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Influencing Professional Practice through Academic Service Learning (AS-L):

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Influencing Professional Practice through Academic Service Learning (AS-L):

Cover Page Footnote

Sharryn Larsen Walker is a Professor of Literacy at Central Washington University. Her research areas of interest are children's literature, teaching methods, and pre-service teacher development. Anne Katz is an Associate Professor of Reading at Georgia Southern University. Her research areas of interest are content-area literacy, comprehension strategy instruction, and service learning

Influencing Professional Practice through Academic Service Learning (AS-L):

Pre-Service Teachers Share their Ideas

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Abstract

Findings related to the reflections of pre-service teachers in Family Literacy Events (FLE) as an Academic Service-Learning (AS-L) project are detailed. Pre-service teachers in the Southeast and Pacific Northwest were provided opportunities to bridge theory with practice and apply research-based approaches in community settings. Teacher candidates provided parents with language and literacy strategies and resources to assist them in creating high-quality home learning experiences. The teacher candidates' reflections are categorized by basic tenets of AS-L, specifically Awareness, Engagement, Practice, Integration, and Reflection. Speculation as to how their reflections were affected by the prompts of their essays are discussed.

Keywords: field experience, pre-service teachers, reflection, service learning

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Influencing Professional Practice through Academic Service Learning (AS-L):

Pre-Service Teachers Share their Ideas

Note: In order to acknowledge gender identification and for the ease of reading, the gender neutral pronouns of zie, zim, zir, zieself, they, and their are used, where appropriate.

When I arrived at Family Literacy Night, I did not expect to gain as much from it as I did. Reading to children that night really helped me to understand what we had been talking about all quarter in class.

This quote from a pre-service teacher (PST) was indicative of those who participated in a family literacy event (FLE) under the framework of service-learning at one of two universities. Academic service-learning (AS-L) is a form of experiential learning in which service is incorporated into a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience. A community need is identified with a mutually benefitting partnership established between the community agency and the educational institution. The intent of the partnership is to provide support to the community agency while bridging theory to practice for those enrolled in the course (Furco, 1996).

Creating and providing quality, high-impact AS-L experiences requires careful planning, as a strong successful partnership is necessary (McDonald & Dominguez, 2015). Basic tenets of AS-L include developing an awareness of the community need; providing engagement and practice in the service; creating time for reflection; and acknowledging how the practice can be integrated into future experiences (A Model for Planning, n.d.). Keeping these tenets in mind can help undergraduates apply their newfound understandings in real world settings (Anderson,

Boyd, Marin, & McNamara, 2019). The findings in this article share how PST perceived the influence of AS-L on their professional practice.

AS-L in Teacher Education

Field experience is a critical component of teacher education programs because PST are provided opportunities to apply their knowledge, skills, and dispositions in real-world settings (Singh, 2017). Due to its importance in the professional development of PST, it is recommended that field experience take place early in teacher education programs. However, many schools are overburdened with hosting field experiences, such as practicums and student teaching. Thus, locating sites for early field experiences can be problematic (Paquette & Laverick, 2017). Therefore, it is recommended that teacher education programs look for alternative placements that allow for the intersection of course content, practical experience, and communities (Zeichner, 2010).

AS-L has been explored as viable solution to this predicament. Experiences have taken place with home-school students (Everhart & McKethan, 2004); self-contained classrooms for the hearing impaired (Doster & Polter, 2008); children's museums (Author, 2012); and afterschool tutoring (Paquette & Laverick, 2017). Each of these authors noted the sites were chosen to provide appropriate early field practice for their PST; identified AS-L as the vehicle for providing placements; and provided opportunities for the PST to reflect upon their teaching.

Reflections of Field Experience in Teacher Education

In teacher education, PST benefit from participating in AS-L before and during other practical experiences (Johnson, La Paro, & Crosby, 2017), as it helps solidify the course content, builds a broader appreciation of the discipline, and creates an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. They also reflect upon their growing sense of self-awareness, examining who

they are, and how that influences teaching and learning (Baum & King, 2006). Research has illuminated PST perceptions of the teaching process and their participation in AS-L as a valuable experience.

Many PST agreed that field experience impacted their beliefs about teaching (Singh, 2017). PST reported being energized, relaxed, or frustrated after participating in early practical experiences (Johnson, et al, 2017). These feelings were often dependent upon their perceived relationship with the field experience mentor (Larson, 2005). This creates both positive and negative surprises about the PST perception of field experience.

PST perceived that they developed self-regulating teaching behaviors through reflection-in-action (Moran, 2007); that their dispositions changed over time spent in field-based and university-based instruction (Rinaldo, et al., 2009); and that personality traits of exemplary teachers are more important than professional skills (Mowrer-Reynolds, 2008). They perceived that they are inadequately prepared to provide early literacy instruction (Mather, Bos, & Babur, 2001), yet felt that their teacher training was adequate (Williams & Alawiye, 2001). Many times, the data collected from these perception studies were used to implement changes within teacher training programs (Alobiedat, 2005; Ludlow, et. al., 2008).

PST reported that their preconceived notions of the students with whom they work were altered through reflection (Parkinson, 2009). They can be taught to ask more questions during lessons; take risks; and self-evaluate to increase their understanding of the teaching-learning process (Grant, 2001). This advancement of reflection is crucial to the professional development of PST and becomes incumbent for teacher educators to address (Walkington, 2005).

Methodology

The purpose of this qualitative study was to analyze PST perceptions of their participation in an FLE as an AS-L experience early in their teacher preparation program, and to consider how that experience might influence their professional practice. PST perceptions were collected through reflective essays submitted online in a classroom management system at their respective universities. This framework provided a forum for PST to reflect in a semi-structured manner where they applied their content knowledge through valuable connections with community members.

Participants

The participants attended either a rural, Pacific Northwest university or a suburban/urban Southeastern university and were elementary, early childhood, child and family studies, or special education majors. PST were predominantly female, came from a variety of backgrounds, and were ethnically representative of the geographic locations of their universities. The majority of the participants from the Pacific Northwest were European-American or LatinX, while the majority of participants from the Southeastern university were African-American.

Context

At the time of their participation, PST were enrolled in either a teaching children's literature course, or a language acquisition course at their respective universities. Those at the rural, Pacific Northwest university were enrolled in a teaching with children's literature course where the content focused on genres and uses of children's literature in the classroom. Using research-based strategies, the PST prepared a story to read and a story to tell as part of the course content. Then each participated in one of the three FLE hosted that quarter. The FLE was co-sponsored by the education department, the university library, and the Diversity and Equity

Center (DEC). They were held in a variety of locations, including local schools, neighboring school districts, and the university library. Children and their families were invited to the free event, with the DEC providing beverages and snacks. The education department and university library provided books for each child to take home at the end of the event.

The participants from the Southeastern university were enrolled in a language acquisition course. The course content emphasized phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The PST created research-based literacy activities; a parent/caregiver letter which provided an overview of the family literacy activity; a description of materials; step-by-step procedures; prompting questions; ideas for differentiation; extensions; and props. Additionally, the Community Center Executive Director presented to the PST about Center programming offerings. The PST then participated in one of two community center FLE during the semester to present the books and activities to parents; model how parents can implement the research-based literacy strategies with their children; and provide literacy support to community members. At both sets of FLE, parents and caregivers were provided with models for reading, storytelling, tools, and resources for engaging literacy environments.

Data Collection and Analysis

After each FLE, the PST reflected on their experiences by writing an essay in response to prompting questions. These prompts included, but were not limited to, reflection on their teaching behaviors; ways they could improve their teaching; strategies for supporting and differentiating their lessons or materials; and how to involve parents in their future teaching. The essays were submitted to the electronic classroom as part of the evaluation within their respective courses.

When each term was completed, permission to analyze the data was obtained by each university's human subjects review board. Then a second party at each university randomly selected approximately ten papers from each section of the course over five years. All identifying markers within the data were removed, the papers were downloaded, and the researchers were provided with electronic versions of the reflections. More than 90 papers were gathered for analysis.

The researchers individually read and reread the essays to identify explicit descriptions of the AS-L experience and possible themes. After numerous readings, the researchers categorized and coded the data, then discussed the themes they identified (Marshall & Rossman, 2015; Mills, 2011). Insights emerged regarding specific aspects of language and literacy development as well as pedagogical practices cultivated. Five overarching themes were identified and used to further tease out specifics within each theme. Those five themes were Awareness, Engagement, Practice, Integration, and Reflection (A Model for Planning, n.d.).

Limitations

There are limitations to the findings of this study. First, although the participants were in an AS-L course at their respective universities, each course focused on different content. Second, the PST at each university were required to participate in a different type of FLE. Finally, the participants represented a variety of majors. Due to these factors, the findings may not be generalizable. However, the data does describe the PST perspectives, thus supporting interpretive validity, that is the discerned meaning of the actions, thoughts, and behaviors of the participants (Maxwell, 1992). Therefore, the findings may augment the guidance of reflection for those participating in AS-L as an early teacher education field experience.

Findings

The PST who participated in these FLE reflected upon their experiences through a written essay submitted for course evaluation. As previously presented, they were given a list of prompts to which they could respond. The emerging themes of Awareness, Engagement, Practice, Integration, and Reflection were used to categorize their understandings of the participation in AS-L as a field experience.

Awareness

Awareness is the active understanding on one's field of study, and how learning and application make contributions to life beyond the traditional classroom setting (A Model for Planning, n.d.). The PST showed an awareness of the existence of AS-L; the purpose of the FLE; and their impressions of the event. Some PST shared their awareness of AS-L by stating that they had been to an FLE as an observation requirement for a previous course. Another commented that zie had not previously attended an FLE and did not know that such events happened in the community.

PST also illustrated their perceived purposes of the FLE. Many declared they participated in the event to practice what they were learning in class and tied the purpose of the FLE to their professional development. Only one PST approached the reciprocal partnership of an AS-L experience when zie stated, "These experiences are just as important for the children as they are for future teachers." None of the comments directly acknowledged the benefit of the FLE for the community at large. However, one PST claimed, "It gave me experience and the opportunity to have an impact on a child's life and the community, which is something I am very passionate about." This statement reflects how the AS-L experience of designing and

implementing a FLE for local community center members expanded learning beyond the traditional classroom setting.

The PST also alluded to the FLE as an AS-L practice at the awareness level. Many of these statements began with “Overall,” indicating a possible summarization of the experience. One wrote it was a “welcoming and inspiring experience.” Others commented that they were grateful for the opportunity to practice what they had been learning; they applied “theory to practice;” and they could use what they had developed in their future classrooms. Again, the statements were from the PST perspective of how it was beneficial to them, but not how such events would benefit the broader community.

Engagement

A tenet of AS-L is the reciprocal relationship between the agency and the candidate’s goals (A Model for Planning, n.d.). Few PST commented on the reciprocal relationship between themselves and the children in attendance. However, several commented on their active participation in the FLE and goals they set for themselves.

A few participants stated how the FLE benefitted children. Comments such as “This will build children’s self-confidence and creativity;” “Fostering a love of books and building imagination will inspire children, and will help their family support future learning;” and “[t]hey are learning strategies for reading comprehension and develop a richer vocabulary,” are examples of how the PST perceived the existence of reciprocity in the FLE. The paucity of comments about the mutually-benefitting relationship echoes the lack of perspective within the previously analyzed area of awareness.

Engagement also demands active participation on the part of the PST. They recorded how children brought a new book to a reader to “try it out” before taking it home. The

interactive learning experience provided valuable insight on how to read stories aloud with one commenting that zie believed the lesson went well because the children were engaged in the experience. The collaboration empowered PST, and another contended this interaction “gave me a deeper understanding of text as I worked to actively engage the children and their family.”

The PST recognized working toward personal, academic, and professional goals as part of engagement in AS-L. When reflecting on personal goals, the PST were excited to see how reading aloud to children would impact their future classroom teaching. They felt more confident about themselves after the FLE and more excited about choosing to become a teacher. One tied zir personal goals to zir academic goals by sharing that zie learned new information about sea life while reading a book chosen from the give-away table. Another communicated that the participation in the FLE, “really helped me understand what we have been talking about all quarter.” Another teacher candidate further explained, “One parent shared a detailed recipe with me for gumbo after the family literacy activity. People read for different purposes, and I will be more creative in envisioning literacy instruction possibilities.”

Finally, the PST most frequently expressed how their participation in the FLE related to their professional goals. They acknowledged that FLE gave them the opportunity to practice their skills in an authentic setting, and “the more I do it, the better I will become.” One was able to see how reading to children was more beneficial than “giving a worksheet.” Several speculated that it was important to engage in professional development opportunities to expand their teaching skills. Many saw the practical application of the course content as important in their “preparation as teachers.” Overall, the value of the FLE in preparing educators who exemplify the highest qualities of character and ethical behaviors while demonstrating the

dispositions, knowledge, and skills required to succeed in the modern classroom were established.

Practice

Overwhelmingly, the PST reflected upon their practice as teachers within their essays. Practice supports the intersection of professional development, academic learning, and professional growth. Primarily, they commented on their planning and preparation for the FLE; their teaching behaviors; and their use of varied methods.

Planning and preparation. Becoming more proficient in teaching skills requires planning and preparation. PST wrote of their engagement of learners, the arrangement of the environment, the transitions between lessons, and accommodations or modifications made during the FLE. Many of the candidates relayed that learner engagement was an important part of the planning process and it was dependent upon several factors—the story to be read or told; the questions with possible responses they would pose during the lesson; the amount of practice they put in before the FLE; and how they might arrange the environment. One PST reported that zie recorded zieself and then played back the video to look for areas of improvement. Others reported they did not need to look at their plans after the first engagement because they became comfortable with the lesson. They indicated that writing out the lesson in detail helped them to internalize the process and that helped them to comfortably veer from the plan. In several cases, the PST told the story multiple times; however, in at least one case the PST wrote of zir frustration because the “children interrupted” by wanting to play or touch the animals. Zie then had to find a way to bring the children’s attention back to the lesson. Additional PST commented on the challenge of “maintaining the momentum” of reading, discussing, and

engaging throughout the story, while “moving the lesson forward.” Another voiced that “maybe this is something that will improve with practice.”

The participants of the storytelling and read alouds were careful to consider the environment in which they presented. Although the FLE was held in a room with open floor space, the PST created a nurturing area for the literacy activities. They sat on the floor, gathered the children close, making sure all could see, as sitting above eye level might seem “intimidating” to the listeners. One wrote, “This strategy seemed to engage the children, but most importantly, this strategy seemed to create a welcoming environment, which is highly important.”

Many PST described the transitions from one reader to another or from the read aloud to the storytelling within their lesson as “smooth.” One PST previewed her stories to gauge interest in the children remaining for another story with zir. The PST also assisted transitions by directing children to another reader. If a child appeared to be undecided as to where to go, the PST invited the child to join the circle. Many of the children were in family groups which moved together, also providing for smooth transitions.

Due to the varied ages of the children in attendance at the FLE, the PST made modifications or accommodations to their literacy activities. Modifications included telling the story a “little different each time;” or allowing the children to stand near their parents as part of the circle. Some lessons were modified because the child climbed into a reader’s lap, thus changing the physical environment of the reading engagement.

Accommodations were made when the PST varied the difficulty of the questions asked dependent upon the age of the children. Therefore, some PST implemented a picture walk or posed lower level question for the younger ones, but asked synthesis/evaluative type to older

attendees. Vocabulary cards were included in some of the FLE packets (with a definition and visual) to reinforce understanding of key words of the read-aloud. Another accommodation included having a child who was hard of hearing sit close to the PST, so the child could see both the pictures and the lips of the reader. Some PST read or told in another language, including American Sign Language, Spanish, Chinese, and Russian.

Teaching behaviors. The PST commented on their burgeoning teaching behaviors, particularly how they moved, their tone of voice, as well as reading punctuation with a sense of expression to match the text. They were sure to face their audience, maintain eye contact, and hold the books or props where all could see. They acted out the movements of animals, coupled with sometimes exaggerated facial expressions. One described, “I would widen or narrow my eyes, move my eyebrows, and do gestures, such as wiggle my finger to represent the wolf scolding the pigs for not letting him in.” They changed the tone and expressions of voice signaling the variation in characters during both the story telling and read aloud. A rationale for this was, “I found if you are monotone, the students will lose interest really fast.” The tone of voice was also altered depending on the age of the listeners. The PST read in a quizzical manner if they encountered a question mark in the story, in an excited manner when an exclamation mark appeared, and pointed out quotation marks throughout the story. One stated, “I especially read dialogue in this manner, and some students started pointing out the punctuation that invited this type of expression in my voice.” The PST also recognized that the more often they told their story, the more confident and animated they became.

Methods. When reflecting on the FLE, the PST considered the methods used during the engagements. Many reflected upon the use of questions to engage or challenge the children during the read aloud lesson. They varied the types of questions, including recall (“Who is the

main character?"); predictive ("What do you think this story is about?"); inference ("Why are the monkeys in the kitchen?"); and vocabulary ("What do you think 'spiffy' means?"). They reported rephrasing the questions when no response was given and allowing time for the children to respond.

The PST also wrote about the selection of materials, including books and props. Several found the selection process challenging because they were unsure of the type of story they wanted to share. One felt satisfied with the book selection when she conveyed, "I realized my book was a good choice, as it had a bright cover that I think really helped to attract kids." Others created props to assist with the story telling and surmised that the use of props "helped me to stay focused and remember the story." A PST explained how "a variety of cloud shapes and cotton balls on construction paper were valuable props while reading so children learn and reinforce shapes, animals, and objects that they read about, and even imagine their own." Another read a space book with students, including "foam balls, scissors, construction paper, glitter, Sharpie pens, and pipe cleaners" on a cardboard base to inspire "creating and thinking while reading."

Finally, the PST integrated feedback to become more proficient in their practice. After hearing from a peer about using animated gestures to better engage the children, the PST implemented the suggestion in the next storytelling and "found that it worked really well." Children laughing at humorous parts of the story was acknowledged as feedback to gauge the success of the lesson. Parents offered feedback by claiming that the book was a "good one" or that it was "meaningful." The additional activities suggested by the PST to the parents, such as the creation of a collage with magazine images to imitate the illustration of one of the texts, were appreciated. PST also suggested that parents might visit the local library to find additional books

by favorite authors or illustrators or to locate more books featuring a given topic. Parents also were “impressed with the friendly attitudes and level of professionalism” exhibited by PST.

Integration

Examining integration of AS-L determines if the participants have the interest to continue to serve; look for the awards and challenges related to AS-L; and develop self-efficacy (A Model for Planning, n.d.). Few PST declared that they would like to participate in a future FLE. One speculated that zie would like to have a “program like this” in zir future teaching position. None of the PST communicated that they would continue to serve in the broad sense; they specifically mentioned that they would participate in a future FLE.

PST wrote of the rewards and challenges of participating in these AS-L projects. It was rewarding to “find out what worked and what didn’t;” being able to help students become excited about learning; and learning what to expect when teaching. Conversely, they reflected on challenges associated with their participation. Many commented on their nervousness of reading or speaking in public but felt more comfortable as the event progressed. One suggested that zir story was “boring” and that made it hard to keep the children engaged in the lesson. Even so zie further surmised that those challenges would be addressed in future teaching experiences. Another PST commented zie “grew as an individual and a future teacher” with this experience, as “I learned to compliment the child when they applied a strategy that I used, and to encourage discussion and an appreciation of language.”

Self-efficacy is defined as “one’s belief in one’s ability to succeed in specific situations (Gregory & Kaufeldt, 2015, p. 10). Many of the PST came away with a can-do attitude about teaching. The authenticity of the experience was appreciated through comments such as, “[w]hen driving home, I thought this was a step in the right direction for me in becoming a

teacher.” Similarly, PST considered how they would read or tell their story in another situation and what adjustments to make. A PST described how, “I decided to change my original plan a little bit. . .I learned to be flexible, which made me feel like a true teacher.”

Reflection

Reflection highlights the deep learning of the AS-L experience (A Model for Planning, n.d.). Schön (1987) identified two types of reflection, in-action and on-action, while Walkington (2005) supported guiding reflection through questioning. In their reflections, the PST addressed both of Schön’s examples. Many cases of reflection-in-action were because of the varying ages of the children in attendance. For this reason, the candidates changed the types of questions they asked and altered the ending of the stories told. They implemented picture walks, abbreviated the story, or used synonyms for some words. They altered the delivery with their voice and use of props as well.

Some cited reflection-on-action moves (Schön, 1987) when they wrote about the need for a different book in future lessons and learning to become more comfortable with asking questions during the lesson. One “regretted” not having props for the storytelling, as it “would have made my lesson more engaging.” Still another thought having several books available for reading would have been “a good idea.” Several lamented they should have “practiced more” so they would have felt more comfortable at the FLE. This sentiment was echoed by one who speculated:

I thought that since I prepared the book and activity with props, it was ready...I realized that I could have been more prepared, done a test run, put a post-it note with key questions in the story, and thought the lesson through a little bit more.

It is interesting to illuminate that some PST made changes to their lessons before the FLE. Although not identified in the literature, this is deemed a form of “reflection-before-action.” For various reasons, some changed the story or project (i.e. the one turned in for evaluation for the course) before the FLE. Several felt their story was too difficult to comfortably tell or not engaging enough for the children. One book was changed because zie read it to zir roommate and stated, “I could see she was getting bored and was unfocused.” Those who changed their lesson before the FLE felt satisfied that they made the right choice in making the change.

While the PST reflected at certain points in the process (pre-, in-, on-action), they also considered specifics of their teaching. They pronounced their deep learning with comments such as, “It [the lesson] probably could have been better if I had practiced more, but I also did not want it to come off as too rehearsed.” Additionally, one PST explained how the experience will affect zir future teaching when writing, “The most valuable lesson I learned was that lessons never go as planned.”

Part of planning involved asking questions in a DLTA format (Vacca, et. al. 2018). Many of the PST affirmed the importance of questioning to keep students engaged in the lesson. PST addressed that questions prompted the children to provide “thoughtful and textually correct answers;” and that the types of questions were altered depending on the listener. This provided the PST with “think on their feet” teaching moments.

The PST also reflected on their choice of materials. Props kept the children engaged and they needed to be durable, colorful, vibrant, and large enough for all to see. Some felt the book they chose was not appropriate and would more carefully consider what to read in future lessons, as “selecting a meaningful text is so important.” One avowed “I am going to consider my

rationale for choosing a book moving forward, and also my reasoning behind the props. Is it necessary, helpful, and does it promote learning? I'll be more intentional.”

Overall, the PST were appreciative of implementing course content in an authentic context. They also appreciated that they were able to interact with families, an experience not common in undergraduate teacher education (Vaughns, 2016). They were surprised about how time “flew” when engaged in the teaching process, and that these experiences reinforced their decision to become a teacher. Several referred to a “self-study as a reader” activity that was conducted at the beginning of the semester, in which they were asked to reflect upon their memories of being read to; the kinds of books and reading materials read to them; the feelings they associated with the experience; the key people who influenced their opinions about reading; and where or how they acquired books and reading materials. A common theme among the PST was that this experience provided a forum for them to positively impact the children and their families as they develop their own respective literacy identities.

Influencing Professional Practice through AS-L

The use of AS-L as a beginning field experience for PST has long been recommended (McDonald & Dominguez, 2015). This high-impact practice assists undergraduates to deepen their understandings of the course content and learner outcomes (Anderson, et al., 2019). In teacher education, AS-L provides PST opportunities to engage in classroom-like situations early in their preparation program; fosters social understanding and/or transformation; provides well-rounded benefits to the participants; and prepares them for the workforce (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to illuminate how PST perceived the influence of AS-L on their professional practice. The PST prepared for and participated in an FLE as an AS-L

experience and then wrote of their perceptions through an essay. They illustrated how their practice was influenced and how it might influence their teaching careers.

Through the participation in an FLE, the PST became aware of AS-L as a methodology. At the awareness level, they focused on the benefit they gained from their participation. Their understood purpose of the FLE was for them to gain more practice in honing their teaching skills; however, only one identified the benefit for the children who attended the event. This exhibition of minimal awareness may be a result of how the professors for the courses presented the FLE to the PST. The focus of the course content was to prepare them for teaching lessons or creating materials for use by a community agency. It may be that the instructors did not fully explain the reciprocal relationship within an AS-L framework. Making a conscious effort to tout the reciprocal relationship when preparing for future FLE is necessary.

A higher level of awareness can also be enhanced with the prompting questions designed for the reflective essay. For the most part, the prompts directed the PST to reflect on how the FLE experience influenced their professional practice. Although it is important for teacher educators to guide reflection (Walkington, 2005), the right questions must be posed so the PST come to a deep level of meaning and understanding. The findings of the coded data revealed that the PST indeed noticed their changed perceptions, which spurred them to think about their current practice and how their participation in an FLE might affect their future teaching engagements. However, because of the minimal awareness of the FLE as an AS-L experience, it appears that they did not arrive at a deep understanding of how AS-L might be integrated in their future classrooms. Gathering and sharing data from parents and community members who attend FLE could be a way to address this paucity of understanding.

One of the tenets considered was the integration of AS-L, meaning that the PST have the drive or capacity of continuing to serve. A reason for including AS-L in teacher education is because teachers are called to serve, and therefore integrating AS-L comes with ease (Anderson, et al., 2001). However, the question arises “Will the PST incorporate service-learning in their future classrooms?” Service-learning has been implemented with elementary students in order to improve school attendance and climate (Barrett, 2017); restore wildlife habitats (Clayborn, Koptur, O’Brien, & Whelan, 2017); and create school gardens (Reeves & Emeagwali, 2010). Participating in service-learning enhances elementary students’ awareness of civic and social responsibility, while supporting the attainment of civic standards, part of the social studies curriculum in many states (iCivics.org). Showing examples of service-learning in elementary classrooms may encourage these PST to include it in their future teaching.

It appears that the PST in this study perceived the participation in an FLE influenced their teaching. Future educators who are dedicated to ensuring that their students fulfill their potential as readers and learners need to be equipped with a repertoire of strategies. The use of targeted reading, discussion, and prop-based literacy projects improved teacher candidates’ commitment to their field and expanded their learning. It would be incumbent to follow up with these participants later in their teacher preparation program to determine long-term understandings that affected their teaching as they engaged in more formal teaching experiences, such as practicum and student teaching.

Additionally, following these PST in their first few years of teaching to determine if they integrated service-learning within their own classrooms could show how AS-L further affected their professional work. These insights may facilitate the ability of education professionals to

examine how to better prepare teacher candidates for the demands of a twenty-first century world that rewards meaningful inquiry and an opportunity to practice close observation.

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