through which they could gain experience modeling diversity beliefs and values while also answering questions about diversity-based curriculum and multicultural resources. Students were able to demonstrate the application of culturally responsive theories and concepts that positively impacted them. One student was deeply impacted by the positive response they received from veteran teachers and noted, “*even experts have room to learn and grow*”. Another student expressed a similar feeling regarding the veteran teachers being impressed by the student presentations which affirmed their teacher identity. They wrote:

I enjoyed learning new things and teaching the teachers of this school about my culture. I think that this [Diversity Training Project] event was very important because it was a way to network with other teachers and also to give them resources to apply multiculturalism in the classroom. I think that the teachers were very impressed with what I presented.

We noticed that when student contributions were valued by the veteran teachers, it not only strengthened their emerging teacher identity, but also reinforced their confidence in teaching as a profession, as further described below.

4.3.1 Affirmation of Teaching as a Career Path

When self-reflection is prioritized, students can connect-the-dots and note the growth that occurred in themselves as emerging practitioners for their field. In this way, self-reflection becomes a key component to the service-learning experience as it helped to deepen the commitment students had to teaching as a career path. The theme of professional teacher identity is related to teachers’ perceptions of the profession. These perceptions “strongly determine the way teachers teach, the way they develop as teachers, and their attitudes towards educational changes” (Chong & Low, 2009, p. 60). Students were able to reflect on the project and document a personal experience that affirmed their teacher identity. Two unique examples are provided below.

When I was an ELL student, I had a teacher who allowed me to share my culture in Spanglish (a mixture of Spanish and English) and I felt respected and valued. Allowing ELL students to represent themselves in their language is very important because language contributes to identity. Not allowing a student to speak their language in a classroom setting is basically stripping them for their identity. I explained this concept to the teachers at the “Elementary” School and they completely agreed, I even had a teacher who stated that she incorporates Spanish in her own classroom.

One important lesson that I learned about myself is that I was not as ahead of the curve in regards to learning more about multiculturalism as I thought I was given my past travels abroad. Just because I have been fortunate enough to experience diverse cultures firsthand in other countries does not mean that there was not still plenty to learn from my own diverse community here in Alabama. Another lesson I learned about myself has to do with the fact that I am even more affirmed in knowing that basing my career off of teaching foreign languages is the path that I want to go down.

Though students were mostly focused on their service-learning experience and did not often describe their thoughts about the self-reflection assignment itself, one student did say that self-reflection was important, saying, “Practicing self-reflection is a very important aspect in the development of a person.” This aligns with the findings of a study conducted by Azim (2017) showing that reflective practices significantly affected the development level of teachers’ identities, which we concur with.

4.4 Developing a Deeper Understanding of Culture and Diversity

The “Multicultural Service-Learning Project” engaged participants in active discussions about the need for

culturally and linguistically responsive teaching and learning practices which enhanced their understanding of diversity. Multiple studies have shown that multicultural service-learning experiences, such as the one in this study, provide a greater awareness of diversity (Tinkler & Tinkler, 2013). Students engaged in the service-learning component of this study demonstrated that they understood the course material related to culture, social justice, and equity. In earlier examples (under “Findings 1: Barriers and Ways to Overcome them) students extended this understanding into planning for how to accommodate future civic action as language teachers which also aligned with findings noted by Moely et al. (2002). These findings intersect and weave into this section which furthers our understanding of how diversity content shapes student thinking and experience with regards to teacher development and dispositions as noted in this section. For example, many students described how the service-learning projects in the multicultural education course were so much more than they expected as noted by the three student quotes below:

At the beginning of this course and my service-learning experience, I had a very vague, very limited definition of culture, diversity, and multicultural education. I definitely understood the words on a very basic level, but through this course and my service-learning experience, I have been able to expand my definitions and my thinking. I originally thought culture was mostly tangible, that diversity just meant different, and that multicultural education was a set thing that you could just include in your lesson plans. I have grown so much since then. I now know there are both tangible and non-tangible aspects of culture, that diversity is about embracing differences, and that multicultural education is not a static thing, but rather an ever-changing goal that we strive toward.

In this course, I initially expected to learn a bunch of definitions and “cookie-cutter” activities for implementing multicultural education in the classroom. I leaned more towards the “Holidays and Heroes Approach” as to understanding what multicultural education is. I now know that multicultural education is so much more than that...

Through our service-learning experience, we have been exposed to many different cultures, strategies, resources, activities, and diverse peoples that we have been able to confront our own biases, stereotypes, and other beliefs that may negatively influence our teaching.

One student highlighted how the course helped with understanding what diversity is, but also what it is not, stating, “Diversity is not a set period of the day...” Another student identified service-learning as a diversity training opportunity and noted the role it plays in creating “collaborative relationships [that] can combat the lack of resources teachers face.” Additional reflections noted how “creating a classroom where diversity is embraced rather than ignored allows students to see a reflection of themselves and work towards a brighter future for themselves.”

Though the specific study of teacher dispositions was not a part of this study, the authors noted how student reflections demonstrated not only notable gains in understanding diversity and culture but also in ways that corresponded with teacher dispositions. The dispositions we considered aligned with the Interstate Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (In TASC) Model of Core Teaching Standards and fall within the areas of “Respect for Diversity of Others” and “Reflection” and speak to areas such as building empathy, respect and understanding with regards to diversity and modeling these behaviors within a teaching context. Also, being able to self-reflect on one’s own strengths and areas for growth as well as examining how past events (in history for this example) can inform future teaching practice.

According to Crane (2016, p.51), “connection-making—as a type of cognitive and affective sense-making involves comparison of experience and ideas—can serve as an index of student learning and lies at the heart of many theories of adult development.” Students in this study repeatedly noted their growth and referenced the many connections they were making as a result of the service-learning experience. Students made comments, such as: “a new way of life for me” and “helped to open students minds” and “I have grown so much” and “I know now it is so much more than that” and “making connections I was able to consider how to incorporate . . .” and “provided a gateway into culture” and “allowed me to grow” and “opened my eyes to reality of education” and “seeing this helped me help others” and “taught me about culture” and “gave me opportunities” and “ideas that sprouted from this project” and “knowing this I can apply resources” and “helped me learn and appreciate”. These kinds of comments validate the impact of the course and the service-learning experience but also the gains made across the many themes explored for this study.

4.5 Exploring Community Resources

Another theme that students lifted-up in their reflection essays was “community as a resource.” This was not surprising as seeking out community resources was embedded in the following course assignments: 1) engage with the local community on campus for multicultural events, 2) scouting for off-campus resources and engaging with community members and local agencies, and 3) sharing multicultural resources with Veteran certified teachers at an education fair in the local public school. The reflections generated spoke to the benefits of increased exposure to one’s own community and how this impacted teacher growth and learning. For example, one student said, “I

learned from this experience and attending events and familiarizing myself with the diversity in my own community”. Another student mentioned learning that “Spanish-speaking communities are often mislabeled and those that fall outside of the border and outside of Mexico are not well understood such as the large population of Guatemalans” and “When educators take the time to tap into funds of knowledge abundant in community, they will be able to implement multicultural ed in classroom that will change lives of students.”

Another take-away was the expanded awareness of diversity related agencies that were available to support teachers and schools. An introduction to community resources could have been taught in the class but having students go out into the field and seek them out allowed them to form partnerships and learn directly from diverse community members themselves. They said things like, “During these events it was clear that our area is filled with diverse communities, and each has their own local organizations” and “The projects that we completed were a great help, the necessity of the project provided a great opportunity to meet diverse members of the community.” Noted below are additional themes that we found important to our understanding of how community engagement impacted student learning.

Another example of impact a student described was how community cultural events can help fill the resource gap and gave the example of the Polish club, “Finding that a few clubs exist in the area such as Polish club that meets once a week to give Polish lessons and an Irish club that operates similarly; I found these clubs through community cultural events where they were actively giving out information for these clubs.”

Another student summed up their experience, saying, “During these events it was clear that our area is filled with diverse communities and each has their own local organizations - I learned from this experience and attending events.”

Connections to world language teaching were also made. For example, one participant noted, “The level of diversity in our area is vast - seeing this helped me help others about teaching students with little English.”

A secondary finding for this theme is what students learned from engaging directly with community members and how they connected these experiences to multicultural frameworks learned in the course. There were many rich examples of this. One example came from a student who extended their reflection to community cultural wealth as described by Yosso (2005) and DeNicolò et al. (2019). They spoke to the cultural and linguistic wealth that exists in the diverse communities of Alabama which deserves to be honored and celebrated while also recognizing how it allows families to survive and resist a wide array of injustices. Another concept explored in connection to community was “invisible minority” as noted in the following quote, “Another aspect I learned through collaboration was the concept of invisible minority. It is not that these resources don't exist or are lacking, sometimes it is that they are not seen as vital or important and are ignored.”

Access and exposure to cultural community resources can also counter stereotypes and assumptions about culturally and linguistically diverse communities as noted by the following student observation:

Language, culture, and identity are deeply intertwined. At Diversity Training, I saw firsthand how to apply the things we were learning in class in a real-world situation. This event also demonstrated the fact that oftentimes the teachers may not be very diverse or have experience with culturally and linguistically diverse students so they may have certain attitudes and beliefs towards these students without realizing it, but these types of activities and events highlight the fact to them so that they can work to combat them.

Another student specifically noted that many teachers may “face a lack of multicultural resources for the classroom but when you dig deeper into a student's background and community, they actually have funds of knowledge that can be used in the classroom”. For example, several students pointed to the wealth of knowledge that guest speakers can provide: “Another idea for a teaching resource from a culture event is having a guest speaker come to my classroom. I received so much valuable information from this person” and “Language and Diversity go hand in hand: When the guest speaker spoke, due to such learning experiences . . . about including French language materials, helped to open student minds in their classroom.”

By creating service-learning opportunities that included engagement with diverse people from cultures other than their own, pre-service teachers were able to locate multicultural resources which shaped their awareness of bias, barriers and needs as well as the ways in which diverse communities navigate, celebrate, survive and resist. These experiences provided opportunities for meaning-making and allowed students to demonstrate the application of course concepts to a wide variety of community contexts as it relates to the field of language teaching and learning. Thus, we found that the service-learning experience can expose students to the wealth of multicultural resources within their own campus as well as the surrounding community.

4.6 Happiness

The last theme we would like to share is “happiness”. This is not really a theme but rather an outlier. Several participants mentioned that they experienced a form of happiness when engaging in their service-learning experience. Though it was not mentioned as often as the other themes, it was mentioned enough to take note of. This was a meaningful finding to the authors of this study, as feeling happy can contribute to teaching engagement and productivity. A recent study by De Stasio et al. (2019) found that subjective happiness together

with compassion were significant predictors of increased teacher work engagement (as cited in Peláez-Fernández et al., 2021, p. 2). We felt that “happiness” was a noteworthy mention given the post-

COVID high stress environment that may be driving many teachers away from the field. Study findings suggest that teachers experiencing high levels of happiness as well as perceiving themselves as emotionally intelligent may feel more capable of overcoming future teacher-related challenges and demands and that this may result in more positive attitudes toward their jobs and careers (Peláez-Fernández et al., 2021, p.4). In this study several students noted feelings of joy, excitement and pride which we felt was somewhat related to feelings of “happiness”. In addition, one participant said, “I am very *happy* that I got to experience this event. I think that I gained so much knowledge from these wonderful teachers and I hope that they learned something new from me.

Unfortunately, happiness is one of the most difficult concepts to define (Lazarus, 2003). As a result, we recommend including “happiness” as a concept when elaborating on teacher preparation and wellbeing as this would help center the need for teacher well-being and happiness. More research needs to be done in this area.

5. Concluding Thoughts

Though the number of course participants seeking a World Language endorsement in this sample was small (only 6), the two scholars sought to highlight the implications of service-learning for World Language students enrolled in the multicultural education course. It shows the many ways in which World Language students use multicultural education resources in ways that align with their own content area. Many students demonstrated the retention of course concepts by appropriately using multicultural education frameworks and terminology reflected in their course textbook, *Affirming Diversity* (Nieto & Bode, 2018). One of the critical challenges facing teacher education programs is how to prepare pre-service teachers to work effectively with students whose cultural and linguistic backgrounds differ from their own. Though the sample was small, the current study shows the promise of service-learning as an asset in reaching this goal.

Additionally, after reading students’ self-reflective papers, we noticed how the service-learning experience impacted student learning in ways that aligned with the teacher preparation guidelines with a cross-emphasis on World Language standards, with specific reference to the communities, and culture goal areas. In fact, one implication is that we better understand how our World Language participants experienced culture and community. This is important because it connects to both the State of Alabama standards for multicultural education, as well as ACTFL standards for World Language education. This study suggests a foundation for using service-learning as an avenue for incorporating World Language standards in teacher preparation programs in order to: 1) ensure professional effectiveness in the teaching of language and culture, 2) expand assessment opportunities beyond the classroom, and 3) enhance access and engagement with diverse and cultural community-based resources.

We found that service-learning can help achieve course standards and enhance student learning outcomes. Service-learning opportunities not only deepened pre-service teachers’ understanding of diversity, but also provided them with reflective practices that helped to connect the dots between their coursework and their service-learning work as it relates to teacher identity and self-efficacy. This demonstrates how using self-reflections throughout the service-learning experience enhanced the application of course concepts and theories allowing students to put theory into practice. According to Sturgill and Motley (2014, p.81), “instructors work with students to meet course objectives through service-learning, intentional reflection about the process is an important way for students to integrate knowledge of theory with experience in practice” as was also a critical component to this study.

Thus, a second implication suggests rethinking effective ways to promote diversity and community collaboration in teacher education. Wade, et al. (1999) state that teacher educators are becoming aware that incorporating service-learning as an instructional method in teacher education can “contribute to effective practice in K-12 schools when graduates enter teaching” (as cited in McKenna et al 2004, p. 2). Teacher education programs would be well-advised to consider the findings of this study when deliberating on the development of and inclusivity in diversity training.

Finally, a third implication from this research suggests how the study could be of interest to educators and scholars investigating teacher self-efficacy, dispositions with regards to respect for diversity and self-reflection, happiness and teacher identity development with regards to pre-service World Language teachers. Although service-learning is gaining attention in teacher education programs, there has been a dearth of experiential research that examines its relationship with teacher identity development and multiculturalism (Borrero et al, 2012). This study contributes to filling the gap in these areas.

Because the number of students is small and the current study took place over a brief period of time (one semester), outcomes cannot be generalized. Nonetheless, the findings are important in a qualitative sense. We were able to examine World Language pre-service teachers as a subset of students in an undergraduate multicultural education course to better understand how course concepts and experiences led to meaning-making, enhanced teacher identity development, perceived future effectiveness and even happiness. Indeed,

these are worthy future considerations for the field of teacher education.

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Notes

Bortons' (1970) Framework Guiding Reflective Activities

What?	So What?	Now what?
This is the <i>description</i> and <i>self awareness</i> level and all questions start with the word what	This is the level of <i>analysis</i> and evaluation when we look deeper at what was behind the experience.	This is the level of <i>synthesis</i> . Here we build on the previous levels these questions to enable us to consider alternative courses of action and choose what we are going to do next.
Examples What happened? What did I do? What did other do? What was I trying to achieve? What was good or bad about the experiences	Examples So what is the importance of this? So what more do I need to know about this? So what have I learnt about this	Examples Now what could I do? Now what do I need to do? Now what might I do? Now what might be the consequences of this action?

Bortons model incorporates all the core skills of reflection. Arguably it is focused on reflection on action, but with practice it could be used to focus on reflection *in* and *before* action.

Figure 1. Bortons' (1970) Framework Guiding Reflective Activities