



Service-Learning Preparation in Preservice Teacher Education

by Marybeth Neal and Jeffrey Anderson

An important component of an examination of the state of service-learning is to investigate the scale and scope of service-learning in preservice teacher education. As Skinner and Chapman write in the conclusion to their 1999 study "Service-Learning and Community Service in K-12 schools," an important indication of the level of support for service-learning is the level of support for *teacher training* in service-learning (Skinner and Chapman 1999).

Degree to Which Service-Learning Occurs in Teacher Education

The 1998 survey conducted by the National Service-Learning in Teacher Education Partnership (NSLTEP) found that more than 225 of approximately 1,325 teacher education programs in the nation offer service-learning experiences, or 17 percent (Root and Furco 2001). Anderson and Erickson's 2002 national study on service-learning and preservice teacher education finds that 59 percent of teacher education institutions *introduce* service-learning to their preservice teachers, and 37 percent *prepare* their teacher candidates to use service-learning as a teaching method. Wade et. al. found that approximately 30 percent of those preservice teachers prepared in service-

learning went on to *implement* service-learning during the first few years of teaching (Wade et. al., 1999).

Anderson and Erickson report that the most frequent courses involving service-learning were student teaching (86 percent), followed by teaching English as a second language (32 percent), foundations courses (21 percent), and methods courses (13 percent). They mention, however, that the student-teaching percentage might be high due to respondents who perceive student-teaching as *itself* a form of service-learning (Anderson and Erickson, 2002a).

Problems With Definitions

While research shows that support for service-learning in teacher education is growing, it also suggests definitional concerns. As mentioned above, some teacher educators interpret service-learning in teacher education as the preservice experience itself. Others believe service-learning in teacher education must expose preservice teachers to methods for designing and implementing service activities that are tied to the academic curriculum of their pupils (Anderson and Erickson, 2002a).

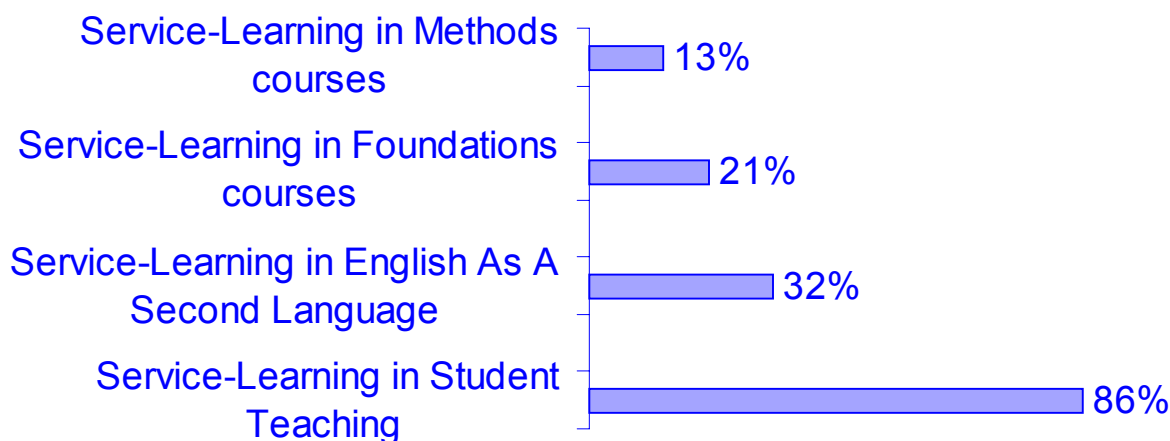
Quality Concerns

Related to the need for deeper understanding of service-learning is the issue of quality.

Experienced teacher educators recommend certain criteria for quality service-learning instruction (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001, and Wade et al, 1999). Anderson and Erickson concluded that most teacher education programs do not follow all the criteria, which include:

- Classroom instruction should present the use of service-learning as a pedagogy and as a philosophy of education, including the creation of a written service-learning lesson plan or unit of instruction;
- Preservice teachers should participate in two types of experiences: first, they should engage in service themselves along with reflection activities; and second, they should experience working with K-12 teachers, students and community partners to design and implement service-learning projects; and
- Preservice teachers should participate in multiple service-learning experiences through classes, practice, and student teaching, where the preservice teachers take responsibility for essential aspects of project planning and implementation.

Frequency with which Service-Learning is Offered in Particular Teacher Education Courses



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Rationales Given For Use of Service-Learning

Anderson and Erickson also suggest that teacher educators may not realize the potential of service-learning to improve academics and student behavior (2002b:11). In their study, the most common rationales for using service-learning among teacher educators were “exposing their students to the communities in which they would serve” (60 percent), “exposing students to diversity issues” (58 percent), and “enhancing students’ personal and social development.” (53 percent). Using service-learning to improve academic achievement was among the least common rationales, at 18 percent (2002b:9).

Similarly, Skinner and Chapman’s 1999 NCES survey of K-12 schools found the most common rationales given by schools for use of service-learning were “to help students become more active members of the community” (53 percent) and “to increase student knowledge and understanding of the community” (51 percent), while only 12% mentioned that service-learning was used as a way to improve academic achievement (1999:17).

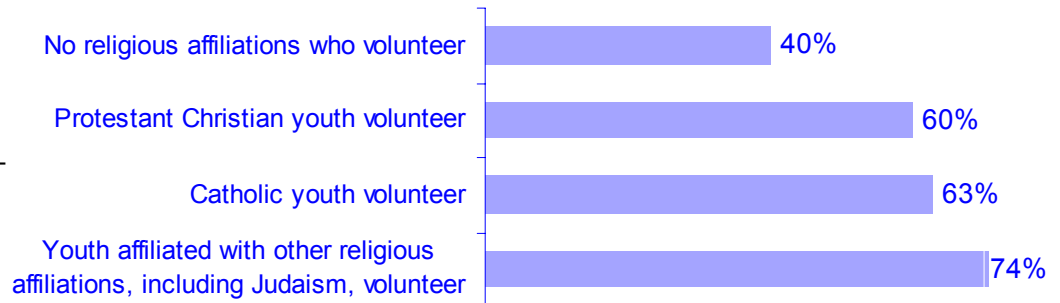
Institutional Barriers

Another challenge for service-learning in teacher education is lack of institutional incentives, support, and coordination. Service-learning is not generally considered positively in promotion or tenure decisions (Matheson, K. 2000:13). Within those institutions offering service-learning instruction, service-learning is taught by relatively few faculty members, many of whom lack support to help coordinate the service component. Anderson and Erickson write:

The status of service-learning in most teacher education programs is that of being recognized as a promising innovation that is used by a few faculty members with some teacher candidates in a somewhat haphazard manner (2002a:11)

Wade et. al. report that increasing numbers of teacher educators and educational organizations recommend

Percent of Youth with Various Religious Affiliations Who Volunteer



that all teachers be prepared to use service-learning as an instructional strategy. To ensure that service-learning is of high quality and integrated into the curriculum, however, much work needs to be done, both in terms of institutional support and deepening understanding of service-learning.

Support Available for Service-Learning in Teacher Education

The American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education’s (AACTE) National Service-Learning in Teacher Education Partnership (NSLTPEP), funded by the Corporation for National and Community Service, provides consulting support and technical assistance to teacher educators interested in providing their teacher candidates with high quality service-learning experiences and preparation. For information regarding AACTE/NSLTPEP, contact Joyce Munro, NSLTPEP Director, at 202-293-2450 or jmunro@aacte.org. For information on the growing role of community colleges in service-learning and teacher education, contact Terry Pickeral at the Education Commission of the States at tpickeral@ecs.org.

**Web-Based Resources for
Service-Learning in Teacher Education**
Education Commission of the States
www.ecs.org

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