Leaning into Discomfort: Understanding Marginalized Children and Youth through Service Learning

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Abstract

"Educational Leadership within a Service-learning Framework" is a course structured to create opportunities for developing a teaching identity through service. Its effect on our students' understanding of their experiences of marginalized children and youth involves complex issues of identity and social position. "Leaning into the discomfort" of social settings that are often unfamiliar and sometimes difficult allows students to pay attention to their own assumptions, question stereotypes, and experience empathy. A critical understanding of their own identities and of social issues that permeate schooling becomes possible.

Keywords: service-learning, marginalized children and youth, teaching identity, discomfort

Introduction

The focus of this report is to examine the effect of the University of Winnipeg (UW) Faculty of Education's service learning course, Educational Leadership within a Service-learning Framework, on education students' understanding of the experiences of marginalized children and youth. It will consider the diverse learning experiences of education students and what issues or difficulties they experience in their service learning.

The Faculty has an institutional mandate to prepare teachers to work in the inner city. The UW Faculty of Education website states: "…in addition to the preparation of pre-service teachers leading to provincial certification, the program provides an additional focus on urban inner-city education. This emphasis is in keeping with the University of Winnipeg's attention to working with and within the urban community that it is situated in and to providing access to the university for community members" (http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/education/index.html). Former President Lloyd Axworthy instituted a mandate for community learning in 2009 which initiated a variety of programs related to community access (Axworthy, 2009). The compulsory service-learning course, which began in 2008–2009, can be situated within the Axworthy mandate.

However, unlike many components in our larger study of initiatives, service learning is a course, not a program. Its function is not to provide direct access for community, like Science Kids on Campus or programs at Wii Chiiwaakanak Learning Centre. Service learning is a course embedded in an academic program. The purpose of the course is to prepare teachers who, in turn, will provide educational experiences to enhance the access to further education of inner-city students, some of whom are marginalized. The course addresses the Faculty's goals as articulated in the Dean of Education's message on the website: "In the Faculty of Education at The University of Winnipeg, we endeavour to challenge and prepare our students to become inspirational and motivating educators who will strive to meet the needs of all children and youth, including those who have been hitherto marginalized" (http://www.uwinnipeg.ca/education/index.html). By placing education students in community sites where marginalized children and youth are participants, education students begin the journey of working effectively and meaningfully with those participants.

Educational Leadership within a Service-learning Framework is a required course for first-year education students in the integrated program. The service-learning course objectives articulated in its syllabus are as follows:

> Service-learning is an educational approach that integrates service in the community with intentional learning outcomes. By providing students with an opportunity to frame theoretical learning in real-life settings, service-learning leads students to broaden their horizons and to change their perspectives on their participation as citizens of a diverse democracy.

Learning outcomes are expressed in the syllabus as outcomes of knowledge, skills, and attitudes. These outcomes include understanding the systemic causes of social problems such as poverty (knowledge), examining how teachers can foster social awareness in the classroom (skills), and developing an ethic of actively caring (attitude). Education students are expected to work towards these outcomes in order to "encourage opportunities for transformative learning to occur," as stated on the syllabus. This transformative process can be understood as transformation into the role of teacher and also as transformation towards becoming a more mature and engaged citizen. Participatory citizenship is conflated with the role of the teacher from the perspective of service learning (Sokal et al., 2016).

The course structure is fifteen hours of preparatory course work at the university, followed by forty hours of service in schools, agencies, and community centres. The education students' initial fifteen weeks of coursework introduces them to inner-city educational issues such as poverty and immigration. It also prepares them to communicate effectively at their sites and provides them with safety precautions. There are six sections of 28–35 students, three in Fall Term and three in Winter Term, taught by three instructors.

During the forty hours of service, students email weekly reflections to the instructors. Instructors attempt to visit each service-learning site once. Monitoring of students occurs through their reflections. The final class is a debriefing session after service is completed. Students' assignments are the reflections on coursework and on community service, and they also submit a portfolio. The course is pass/fail, but is based on a minimum grade of C+ to pass, like all courses in the Faculty of Education.

The service-learning course takes place in the first year of the five-year integrated education program. Part of the intention of the course is for students to gain experience working with inner-city youth which is, for most, an unfamiliar experience. The service-learning experience may encourage or detract from their commitment to becoming teachers. Professors agreed that the course is useful insofar as it assists students in deciding whether teaching is a good choice by placing them in complex teaching contexts where they experience the difficulties and satisfactions of teaching.

Like many educational activities, the design and purpose of the service-learning course is taken up by students from within their own learning and personal objectives. For many of the students observed and interviewed, the purpose of the course was primarily to experience "the role of teacher" (this phrase re-occurs in student dialogues in field notes, interviews, and focus groups). Students were purposeful about their own learning as well as their participants' learning.

The course purpose and structure addresses its student population. Most education students have limited experience with at-risk or marginalized youth when they start the integrated education program. Students in the integrated program are predominantly female, White, young, rural, and middle class (Office of Institutional Analysis, 2017). In a start-of-term survey, 56 of 59 students considered themselves privileged and only one had ever been termed "at-risk." Many students identified their own experience of schooling as predominantly positive.

First-year education students enter the program because they aspire to become part of a system that supported their identity and values. They want to assume the role of the teacher. The research questions emerge from the experiences and demographics of first-year education students: In positioning themselves as teachers, are these students bringing an understanding of marginalized youth to that position? How does the service-learning course help build that understanding?

Methods

Research in education benefits from qualitative or mixed methods (Deeley, 2015). Students' understanding of marginalized youth is shaped by their experiences in the service-learning course and those experiences were central to data collection. Data sources included a survey of students at the start and end of the course, observations at service-learning sites, and interviews and focus groups with students, site supervisors, and the service-learning coordinator.

The researcher and research assistant presented the study to students in all sections of the course during class time and obtained signed consent forms from willing students. From the group of students who consented and participated in the survey, students were invited to be interviewed. Students who consented to be observed and interviewed form a smaller sub-group of participants. From the smaller group, eleven students were selected and observed at seven different sites. Nine of those participated in interviews and/or focus groups. The accumulated data from observations and field notes, interviews, and focus groups has been analyzed and triangulated. Out of this analysis, portraits of some students have been constructed which explore aspects of their experiences in the service-learning program. This ethnographic approach is embedded in the lived experience of the students, the site supervisors, the program coordinator, and the research assistant and the researcher.

Survey Findings

The link to an online survey was provided to all students. Descriptive statistics are drawn from the surveys completed by service-learning course students. The surveys focused on student perceptions of at-risk youth and the role of educators in supporting them. In the Fall Term of 2015, 39 students out of approximately 90 students enrolled in the service-learning course's three sections completed the survey. Of those 39, 12 completed a follow-up survey after the service learning was completed. In the Winter Term of 2016, 21 out of approximately 90 students enrolled in the service learning course's three sections completed the survey. Only six completed the follow-up survey which had to be given at the end of the university year.

In the survey, students were asked to select qualities they believed would be found in at-risk youth from the following list: empathetic, disruptive, competent, unstable, obedient, creative, rebellious, disconnected, talented, and focused.

The categories chosen by the lowest percentage of students in the online survey were: empathetic, competent, talented, and focused. Unstable, rebellious, and disconnected were all selected by over 80% of respondents, suggesting most students had some negative assumptions about at-risk youth. The major difference between the pre-service and post-service survey was an increase in respondents choosing "focused" (from 16.2% to 45.5%). In the pre-service survey, education was rated as being very important for at-risk youth by 100% of the respondents and 83.3% believed the role of the teacher or youth worker to be very important in supporting positive change in at-risk youth, with 16.7% stating it was somewhat important. In the post-service survey, the role of the teacher/youth worker was seen as very important by 97.4% of respondents.

Before service, when asked whether they expected their understanding of at-risk youth would change as a result of this service learning experience, 53.8% of respondents expected some change and 46.2% expected real change. After service, 50% reported some change in understanding, 41.7% reported real change, and 8.3% reported no real change. No real change in understanding could suggest their assumptions were confirmed by the experience or that they were familiar with at-risk youth before their service experience.

Students, Sites, and Site Supervisors

Service learning is rooted in the service-learning sites. There are between 15–20 sites used in a term. Some are located in public schools; others are in social service agencies and community centres. Education students are required to spend forty hours of service at their site(s), in addition to the fifteen hours of coursework at the university, which prepare the students for their service in schools, agencies, and community centres. Students are assigned in small groups to a site with one or more site supervisors. Students have some input into which site they are assigned to, but final decisions are made by instructors. Hours are established with the site supervisor. Site supervisors observe, interact with, and assess students, but are not evaluating for course credit.

Supervisors in the focus group acknowledged that many education students were unfamiliar with inner-city experience and some were fearful about their placements. However, the supervisors witnessed growth in the students as they worked at the sites. Some students who began working with small groups developed the skills and confidence to lead a whole class. One supervisor explained that students overcame assumptions and learned that the participants who are low income "have good things in their lives." Another spoke of how the education students' learning had a ripple effect of "accidental education." The supervisor believed that students pass on their greater understanding of marginalized youth to their families.

Eleven education students were observed at seven different sites. Of the eleven, there was only one student who had significant difficulty engaging in activities with participants. The rest worked through their assignments thoroughly, sometimes initiating variation on routines. These assignments varied widely: from math and reading support in the schools, to providing meals and supervising games for children in after-

school boys and girls clubs, to English as an Additional Language and homework support at Peaceful Village sites. In school settings, the students worked one-on-one, with small groups, and with large groups supported by other adults. In all settings, the preferred focus for students was on teaching activities. In community sites and school sites, students were concerned with managing behaviour, although that was accentuated in school sites.

Students expressed a preference for working in school settings during school hours, where they could more fully explore the role of the teacher. At the boys and girls clubs or other after-school programs both the atmosphere and their role was less formal. The Peaceful Village setting was more focused on schoolwork than the other after-school programs, but less formal than working in schools. The preference for working in school settings was centred on the opportunity to work with practising teachers and to learn from them. Students identified that they learned much from their cooperating teachers. For example, they learned how to build relationships and how to laugh and be playful and still have authority. Observing classroom management by the cooperating teacher was valuable and most students stated that building relationships and making connections with the school children was instrumental in the learning process.

Education students' experiences with the children and young people they worked with were central in their discussions of the service-learning course. Observing the children and young people improve in math, reading, or the English language was validating. When students were told by participants that they would be missed, it affirmed that they had built strong relationships. One student stated that she understood how much she likes working with kids and "figuring out why they do what they do." Another said that the course had given him "tools to work with," including the understanding that teachers have authority and influence.

Service-Learning Coordinator and Course Direction

Marc Kuly became the coordinator of the service-learning program in 2015 after the retirements of Vern Barrett and Allen Appel, who had developed the program and shared that position since its inception. Central to their design was the concept of "servant-leader" (Barrett & Appel, 2013). Professor Kuly was interviewed at the end of his first year as coordinator. He reflected on both the structure and content of the program. He was particularly focused on what students could learn from the experiences in the course and how to facilitate that learning. Professor Kuly had been a classroom teacher in inner-city schools for several years before accepting a position at UW. Those experiences inform his values and give him insight into his students' experiences on site: "I want these students to come out with, sort of, an emerging critical consciousness and a sense of empathy and capacity."

The paths to develop these competencies and values are multi-layered. They begin with the physical location of the service sites where most students must deal with the discomfort of the unfamiliar. As discussed above, students in the integrated program are predominantly female, White, young, rural, middle class, and of the dominant culture. Many experience "culture shock" when they first visit their sites and

thereafter. Occasionally students decline their placement. When rejecting her proposed site, one student had stated: “I don't like those people.” “Those people” were “Other,” not people she could work with. This example manifests an extreme of Othering; however, many of the students interviewed spoke directly of differences that they had found distressing.

The students’ cultural experiences are often very different from the participants at the service-learning sites. The course is designed to assist students in the transition: “And we [instructors] support them on a number of things, because our suspicions are that their needs, generally, are going to be around understanding cultures and settings that are foreign to them—and that creates a bit of a culture shock” (instructor interview). Professor Kuly encourages students to “lean into the discomfort” and learn from it. As students experience themselves interacting in these sites and learn to see from the perspectives of their supervisors and participants, an identity shift may occur (Pratt & Danyluk, 2017; Preece, 2016). In the classes prior to starting service at the sites, instructors introduce identity construction and the need to question one’s assumptions. Kuly acknowledges that this discussion is only the beginning of a process and that it is taken up by individual students in different ways.

In addition to beginning to develop a critical consciousness of identity, students are developing a teaching identity. This re-negotiation of identity is often uncomfortable due to conflicting perspectives and the tension between what is known and familiar and what is learned in a professional context. Students’ experiences of their own schooling have to be connected to a new context. Their identification of the teacher as “expert” needs to be modified. Professor Kuly notes that students learn that they don’t always have the answer and that’s okay; they can look for it. They learn to respond in the moment: “… that's what the service learning gives them a very good taste of, the immediacy of the teaching moment.”

Kuly expressed his concern that as the beginning teacher identity is developed, it constellates into one of two roles, the saviour and the nurturer, neither of which are sustainable.

> And the one thing I try to stress to the students is, like there are two extremes that are very common, two extreme positions that are very common and unsustainable for inner-city educators. One is the saviour and the other is the... like, the, sort of, shoulder to [cry on]… the saviour who's going to swoop in and make them like me. And the other will go in and, sort of, recognise no problems in the area except for victimhood and just, you know, hug and [say] “oh my God, we're not going to teach today because we just feel so badly.” And it's like both of these things are not sustainable and not helpful. Because you have to recognise that, like... yeah, they both deny the humanity of the people that you're working with. I think that message I could get across.

Kuly affirmed his social justice orientation and how that positions his purposeful teaching: “… wanting to tune in to laying the seeds of activism and identifying a teacher identity which doesn't pretend to be

neutral…" From his perspective, the service-learning course is a context where students can learn about teaching for change.

What identities did the students take up in relation to their placements? As they positioned themselves as teachers in their site communities, how did the students understand their participants and their participants' communities? Professor Kuly described one student's experience as discovering that, within the affluent Fort Richmond suburb where the student lived, "there was another Fort Richmond" at the service-learning site which served a Manitoba housing complex.

One student, Arlene (all students' names are pseudonyms), voiced her Grandmother's concern at her being placed in an inner-city school:

> And I remember you asked did we feel safe at our schools and like I'm not from Winnipeg, I'm not even from Manitoba, so I don't know the city very well. And I live with my Grandma here and she grew up here. And I told her… I have a new volunteer placement at School X… She's like, you can't go there. And I'm like, I'm going but why?… she's like 70, so she has very stereotypical views of the North End and of First Nations people. And so she's very, she was like: You need to change your placement. And I'm like: I'm not changing my placement, they wouldn't send me somewhere that was not safe.

At the outset of her service-learning placement, Arlene is situated in conflict between Grandma's culture and the culture of the faculty. Her portrait will examine that conflict.

Grant, another service-learning student, decides to investigate his site prior to starting the placement.

> And so I plugged into my GPS and I went after school one day and I drove past [the school neighbourhood he would be placed in]. And I was absolutely just shocked at like the despair of the homes around the school. Like the school is, like there's houses all the way around on all four sides and they're all boarded up, shacked up, you know, just… as I drove past I was just, I was just in shock because it is so completely different from my—I grew up in small town, I went to probably an elementary school that is as close to a private school as you can get in the public school system. You know, it's—you know what I mean. So it was just such a shock to drive past.

From his portrait below, Grant's capacity to see differences and to see beyond the differences poverty constructs becomes apparent. There are three student portraits—Maria, Grant, and Arlene—chosen out of the eleven participants in the extended study. Although the three had many commonalities, they were chosen because their individual experiences were different. These portraits provide awareness of the tensions and the growth of students negotiating the service-learning sites.

Portraits of Service Learning Students

Maria

The first image of Maria was her crouched beside a kindergartner, reading. Maria was placed in a Kindergarten/Nursery class in an inner-city nursery to grade 8 school. The combined nursery and kindergarten meant Maria was working with two teachers and she reported that she enjoyed learning different teaching styles. As well, there were educational assistants (EAs) in the class. Maria reported that she liked her placement working with young children. She was particularly attached to child C, who had been elective mute and had opened up to her and was now speaking. Maria gave him ongoing attention, reading, conversing, and drawing him out. Maria was warm and connected with many of the children, and generous with encouragement. In the class was one student with multiple disabilities who had a fulltime EA. Maria did not work with this child nor did she refer to the child at any time, suggesting that this child's level of special needs was beyond her ability to comprehend or interact with.

Maria did not relate much to other adults in the room but found the environment as a whole to be a learning experience and felt connected to it. She stated: "It was just really good working with kids cause that was my first actual in-class ever teaching role so it was really clicking and kind of set it off." Maria emphasized how service learning allowed her to experience the role of the teacher. However, my observations and her reporting suggested that her role was limited to working one-on-one or with very small groups and she also described herself as a teacher's assistant. Within that role she felt she had learned to be strict and to guide students. She believed a teacher's role is to "be there for the student and bond." Another way she expressed this was by reiterating how important person-to-person connections are for learning as it "makes them see you actually care for them." It appears that Maria's current understanding of the teacher's role is to nurture relationships. Her teaching identity is moving towards what Professor Kuly described as the nurturer. How does she understand the students she nurtures? Before the course she thought at-risk students meant only students with special needs. Now she was aware of other kinds of at-risk students. There was no indication that she was aware of social factors that put students at risk. Her current practice was focused on individual relationships.

Arlene

The first image of Arlene was her sitting on the floor at the back of the classroom playing a math game with two grade 3 students. Interactions were formal. She was focused on the rules of the game. Her focus encouraged the children's focus. She had been tasked with providing math support to this class through a series of math games. Arlene's other responsibilities were to supervise at recess and at lunch hour and she also volunteered for the Winter Concert at her inner-city K–6 school. As well as her observed service at the school, Arlene had a second service placement in a recreational after-school program also in the inner city.

Arlene had attended a Catholic elementary school and explained that she had not experienced people of lower socioeconomic status while growing up. As described above, her grandmother had concerns about Arlene's safety at her placement site. These concerns led to Arlene's concerns about the students:

> And like one thing I thought was really interesting was like my grandma like freaked me out, she was like, I figured I was going to go to a school where like all the kids were going to be mean and like really rough. And, you know, the teachers were going to be all like really unhappy because they have to deal with rough unhappy children. And like at first all the kids were really good with me, right, like really well behaved.

Arlene's initial assumptions, based on her talks with family members, that the children would be unmanageable were not realized. She was able to connect to them through math games and activities. She enjoyed working with them and felt useful and capable. However, the differences between their experiences and hers were abundant and hard to process. Arlene stated she was happy to have encountered these differences in her service-learning placements as it would have been a "shock" to go into teaching without those experiences. She had learned that relationship building was important to teaching and that teachers need to understand individual student needs. She experienced the necessity to differentiate in her math sessions: "I tried to work with everybody but I would often spend more time with the students who were having a really hard time with, *not a really hard time, but were challenged* [emphasis added] by the games." Arlene understood that some students in the class needed more attention and support than others. She was disturbed by how students were labelled "bad" and in the quotation above she corrects herself for saying some had "a really hard time" and reframes it as some were "challenged." Arlene expressed concern about children in unsafe situations. At the same time, she explained she had learned to be "caring without caring too much." She recognized that talking to her professor and to her mother, a high school teacher, had been valuable in processing her experiences in inner-city schools.

Arlene consistently remarked on the difference between her own experience and the school children's. When she talked to her mother about Winter Concert at her school, her mom had asked her what a winter concert was and Arlene translated it as "Christmas." Arlene grappled to comprehend an unfamiliar school setting, but she was not able to articulate how cultural differences may require a changed vocabulary and approach. Similarly, absenteeism from school is perceived as a parenting problem, not contextualized in a socioeconomic framework:

> But, like they wouldn't be there. And it just like, it made me so sad because like—I used to fight with my mom to go to school in the morning and I loved school, you know. But they just didn't have the support at home or whatever. And another thing that I was not familiar with is like I get to class and there wouldn't be many people. I'm like, "oh, that's weird there's not very many people today." And they're like, "oh, it's cheque day" or "yesterday was cheque

> day" or something. And I'm like, "explain this to me because I don't get it," you know. And so I, you know, got a bit of an explanation and I'm like it just, it just made me sad.

Arlene wanted to learn about teaching and from her placements, and she believed she had learned much in both settings and from the adults she had worked with. The relationships with students were key to her learning. At the end of her service, she affirmed that her perception of at-risk students was that of an "outsider" but that her perspective was broader than it had been before the service learning.

Grant

The first image of Grant was him standing tall waiting for a guest in the school hall. He had presence and a sense of propriety. He was comfortable in the busy hallway and assured in his interactions with the visiting professor. His interactions with the students and the staff were connected, confident, and good humoured. His perceptions of the students were complicated by the unfamiliar context, as indicated above in his description of the poor housing in the neighbourhood. Another example was absenteeism, in that he had not experienced ongoing absenteeism in his own schooling.

> Because attendance, I think we talked about this, attendance was often not great, you know. The morning bell would ring and there'd be four students in the classroom and then they would slowly trickle in throughout the morning… And so then by lunch we'd have pretty much the whole class. But right at the beginning of the day there'd be like six students. So the fact that they were there, that they woke up in the morning oftentimes by themselves—and got themselves there or had their older siblings make sure that they were up and got themselves to school. I think that was a triumph in itself. *And it just took me a while to see past the hardship that was so visible* [emphasis added].

What did Grant see when he looked past the hardship, leaned into discomfort? He saw children who wanted to learn and understood that he had much to learn in order to be able to teach them. Grant was placed in an inner-city school working in three classrooms: Grade 1, Grade 2/3 split, and Grade 4. As part of a school-wide literacy program, Grant's task was to work on reading with individuals or small groups. However, his stated preference was working alongside the classroom teachers with the whole class, as he experienced the teacher role more fully and there was more variety. Grant focused on what he could learn from each of the three teachers: "So I did enjoy being in the classroom more [than being in a separate room with small group reading]; I found I learned more being able to observe classroom management skills and being able to observe the teacher like actually interact with her students." Grant also felt that working with three teachers was challenging as he had to adapt to their different teaching styles and had different roles with each teacher. Like other students, Grant was focused on his own learning as well as the children's.

> I was there from fall till like November so it was getting kind of cold in November and they didn't have any winter jackets or anything. So that was, that was hard to watch, I think, and

> hard to, you just wanted to help everyone. So that was a huge learning experience for me coming from a totally different set of experiences to just see the struggle. Also, to see the triumph and just get to watch their growth, and they did grow. So it was a really cool path. And I'm still there; I volunteer every week now.

Grant's commitment to the school was part of his choice to volunteer weekly after he completed his forty hours. Grant identifies the "struggle" of these students as a struggle with poverty. He understands poverty as an absence of material comforts and goods (clothing, housing). Grant stated he had never experienced or even witnessed such poverty until coming to this school. He recognizes his privilege, but does not connect it to the poverty he witnesses at his school site. This may be an understanding he will develop with more experience and reflection. Grant's strong identification with the role of the teacher and his desire to be respected in that role may lead him to take on a teaching identity akin to what Professor Kuly described as the saviour.

At another level, Grant may be approaching the transformative learning which the service-learning course provides opportunities for. Rather than the deficit approach (Preece, 2016) of some service-learning students, who see the participants in their programs as missing parenting, focus, or motivation, Grant sees strengths. He understands that the children's getting themselves to school is an effort and a "triumph." He sees their capability and determination.

Discussion

Professor Kuly's objective in teaching towards critical consciousness encompasses an understanding that a teacher's support of their students should "recognize the agency of the individual" and thus move beyond the roles of nurturer and saviour. Teaching critical consciousness is "… a hard thing... and yet I think the service-learning course is one of the best places to start that teaching." Kuly emphasizes that the service-learning program is part of the larger curriculum in Education and that learning to think critically about the social contexts of schooling has to be taken up throughout that larger curriculum.

Based on observations and discussions with education students, critical thinking is developing:

> It helped me in the way that I was able to, like, I learned that just because there are barriers, such as language barriers, doesn't mean that you can't help them. That you can actually help people even though there's, there may be things in the way. And then I realized as well… while *they were learning from me I was learning from them kind of* [emphasis added].

At all sites, education students are working alongside or directly with other students in the course. They may also cooperate on planning and delivery of activities. Kuly's belief is that students need to learn to work and plan collaboratively and to recognise that a teacher's role includes understanding and interacting

with social groups and communities. This would enhance their ability to comprehend the root causes of poverty and other social problems. He would like to see the course structured with more interaction and shared reflection among the students while they are at the sites, possibly on a joint website. Other developments would be to strengthen the reflective writing skills prior to going to the sites. In 2017–18, the course was to be re-structured to have a class on campus in the middle of the placement in order to debrief with the students and consider how they are relating what they have learned in the classes to their experiences at their placement sites.

Two individuals' responses to the survey question (given after completing the forty hours of service) reveal different perspectives. The question was "How has your understanding of at-risk youth changed as a result of service learning?"

> Student X: I was already aware of the many issues surrounding kids who are in difficult positions depending on family finances, etc. So my understanding hasn't changed. I have been given a better idea of how a caring person can have a positive effect on kids and adults who are having a difficult time in their life.
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> Student Y: All of my preconceptions have dissolved after taking the service-learning course. *I have grown in understanding at-risk youth by working with them* [emphasis added].

In examining the effect of the Faculty of Education's service-learning course, Educational Leadership within a Service-learning Framework, on education students' understanding of the experiences of marginalized and at-risk children and youth, there are complex issues of identity and social position to consider (Pratt & Danyluk, 2107), as well as the diverse learning experiences and prior knowledge of the education students. The course is structured to create opportunities for developing a teaching identity through the service. In addition, students experience social settings that are often unfamiliar and sometimes difficult. "Leaning into the discomfort" allows students to pay attention to their own assumptions, to question stereotypes, and to experience empathy. Reflecting on those assumptions, on stereotypes, and on experiences of empathy and then sharing those with reflections with fellow students, professors, and site supervisors is valuable. It makes possible a critical understanding of one's identity and of social issues that permeate schooling. A "pedagogy of discomfort" (Boler & Zembylas, 2003) assumes the presence of a dominant culture and requires unpacking how educational institutions partake in maintaining dominant culture. It also takes into account the emotional investment individuals have in dominant cultures, both those embedded in it and those at the margins (Block, 2013). A critical approach to the experiences of service learning may develop or transform education students' understanding of themselves and of marginalized children and youth. The extent to which students grow into a deeper understanding of teaching and learning and its social context will inform their competency and convictions as teachers supporting the education of marginalized children and youth.

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