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Gardening, Tutoring, and Service by and for Latinos: La Esperanza

Kathy Bussert-Webb

The University of Texas at Brownsville

This paper describes a community service learning (CSL) project that helped sixteen Latino/a teacher trainees in the areas of caring, social justice, bias reduction, teaching experience, personal growth, joy, and collaboration. The project was significant because the participants and the children they tutored were all Latinos who had shared similar experiences, unlike the dissimilar backgrounds between most college trainee students and the children they tutor. Participants engaged in tutoring, planting native flora, and a literacy methods course for three weeks in a South Texas neighborhood, reputedly the most economically disadvantaged neighborhood for its size in the USA.

'I can personally relate to some of these children because like them I was an immigrant into this country once and I was illegal here until I was in 8th grade'

(Pili, pseudonym, English major trainee)

Introduction

Many U.S. pre-service teachers do not question social justice issues after community service learning (CSL) perhaps because most are from White middle class backgrounds (National Center of Education Statistics, 2009; National Education Association, 2003; Boyle-Baise, 1998, 2002). Having White college students tutor minority children can even perpetuate racial and social class stereotypes (Sperling, 2007), but Pili's quote demonstrates one reason for the success of the project examined in this paper: participants shared similar backgrounds with the children they tutored (Robinson, Ward Schofield, & Steers-Wentzell, 2005). CSL involves meaningful community service being closely related to course content, consequently the common links made by participants between tutoring, gardening, course content, and life experiences clearly influenced the positive results achieved in this CSL project.

This paper examines a CSL project involving sixteen pre-service or trainee Latino/a teachers, the setting of the project, and the theoretical framework. It also addresses the qualitative research methods used, data sources, and seven emerging themes, which were caring, social justice, bias reduction, teaching, personal growth, joy, and collaboration. Comparisons between 2006 and 2007 findings are examined.

The University and CSL Project

The University of Texas at Brownsville (UTB) has existed for 17 years and is a partner with Texas Southmost College (TSC), a community college. UTB/TSC is an open-enrollment campus of 17,000 students, who seek certificates, as well as associate, bachelor, master, and doctoral degrees. Located close to the Mexican border, UTB/TSC serves mostly Latino/a students. It is primarily a commuter campus, with an average undergraduate age of 25 years. The college prepares many students for work in the Brownsville Independent School District, which has approximately 7,500 full-time employees and 50,000 students.

UTB/TSC is also part of the Texas Campus Compact, a higher-education organization for service learning and civic engagement. Civic engagement involves collective or individual actions to identify and address public concerns (American Psychological Association, 2009). With several donations from local businesses and organizations, and a \$500 UTB/TSC Center for Civic Engagement grant, a walking path was created around a church parking lot of 150 square feet or 50 square meters. The walking path/church parking lot is about a 10 minute drive north of UTB/TSC and is adjacent to an after-school tutorial agency where the CSL took place. The pre-service teachers and the children they tutored planted native flora around the parking lot/path perimeter. The county officials painted stripes around the church parking lot to delineate a walking path and signs were installed for the path name, lap/mile/kilometer distances, and warm-up and cool-down exercises.

Teaching Reading to the English Language Learner (ELL) is a required three credit hour class at UTB/TSC for pre-service mathematics, science, and English majors. Those who wish to teach primary school children may take the Reading class as a literacy course substitution in their program of study. Students can enroll on campus during the Spring or Fall, but they may also take an intensive three-week CSL version of the Reading course at the after-school tutoring agency in May. This upper division methods class has consisted of mini-lessons on ESL theories and methods, pair strategy presentations, role-

plays, and discussions. Students should leave the class knowing how to help English learners and how to apply literacy methods to their content area classes. A further additional goal is for students to match instruction and assessment with local contexts and the children's knowledge (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and for pre-service teachers to realize how structural inequalities influence the local children.

The Reading class and the CSL project were conducted between Mondays and Thursdays over the period 14 May to 2 June 2007. Under the supervision of the tutoring center director and the author-instructor, pre-service teachers tutored Esperanza children from 3:30 to 5:00 p.m. For 45 minutes, they planted native plants around the walking path across the street with the children they tutored. From 6:00 to 9:00 p.m., they participated in the author-instructor's course. For the May 2006 project, the author-instructor and another group planted butterfly and vegetable gardens across the street at the tutoring center.

Tutoring and gardening facilitated common goals between university students and the children they tutored. Each pre-service teacher created and executed three lessons involving gardening. Mathematics teachers developed lessons about estimating, comparing, and solving geometric problems; science majors created lessons on the water cycle, ecology, and botany; and English majors had children they tutored read and write about different facets of gardening. Additionally, in their written reflections students related tutoring and gardening to course concepts. Lastly, as part of the culminating celebration, students and the children they tutored had a scavenger hunt to match native plants to the butterflies they attracted.

The Research Site

A layering of inequalities is one way to envisage the research site. The per capita income of this southern Texas city is amongst the lowest in the U.S.A. and more than 40% of the population have less than a high school education (Imagine Brownsville, 2009). Within the city limits is the neighborhood of Esperanza, pseudonym for the area where the CSL project took place. According to the most recent U.S. Census (2000), Esperanza is the poorest neighborhood for its size in the U.S.A., with a per capita income of approximately \$4,000. Esperanza is the first American home for many of its 5,000 residents, about half of whom were born outside of the USA; 99 per cent of the residents are Latino/a (U.S.

Census, 2000). Lastly, less than one in five Esperanza residents over 24 years of age has graduated from high school (U.S. Census, 2000).

Esperanza is also one of the oldest U.S. *colonias*. A *colonia* is an unincorporated settlement, most of which are found in southwestern U.S.A. They lack 'basic water and sewage systems, paved roads, and safe and sanitary housing' (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, No Date, p. 1). Esperanza is approximately 50 years old and within city limits but the city has not incorporated it (U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2005). This means that Esperanza does not receive city services such as police protection or electricity. A local company, not the city or county authorities, covered the energy costs for 84 street lights paid for by the state of Texas which were never installed (Martinez, 2008).

Hope is another way to envisage the research site of the project. Despite the high poverty level, most Esperanza children attend Texas Education Agency (TEA) recognized or exemplary public school campuses, and demonstrate above average attendance, retention rates, and results in state-mandated academic tests. Esperanza also has a cultural center and several churches, and small businesses covering baked goods, groceries, meats, cell phones, beauticians, signage, tires, insurance, flooring, a pediatric clinic, day care, and several snackbars. Lastly, several universities provide health promoters, free health clinics, and tutoring.

The after-school tutorial center where the CSL project took place had been in existence for over 10 years and is a United Way, or social services, agency. Because of efforts from public school children, their parents, and the tutorial director, most children attending the tutorial center pass to the next grade level and fare well on state-mandated tests. Approximately 20 children sign in daily and give their report cards to the director or her assistant. A few Catholic high school students also tutor, as well as some undergraduates from UTB/TSC as part of required field experience hours in teacher certification classes.

Besides tutoring, the director holds Al-anon meetings in the mornings; she has also produced several musicals and dance programs with the children. A few years ago, she worked with UTB/TSC students, staff, and the author during the National Endowment for the Arts 'Big Read'. For this event, tutorial children read and produced *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960). The director also obtained scholarships for the children to attend fine arts classes and zoo summer camps. Through the U.S. National Writing Project, UTB/TSC professors and

public school teachers have organized children's writing workshops at the center; other professors have also generated photo story projects. The author has worked closely with the project director since 2004 to plan and implement the May CSL project described here.

Perspectives

Critical theory was the theoretical lens used in data gathering and analysis because the author wanted to determine if participants viewed themselves as change agents (Giroux, 1985) who realized the structural inequalities of poverty. Thus, Freire's (2000) discussion of poverty as system-based was essential. As Parker-Gwin and Mabry (1998, p. 289) state, CSL must help students to 'identify the causes that result in the need for their services'.

Access is also essential when discussing the structural conditions of poverty. As access to books and libraries is important in improving literacy (Krashen, 2009), access to exercise is important to health (Harrington & Elliot, 2009). Thus, a walking path in a safe, central location can provide access to exercise in a community with disproportionate rates of obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes (Cuellar, 1999). Esperanza also has narrow streets, no sidewalks, and no enforcement of traffic laws, which makes walking or jogging along its streets dangerous.

Boyle-Baise's research (1998) with 65 pre-service teachers also played an important role in the design and interpretation of this CSL project. Boyle-Baise found that CSL exposed her students to cultural diversity and helped them to empathize with others but she was disappointed by their lack of any critique of poverty. Perhaps the scattered CSL placements of her students and the sheltered backgrounds of most of them were responsible for their lack of critical reflection.

Sperling's (2007) critique of service learning projects aimed at teaching White students diversity was also influential in shaping the CSL project. Sperling argues that in many cases, pre-service teachers replicate deficit notions of underserved students because they are not asked to examine structural inequalities, their own racist ideologies, or children's cultural strengths (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005). Instead, seeing poverty on a case-by-case basis and helping stigmatized social groups to 'assimilate into White mainstream culture' appear to be the goals of most multicultural service learning projects (Sperling, 2007, p. 317).

Few researchers have examined the effects of ethnic similarity in cross-age tutoring dyads; however, findings indicate that ethnic composition is important: 'Research on stereotype threat suggests that minority students in same-race or same-ethnicity pairs may outperform those in mixed-ethnicity pairs because race and ethnicity are more likely to be salient in mixed dyads than in those in which both individuals are members of the same racial or ethnic group' (Robinson, Ward Schofield, & Steers-Wentzell, 2005, p.352). The author-instructor thus pondered what it would be like to create a CSL project in which Latinos/as shared backgrounds similar to those of the children they tutored.

Methods

Of the 20 student teachers enrolled, 16 agreed to participate: four males and 12 females. Like the children they tutored, all the participants were Mexican Americans. Three sought early childhood or primary school teaching certification, seven middle school or intermediate education certification, and six high school certification. Respondents included six mathematics majors, five science, two English, two bilingual, and one ESL. Ten were parents which is atypical of most U.S. undergraduates, but more common at UTB/TSC where many students begin their university careers after starting families. The participants' experiences as parents and Latinos/as may have helped them to relate to the children but few had any experiences with CSL. Of the eight had participated in CSL, six had sat in waiting rooms at doctors' offices for a few hours to read to pediatric patients. One student had tutored at an adult literacy center for a class requirement and another had participated in recycling and beach clean-ups.

During the first class on 14 May students wrote pre-reflections. All completed the same course assignments, but the participants' work was only for data analysis. Students wrote three process reflections between 15th and 29th May and a final reflection after the culminating celebration on 30th May. Each essay varied from one to six pages; the criteria were to follow directions and demonstrate effort and depth. As a member-checking device, the author emailed the findings and photos to the student participants to elicit their responses. Since the students only responded to the photos, she believes they were in agreement with the findings. The tutorial director also shared insights during and after data gathering and several colleagues provided further insights.

The author coded all data sources and organized participant quotes into themes using the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser, 1965) as a

grounded theory approach. Initially 26 themes emerged, but these were collapsed when they represented the same concept. For example, combined awareness of inequalities, knowledge of community resources, desire to continue volunteering, and plans to have future students engage in CSL were all combined within the social justice theme. Likewise, increased self esteem and personal agency were combined within the theme of personal growth.

Data Sources

Each participant's pre-reflection, three process reflections, and their final reflection were data sources, as was the focus group discussion and the small groups' presentations of visual metaphors. This reflection focus stems from Rowls and Swick (2000). Pre-reflection questions focused on participants' majors and grade level certifications; experiences with children, gardening, and SL; impressions of the site, director, and children; skills needed to tutor and garden; what they believed they would learn from the children; and anxieties or questions. Process reflections contained a description, reaction and self-reflection, and an intellectual analysis; in the latter participants made explicit connections to course concepts. For the final entry, students wrote about what they had learned about teaching and learning, CSL, the program, the children, Esperanza, and themselves. They also wrote about CSL projects that they could get their future students involved in related to their content areas.

The focus group discussion took place during the last class day. During this audio-taped discussion, those who agreed to be in the research project were invited to speak about the community walking path, the tutoring project, having a university class taught outside of university walls, and CSL. The visual metaphors, also included on the last class day, involved small groups writing and presenting their metaphors. For this activity, groups between two and four received a blank poster board cut into the shape of a walking path. Each group wrote and drew metaphors on their boards to relate the planting, walking path, and tutoring project to teaching and learning. Although the enrollment changed, planting native plants, the curriculum, and research methods for 2006 and 2007 were similar. The author-instructor added the visual metaphor heuristic and focus group discussion as an extra to the 2007 study.

Results: 2006 and 2007 Findings

The seven themes emerging from the 2007 data analysis, in no set order, were: caring, social justice, bias reduction, teaching, personal growth, joy, and collaboration. The themes between the 2006 and 2007 studies were similar, which demonstrates consistency and trustworthiness in findings. For 2007, 'joy' replaced 'hope' because on further analysis, it appeared that 'hope' overlapped the previous five themes and was not a category by itself. Collaboration was a 2007 theme that did not surface in 2006.

Theme 1: Caring

For the first emerging theme, the caring that participants experienced influenced their professional and personal development. Caring consists of contributing to, learning from, and responding to others in reciprocal, meaningful ways (Noddings, 2005). In this section, the themes discussed are: the center's welcoming ambiance, tutors as mentors, caring for the environment, and caring by children and parents.

Home-like Atmosphere

Frank (all names are pseudonyms) was attuned to the homely feel of the center, which he called a house: 'We then went outside and started digging holes where we would soon plant our palm trees. After an hour we then walked over to the house and washed our hands before eating some goodies'. Tiza also commented on the center's warm, friendly environment: 'I see this place as a home away from home'. Pinta thought likewise: 'They feel safe, loved and comfortable. I can even say that it makes the students feel at home'. These representative quotes demonstrate that participants felt the center was a place in which they and the children felt cared for.

Mentors

Participants also saw themselves as college student mentors who, like the children they tutored, were Latino/a. As Cielo wrote: 'From the stories she has told me, I can see that sometimes she might be a bit of a "trouble-maker" but with me, she has found a friend. I have learned that as a young adult I can be of great impact (sic) to these children. They look up to me and see themselves in my place. I have to set the example for my tutee and the rest of the children'. Cielo's perceptions of being a

role model and friend are consistent with role theory, or a set of attitudes and behaviors determined by the roles a person plays (Robinson, Ward Schofield, & Steers-Wentzell, 2005); the same authors also argue that tutors are more likely to become role models if they are 'closer in age' to their students, and more likely than teachers to establish friendly as opposed to authoritarian relationships with their tutees' (p. 349). As a role model and confidant, Tierra realized she could influence the child she tutored:

I told her she should wear gloves for shoveling. She didn't care to; she said she could handle it. 'That's what I love about you, you're a tough girl, very independent. Your living conditions are very healthy, it makes you a strong person. Not many girls are fortunate to be strong while being raised and end up too dependent on someone else. You keep that up'. She shared with me that she saw a pregnant girl in her school. After a pause, I exhaled, 'Keep your focus'.

Tierra affirmed the young woman's tough upbringing, but also challenged her. The commonalities between the participants and the children as bilingual Latinos/as who had grown up in similar contexts allowed learning to go deeper; the participants appeared to expend less energy on finding ways to relate and more energy on deepening connections and mentoring the children.

Caring for the Children

Participants also realized that teaching involved caring for others. Caballero stated: 'I also show my tutee that I care which, in the story about Miguel, is a key factor in reaching kids'. Caballero referred to an article read and discussed about an English learner who received caring support from two middle school or intermediate grade teachers (Rubinstein-Avila, 2003). Earl also wrote about caring for the children he tutored so that they could achieve success: 'The students we were tutoring may have had family matters of their own but I think that as teachers our job is to take them out of their everyday lives and for the time that we are together, to let them unwind and think of something else. That is in addition to making them feel that somebody cares for them and believes in their potential'.

During the focus group discussion, Elva wrote that her experience was different from a previous CSL project because she had become

attached to the children and class members and they had become part of her family. She also said that the project required a personal investment: 'It's not just a repetitive motion', she said. 'You bring life to it.' Reflections of this nature from participants demonstrated their personal investment in the project. They also often brought meals and books for the children during tutoring to demonstrate their caring attitude.

Caring for the Environment

Caring for the children may also have helped participants to care for the earth. In the visual metaphor activity different groups recorded these metaphors to symbolize the interrelationship between caring for people and caring for plants: 'A plant needs light like the children need their teacher to light their way and guide them', 'Children are like flowers, they open to warmth', and 'Children need love and care to grow strong like a tree'. Tierra, an avid recycler, created an ecology lesson to teach her students about caring for the earth:

I gave a lesson to both about the importance of recycling. I talked about where our trash goes and how 80 per cent of it can be recycled. With that, we went outside and I had them race to see who could get the most plastic from all the litter that was out there. The winner got a prize. I picked up the rest of the trash while I watched them run about as though it was an Easter egg hunt.

Lastly, Caballero connected tree planting to caring by personifying a flower he and a child planted: 'The first one we planted we called lucky, because it would be lucky if it lived and unlucky if it died. We also planted it in mulch and good soil so that it would grow big and strong'. This love and appreciation of nature and each other influenced the future teachers perhaps more than any instructional strategies they might receive. As Wink (2005, p.167) tells us, 'It's true, love trumps methods'.

Caring by Children and Parents

In an environment of caring the cared for must also reciprocate (Noddings, 2005). The children demonstrated their passion and enthusiasm in this reflection by Earl: 'I also noticed how the kids are full of energy; many of them, including my tutee, cannot lift or handle the big shovels and rakes but they go ahead and enthusiastically move dirt

with their hands. Their energy is uplifting for me.' Girasol also realized that the children cared for her and the garden:

I worked with my tutees across the street planting some palms. They were so excited and very helpful. I feel satisfied with the work we were doing in this project. I see that the students are happy to come even though they have spent seven hours in school. The first day I did not feel confident that my tutees would continue coming but now I am happy to see I was wrong. They are very helpful and respectful.

Tierra, a single mother, noticed mothers of the children volunteering: 'The one thing that stood out was that the mothers and families helped out. They really want our help and they are willing to help by feeding us so that we are comfortable. They appreciate us for helping their children'.

Theme 2: Social Justice

The caring participants also experienced social justice, defined as a fight against oppression and a desire to change society's structure to make it more just (Giroux, 1985). Thus, a systemic view of oppression takes precedence over inequalities viewed as individual problems (Freire, 2000). Social justice also involves a critical orientation to race, ethnicity, and economic inequalities (Boyle-Baise, 1998). Participants in the project not only became aware of structural inequalities and other forms of mistreatment of the earth and its inhabitants but also critiqued injustices and voiced plans for change.

Critique of Discrimination

Caring and social justice are not opposites, but are instead part of a 'new dynamical pedagogical whole' (Wink, 2005, p. 167). Lin (2001, 110) claims that 'When people sincerely care about others, they find ways to treat them justly, fairly, and equitably'. For example, Concepción's friendship with the child she tutored helped her to realize he was being treated unjustly at school: 'He is not allowed to bring home any books because they reserve them for the advanced kids. I was saddened by the lack of care from some teachers in his school. I find it hard to believe that there is a lack of focus on the teachers' part as far as educating him'. Other students noticed that some teachers either ignored Esperanza children or were mean to them after discovering where they lived.

Jesusa wrote: 'Some of these kids just need a little push but because they are poor and have problems, other people don't even pay attention to them'.

Many city officials have shunned Esperanza by not providing services. Tiza noticed how this mistreatment hurt the children: 'It is sad to see that an area that is part of the city can be shunned. In the end, the only people hurting from this type of treatment are the children, who are the future of this city'. Tiza's quote was heartening because she initially appeared terrified of Esperanza; in the first few days of class, she asked if they were safe and if county sheriffs could wait in the parking lot as they left class at 9:00 p.m. The tutorial director spoke to participants to calm them, but when they left class that night and on subsequent nights, two sheriff's cars were there. The tutorial director must have called the county sheriff to reassure participants.

Awareness and Critique of Structural Inequalities

In the last week of the course, the tutorial director, participants, and the author-instructor took a 45-minute walk through Esperanza to get a better understanding of the children's environmental context. After returning, a few expressed anger about the heat, sun, dust, and narrow streets. One participant asked, 'Why did we do this?' Paraphrasing Atticus in *To Kill a Mockingbird* (Lee, 1960), the author-instructor replied, 'I wanted you to walk around in their moccasins for a while so that you could in some small way live their experiences'. Heads nodded slowly in agreement. They understood what the children faced in coming to the center every day: heat, sun, dust, roaming dogs, no sidewalks, and narrow streets. Now they also understood the importance of the tutoring center for the children who risked these dangers to advance their education.

Girasol was dismayed to find Esperanza existed in America: 'I have learned that this is a neighborhood with many needs. It seems as if it is not part of the United States because it is not the image I have of a place that is part of the most powerful country in the world. But it is a reality and it is here. It is a part of our community and [name of program] is inviting us to continue helping it.' Sissy also claimed that Esperanza did not appear to be in a developed country: 'This neighborhood is not one I've ever walked through. To be honest I didn't even feel like I was in [city name] when we did the walk through. I could have convinced myself that I was in Matamoros by the way some of the houses were badly built ... It was a new experience for me; an eye opener'.

The conditions of Esperanza homes are not uncommon for a *colonia* where makeshift structures by nonprofessional builders are common (Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, nd.). Given that Esperanza is at least 50 years old and within the city limits, one would assume that it would have sidewalks, lighting on most streets, drinkable water, and other services necessary for the health and welfare of its residents. The absence of these amenities in the same city that they lived in surprised and angered the participants.

The following quote by Pili demonstrates an awareness of the city's neglect. It also embodies a social justice orientation or consciousness of structural inequalities, empathy, caring, and a desire to fight for justice as a teacher. Perhaps Pili grasped the concept of social justice so well because she lived in the U.S.A. without legal status until middle school. She was also intimately aware of poverty, having gone through times in which she and her siblings had nothing to eat. Pili's desire as a teacher was to help those encountering similar strife:

There were no sidewalks. The cars had to stop to let the entire group of tutors and tutees go through. ... Water drains were not underground and I also learned that the people in that neighborhood only recently received sewage draining. ... Children we tutored ... do not have all the resources that some of us take for granted. The homes are not all lifted up high enough to prevent water from entering when it rains heavily. I noticed some of the children were used to walking around in their neighborhood and that they knew where all the scary dogs were. I also noticed that some were not proud of where they lived. I can personally relate to some of these children because like them I was once an illegal immigrant in this country until I was in 8th grade. My mother never had government assistance because none of us were born in the United States, so that meant that we didn't always have something to eat. I remember looking forward to the day when we got to stand in line at the church to receive a block of yellow cheese, powdered milk, corn bread mix, and other items. I can still taste the corn bread my mother made for us. I knew that someday I would be able to look back at that and that it would motivate me to help make a change in the life of a child going through the same experiences as I did.

Pili's experiences with poverty enabled her to empathize with the children in ways that teachers from privileged circumstances would find it difficult to fathom. It is also much easier to promote justice if one has experienced injustice.

Participants' reflections of structural inequalities, such as the lack of basic services and income disparities, were significant because respondents in other studies did not notice these issues. Boyle-Baise lamented that pre-service teacher participants did not question the poverty they saw during their CSL experiences: 'A significant "nonfinding" was the lack of a critical stance toward inequality' (1998, p. 53). Boyle-Baise held her multicultural education classes at the university and had her students serve at various community centers. By contrast, holding classes at the center helped participants in the present study to feel connected to Esperanza residents. Since participants were at the center from 3:30 to 9:00 p.m. four days a week for three weeks, they, to some extent, lived the children's experiences. Because they not only tutored the children, but planted with them to create a garden, they may also have been able to associate poverty with children they came to love. Thus, the children were no longer 'the other' but the loved.

Plans for Action

The participants' awareness and anger about inequalities appeared to motivate them to engage in future CSL projects. According to Freire (2000), consciousness raising is the first step to changing oppression. This was demonstrated in Tierra's plans to convince others to help Esperanza: 'Hopefully this procedure of tutoring and volunteering spreads to other professors ... I want to share this with UTB's clubs to do the same ... I do know politicians so maybe I can bring this to their attention. I want these kids to understand that they *are part of us, not outsiders* (participant's emphasis). The historical isolation of Esperanza by City officials' who failed to incorporate it has perpetuated the *colonia's* marginalization'.

The pre-service teachers' awareness of social justice issues may also have motivated them to engage their future students in CSL. For example, Cielo wrote:

'I think that a service learning project in maths would be a program that I could volunteer for as a tutor, to help a group of low-income students who have the potential to be engineers in the future. Or, I could also aid in a project that assists students in improving their maths and science skills since these are some of the weakest subjects for most students'.

Most participants also mentioned encouraging their students to tutor children in and outside of school settings. The plans of Science majors were especially detailed and specific, perhaps because they could readily connect ecology with the gardening project.

Sissy, who had no prior CSL experience, stated in her final entry: 'I can think of several service learning projects where science can relate. One project is the beach clean-up. As the students give their time to a clean up they can learn about recycling and the negative impact that trash has on the environment'. Concepción, who had read to children in a doctor's office for her previous CSL experience, expressed a desire to create anti-littering videos with future science students and to present the videos at schools and on the local school district's television channel. She also wanted to eradicate invasive weeds and plant native flora at a local park: 'Students would research invasive weeds and then make public presentations via community meetings, newsletters to parents, and educating elementary students. The students would then write journals and share their entries with the rest of the class for discussion'.

Theme 3: Bias Reduction

This section focuses on how students altered their biases about Esperanza and its children after their CSL experience. Bias reduction is a decrease in the negative or ambivalent feelings that one has towards people or places. Because students were tutoring the children inside and gardening with them outside, their personal connections became deeper and multi-faceted. They dug, planted, mulched, and watered plants together, which, in turn, broke down barriers and transformed relationships (Robinson, Ward Schofield, & Steers-Wentzell, 2005). When the children worked informally with the pre-service teachers to create a unified product, they had fun, which lowered the children's affective filters so that more learning could take place during tutoring (Herrell & Jordan, 2008). Creating a common class product was also a motivating factor which created a community of learners (Dewey, 1938).

Changing Biases about the Colonia

Participants discovered Esperanza was not as dangerous as others had said and that nothing bad happened when they helped at the center. They also realized that the *colonia* residents had the same dreams and the same rights. As Tiza wrote:

At the beginning I was very scared about being in this neighborhood because of its reputation. I grew up near this community and I heard many stories about the things that happened there. But as the days went by my fear subsided because I knew we were doing something to help and beautify this community ... I learned that this neighborhood is part of the city I live in and that the people that live here are equal to everyone else in this city; therefore, they deserve the respect and love that every other neighborhood gets.

Cielo, like Tiza, was nervous about Esperanza on the first night of classes, but her fears soon subsided when she got acquainted with *colonia* residents:

The neighborhood where we worked is known as one with 'bad' kids, low- income families, vandalism, and drugs. Many have been scared to set foot into the area, and I won't deny that I was too in the beginning but I was given the opportunity to see the other side of this community. I met parents and kids from there with a big heart who would never hurt a fly. For reasons unknown they ended up in a neighborhood with a bad reputation, but they are not even close to being the way they are stereotyped. They are an example of why one should not judge a book by its cover.

Sissy realized that Esperanza residents were not so different from her:

This is really the first time I've taken part in a service learning project. Reflecting on this, I didn't realize how life was in a low income subdivision; the poverty and the prejudices that go along with it. You have to live it to experience it. What I mean is that until you actually get to know the people in the community and interact with them you will never know that these people are just like you and me.

Earl, like Sissy, also realized that his own neighborhood was not so different and that Esperanza's reputation was based on prejudice:

I have learned that Esperanza is not so different from my neighborhood. I come from the south part of the city and know that my neighborhood has a similar type of reputation for being dangerous and just a plain 'ghetto' for a lack of a better word ... My neighborhood has been around

for a longer time so the outward appearance is certainly better in my opinion. I know after talking to my tutees and others that they don't feel unsafe in their neighborhood. Some of the reputation is true, but most of it is just unfair infamy.

Shared experiences with Esperanza residents prevented the participants from marginalizing *colonia* residents. As Nieto and Bode (2008) state, people have commonalities, but also differences; getting learners to see how they connect to others helps them to affirm the diversity of all. Perhaps the initial fears of the participants' were based on myths designed to keep Esperanza functioning as 'the other'. Perhaps this is why no participant volunteered to work there previously and why few had driven through Esperanza before the project. It was as if the designation of 'other' caused them to believe that Esperanza was not part of the city, not part of their 'problem' (Delpit, 1995). After all, city officials had not incorporated Esperanza.

Isolating a neighborhood by not providing for its basic needs generates a depressing situation. However, Callejas discussed how he became optimistic after seeing how involved the parents were: 'The neighborhood seemed dangerous and even hopeless, but witnessing how parents and the community helped make the CSL project a success does bring me great joy and hope for this neighborhood'.

Changing Biases about Esperanza Children

Participants, such as Sissy, had biases about Esperanza children, most of whom were of Spanish origin: 'I am surprised to find Nemo is very advanced in her L2. I underestimated Nemo's intelligence, maybe even stereotyped her. I'm embarrassed for doing that, but I realize my mistake and will be more aware next time'. Others, like Concepción, explained how the CSL project helped her to see the strengths of Esperanza children and their parents (González, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) and also the importance of high expectations for all learners (Haycock, 2001):

I am a little anxious because everyone talks about the environment that they live in and how it will affect a child's learning. However, my tutee was very eager to learn and stated that he looked forward to tutoring every day. He readily answered all the questions and then I had him read the survey and complete it ... I also believed that because of his background that I would have some type of discipline problem, however,

he is so well behaved and has excellent manners. I also assumed that being an English language learner his parents would not care or bother about his education. I now realize that I was wrong ... I learned that teaching ELLs is a challenge and that caring and having high expectations motivates students to achieve at a higher level.

Theme 4: Teaching

The children's hunger for knowledge impressed the student teachers. Some participants stated that the CSL experience solidified their decisions to become teachers. They also wrote about gaining valuable teaching experience, using multiple intelligences strategies for diverse learners, and contextualized teaching.

Solidified Career Field

Many, like Cielo, realized they had chosen the correct profession: 'Now I feel the career I have chosen is what I am meant to do'. Similarly, Jesusa noticed that she had the necessary attributes to teach mathematics: 'After just a day of tutoring I learned that I can be a teacher. I didn't think that I was a patient person but after spending an hour and a half with my tutee I found that I am a calm person and that I wasn't getting frustrated with her'.

Experience Gained

Participants also wrote about the experience they gained. Earl discovered he needed to slow down and to see mathematics from a child's perspective, a theme he consistently mentioned in written work and in the focus group: 'All my future students will have their preferred way of doing problems and I need to focus on helping them using their method instead of mine'. Playa appreciated the hands-on experience in connecting strategies to student needs:

I have learned most of the strategies from the book, and I'm trying to put them into practice in my tutoring. For example, I chose the shared reading and language focus lesson strategy for the areas in which my tutees had problems; I believe they had fun working with them. I really like what I'm doing in this course because I'm working in a real academic setting where I can develop the skills that I need as a future teacher.

Tutoring gave the participants experience in challenging the interests, strengths, and needs of diverse students. Tierra wrote: 'I learned a lot from these two weeks, it shook off my anxiety about ELLs and the classroom' while Sissy said she 'never imagined there were so many ways to help students make learning connections. With this knowledge I feel empowered to assist any ELL student that I may have in my class'. Finally, Aguja learned how to reach diverse learners: 'The experience with my tutees has allowed me to understand the different backgrounds children come from and the experiences they bring to class ... We have to accommodate all the children so they will leave our classrooms learning and benefiting as much as they possibly can'.

Multiple Intelligences Strategies

Participants discussed using multiple intelligences to support diverse learners. Jesusa discussed using realia, or real-life objects that students can see, smell, and touch, as part of her lessons: 'Having an object for students to look at enhances their understanding In my lesson plan the holes we were measuring were real ... I didn't even know that some of these were strategies. I had been using some of them without even knowing what they are called'. Now she can explain the theoretical reasons for a multiple modality approach. Concepción used multiple modalities in her science lessons because her tutee loved hands-on activities and visuals. She incorporated the realia strategy into her teaching by taking a trip out to the garden to allow her tutee to see and feel the plants. She claimed that using a variety of lesson types helped her to understand students' learning styles which, in turn, helped them to achieve at a higher level. Callejas claimed that the theory underlying the concept of multiple intelligences being taught in the course would improve the participants' methods in tutoring.

Contextualized Teaching

Since students had to teach three lessons related to gardening, they were more readily able to connect the outdoors to their future teaching. Girasol wrote: 'I have learned from this project that teaching is not restricted only to activities in the classroom or in the school. Children can learn from activities like planting as the one we did here because they worked in groups and could learn about the plants, where they have to be planted, and why they are important in our life'. Participants also realized the importance of understanding the students'

environmental contexts in order to reach them. Concepción commented: 'We must remember that learning happens at school, at home, and everywhere in between As teachers, we must be role models in school and in the community, teaching as we go along the path of life rather than locking the classroom door behind us at the end of each day and thinking our job is done'.

Theme 5: Personal Growth

The fifth theme to emerge from the project was personal growth. The participants' candor concerning what they had learned about themselves was surprising. Some described increased humbleness, while others realized that they played an important role in the lives of young children. The sub-themes to emerge in this section were their personal connections with tutees and the realization that they could be change agents (Giroux, 1985).

Personal Queries and Interests

Throughout her reflections, Aguja, a Latina who planned to teach young children, realized the need to be bilingual in this 95 per cent Latino/a city, however, she had lost her ability to speak Spanish during her acculturation into the mainstream U.S. culture:

During the interviews with my two tutees I was very uncomfortable speaking Spanish. Not only were the children listening to me, but so were other people around us, including their parents. This awkward situation made me realize that even though my certification will be in ESL and not in bilingual education I *need* to be able to communicate in Spanish because in this area it is the second dominant language ... I come from an Hispanic family and I grew up speaking both English and Spanish and I have somehow lost most of my ability to speak Spanish well enough to make complete sentences for basic communication. My two tutees have left a lasting impression on me so that I am going to do my best to learn Spanish.

Caballero also did much soul searching. It seemed that working so closely with children caused him to explore his future parenting style: 'I have to admit that when the class is over I will miss the kids. My experience reminded me of what a girl I once went out with said, 'I am not sure you would be a good father; you would be more like a friend to

your kids'. I think she might be right. I view the kids as though they are a little like my own, but I think they like me because I tried to be their friend'. The author-instructor believed his sensitivity and kindness would enable him to be a wonderful father because of the care he demonstrated toward the children he tutored.

Tierra realized she was kinder and more capable of love than she believed initially: 'I have a bigger heart than I thought'. Some, like Elva said they needed to be more appreciative: 'I have learned many things about myself that I never knew. First, I never realized how sheltered I was as I grew up. I learned there is so much I have to be grateful for'. Pinta became more appreciative: '... service learning has taught me a lot. It has taught me to become more humble. It made me realize that teaching can be rewarding and that if you see a smile on a child you have made a difference'.

Some students were motivated to do more gardening after the project ended. Aguja wrote: 'I am glad to say that this project has really inspired me to spend more time outdoors working on my yard and making a vegetable garden after I am done with school'. Sissy, a science major, learned more about ecology from the program: 'I now know more about native plants and the wildlife they can attract. I'm also glad I learned the importance of Frog Fruit. I have it growing around my house and in the past I've always pulled it out because I thought it was a useless weed'.

Agency

Participants in the project also learned that they could change their worlds, which is integral to social justice (Giroux, 1985). Jesusa said: 'I have learned from [name of the VISTA volunteer] that even one person can make a difference'. It was exciting to see how students' views of themselves also changed. In her pre-reflection, Sissy wrote: 'I'm afraid I won't do a good job tutoring my tutee. I've never tutored anyone before'. In her final reflection she mentioned that she almost dropped the class, but later realized that she could achieve much. Tiza also changed from feeling nervous that her tutee would not gain anything from her in her pre-reflection comments to this comment in her final reflection: 'I was not truly comfortable teaching these students, because I did not think I had anything to offer them. But as the days went by, I realized that they enjoyed coming and that they enjoyed letting me help them, which lowered my affective filter'. Aguja, in her final reflection,

saw herself as being an effective teacher who was motivated to serve others:

I can make a difference in their lives. What I learned about myself is that I can make someone's life brighter. This is just by being there every day ready to tutor and having a smile. That's what the tutees need to see. I also learned that I have the patience to teach and that someday I will become a great teacher and change students' lives. I really enjoyed listening to the speeches given yesterday [at the conclusion of the project] and I took them to heart, especially the comment that it does not have to be a group of people, even one individual can make a difference in volunteering or lending a helping hand, and that together we can all make a significant difference.

Theme 6: Joy

The sixth theme identified was joy, defined here as fun, enjoyment, happiness, satisfaction, pride in one's work, and good memories to cherish. For example, Pili wrote: 'This is an experience that I will cherish forever'. Although all participants said the project was personally fulfilling, some said they especially enjoyed tutoring, others said they took pleasure in gardening, and some liked both. The themes covered in this section are: gardening, tutoring, and planting and teaching combined.

Gardening

Frank appeared to be in nirvana during gardening activities. He often smiled widely as carried water or pushed a wheelbarrow. He wrote: 'While being outside digging holes my tutees and I had a great deal of fun When the lesson was complete, we gathered with the whole class to finish planting our last plants over at our beautiful park'. The words 'our beautiful park' demonstrated ownership and love. Frank also stated, 'I was really joyful to see the smiles in my two students as we worked together to make the holes [for the plants]'.

Cielo equally enjoyed gardening: 'Together we enjoy digging holes and laughing at the roley polies as they curl when we invade their territory. In the sun and sweating to death, my tutee and I have established a great connection'. Concepción shared similar views: 'I saw that he [my tutee] truly loves to observe nature and was glad that he enjoys it as much I do'. Tiza, who entered knowing little about planting,

was motivated by a child's gardening enthusiasm: 'I had a great time working in the garden with [my tutee] because he was a very hard worker. He made planting fun and interesting'. Caballero, who stated that he had 'never been much into gardening' wrote later: 'I felt great planting the trees. This class has been more enjoyable than I thought [it would be]'

Tutoring

Earl enjoyed time spent with the children he tutored: 'I had a lot of fun with my two tutees these past two weeks'. Elva also enjoyed getting to know the children:

In service learning you get attached to those you are helping at a higher level. You care more about them and want to make a real difference in their lives. You have a more personal relationship with the person you are helping. You begin by learning basic facts about them and by the end you know what they like and don't like, in my case the boys had a crush on. You want to continue the time that you have with them especially since you know that it is quickly coming to an end. This experience will be one that I will cherish forever.

Planting and Tutoring Combined

Pinta enjoyed the combination of tutoring and gardening: 'I love both of them. They give me so much peace. I even think I am starting to like planting trees and flowers. It has been a really great experience'. Earlier she had said that picking up rubbish and digging holes was not the greatest thing that she liked doing but she could deal with it. She thought that it was for a good cause and would help her and the tutees in the long run. Aguja stated that gardening and tutoring uplifted her:

I feel very proud to have been involved in a project like this. We helped this community and the children who live here to provide a designated area which looks really nice to walk and exercise in and spend quality time with their families. I have really enjoyed this project of working with both of them Service learning ... has enabled me to have a very touching and rewarding experience. My life has truly been blessed by the whole experience of this class. I have never had a class like this where we (UTB students) go to class to get sweaty, dirty, tutor children, work to do something nice for the community, and have a regular class afterwards.

Theme 7: Collaboration

This section focuses on the collaboration of participants as well as children and parents. Collaboration is different than cooperative learning. The latter is a strategy with specific steps, including the teacher selecting the specific roles for group member (Herrell & Jordan, 2008) whereas the former means working well with others to create a project in which no formal roles or tasks are given to learners. For example, no formal tutor/child hierarchies or tasks existed for the planting activities.

Participants' Collaboration

Frank discussed working in unison with the children: 'While being outside digging holes my tutees and I had a great deal of fun. Since my two students really get along well with each other, we were able to accomplish a lot as a team. I was really joyful to see the smiles on my students' faces as we worked together to dig the holes'. Girasol thought that the UTB/TSC students and the children improved Esperanza: 'The children were very helpful and respectful. I have learned that with cooperative work we can beautify important places in our community, and at the same time teach our children to do it'. Girasol demonstrated a real connection to Esperanza children when she referred to them as 'our children'.

Tierra said that the child she tutored perceived the college students as kind and cooperative towards each other: 'Yesterday she told me that all the UTB students are so nice. I think she meant the way we all get along with everyone. No one is busy gossiping or being rude. I forgot that middle grade students go through that phase'. Tiza, an English major, was glad she and the child she tutored could ask questions of science major students: 'I learned that I, too, need help sometimes. I found out that I had to ask my fellow science majors for help to understand some of the questions in my tutee's homework. I felt that my tutee really appreciated that I asked for help when I did not know the answer to a question. The point of helping someone to do their homework is to guide them to the correct answer'. Mathematics major students also collaborated to explain concepts to children during tutoring.

Earl enjoyed being part of a team that embodied selflessness: 'Having time left over we team-planted with [a male participant] and his tutees,

another tree in the corner of the lot, and helped anywhere else we could afterwards'. Pili also enjoyed the collaborative project:

The tutors and tutees have been working together as a team to create a welcoming atmosphere along a walking path where people from the community can feel safe. My tutee was really looking forward to helping ... He participated in last year's gardening project and he told me that he really enjoyed it. The project has given me the opportunity to work side by side with my tutee and with other tutees as well. ... I have always enjoyed working with others and love being a part of a team that makes things happen.

Child and Parent Collaboration

Playa mentioned the way her learners were able to learn together, despite their different strengths and needs in reading: 'I liked the way [tutees names] worked cooperatively by reading aloud'. Aguja was also impressed by how the parents collaborated: 'These people get together at this facility to try and make a better life for their children and for themselves by getting involved and belonging to this group of people who make a big difference to the lives of other people'.

Implications

This section focuses on how participants valued this CSL approach over other required experiences as part of their teacher education program. The importance of an instructor's presence is also discussed.

CSL Versus Required Public School Experiences

Many participants wrote in their reflections and mentioned in the focus group discussion that they valued CSL over other required field-based experiences, which entail pre-service teachers observing for 20 hours in public school classrooms, teaching two lessons, and being evaluated for these lessons by public school mentor teachers and education professors. Earl wrote: 'I think that this type of program should be implemented in all education classes. Instead of observing all our hours in school and then performing two lessons, we could do some hours in school and tutor for the rest in programs like the one in [name of center]. I think that UTB students would get more from that than from the system that is currently in place, and give more to the communities'. Callejas also saw how this CSL program applied to formal classroom situations

because it ranged from working outdoors and planting beautiful plants around a walking path to implanting lessons to students in need of help in particular content areas. 'More students from the university should be involved in a program that gives you first-hand experience of what it is like to make a difference in a child's learning'.

Boyle-Baise (1998, p. 52) has also written about the merits of CSL over public school field experiences because CSL exposed future teachers to positive intercultural experiences that they may not otherwise have had. Placing pre-service teachers in schools serving culturally mixed or low-income populations has provided experiences with diverse youth and exemplified responsive teaching. This practice has its limitations, however, because teachers with whom prospective teachers are placed may not be in touch with local communities or may not teach in culturally sensitive ways. Boyle-Baise's discussion of teachers who may not practise culturally sensitive pedagogy matched the participants' reflections about how mean many teachers were to children when they discovered that they came from Esperanza. However, the participants in the project learned about inequities through the lenses of those being discriminated against – the children.

An Instructor's Presence

An instructor's presence during a CSL project demonstrates her/his priorities, which may motivate participating college students to take the project seriously. Every Fall and Spring, the author-instructor had her students volunteer at the center, but could only be at the site in May. Even though the reflection questions were identical, differences in student growth and understanding between the on and off site CSL classes were surprising. When students went to tutor in their own time and without the instructor, most of their reflections were superficial.

Furthermore, in a university setting, the passionate professor may be the only continuing CSL link from year to year with a project site. Even though UTB/TSC has a Center for Civic Engagement, it is limited without faculty initiative. Universities need more professors who not only engage their students in CSL, but who make long-term site commitments. From their research of 260 college students participating in community service learning, Parker-Gwin and Mabry (1998) concluded that an important element in success is a professor's long term positive relationship with the community where the service takes place.

Conclusion

CSL is not unique. Boyle-Baise (1998, 2002) has written extensively about it and the involvement of college students serving in community agencies as part of their course requirements, however, CSL research with culturally diverse college tutors is unique (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Sperling, 2007). This is because most CSL respondents in the U.S.A. are either White middle class teacher candidates or practising teachers (National Center of Education Statistics, 2009; National Education Association, 2003). It is also rare to read about a professor's sustained participation during the service element of a course.

CSL is not for those who believe White, middle class students can 'save' minority populations. Sperling (2007) states that the desire to change the educationally underserved is all about who has the power to teach and who must be 'saved'. He argues that this would be as ludicrous as having Black college students teach their wealthy White high school peers about the dangers of drug abuse and having the Black students reflect on the cultural deficits of White upper class parents. Conversely, professors who believe in social justice and power could focus on the 'funds of knowledge' of those being served (Gonzales, Moll, & Amanti, 2005) or encourage participants to take steps to fight the most 'powerful perpetrators of racism, sexism, and classism' (Sperling, 2007, p. 316). For the future this author would like to invite participants in CSL projects to write editorials for the mass media and to make presentations to civic authorities about the need to incorporate the district of Esperanza despite this being perhaps an unwelcome move for those in power who wish to keep Esperanza marginalized as an unincorporated *colonia*. In the southwest of the U.S.A. *colonias* remain beyond the radar of the politicians because many residents do not have any legal status but opportunities to redress social justice via CSL projects exist wherever people are marginalized.

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