

Service-Learning Tutoring of Newcomer Latinos: Multicultural Education at its Best?

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Abstract

Service-learning opportunities are often touted as providing effective venues for achieving the goals of multicultural education and the development of cross-cultural understanding. This qualitative investigation of three semesters of participant self-reflections from a university service-learning course providing tutoring outreach to K-12 Latino students in a newly-Latino state identified five primary thematic outcomes supportive of the appropriateness of service-learning for multicultural education, following Gay's (1994) synthesis of multicultural educational goals. These included participants' development of knowledge about Latino cultures; their own personal development; increased compassion for diverse populations and reduction of negative stereotypes towards Latino youth, families and culture; enhanced multicultural and cross-cultural competence, especially in educational techniques; and increased commitment to action and future work in service of multiculturalism and immigrant Latinos.

Introduction

Community-based service-learning programs are increasingly of growing interest both to universities across the country and to their students (see for example Campus Compact, 2005). In service-learning, "students learn not only about social issues, but also how to apply the new knowledge to action that addresses real problems in their own communities... Students receive academic credit for demonstrated knowledge in connecting their service experience with course content" (Torres & Sinton, 2000). In their review of service-learning research, Eyler et al. (2001) demonstrate that service-learning programs, when done effectively, can provide numerous positive benefits for not only the service recipients, but also the students, faculty, and institutions that sponsor and participate in these programs. Student benefits of service-learning identified in prior research include fostering personal development, stereotype reduction, and commitment to service, among other positive effects. Additionally, service-learning is often touted as a valuable tool for engaging university students with issues of privilege and diversity, and can impact and challenge their beliefs about poverty, race, and cultural diversity (Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Dunlap, 1998). As such, service-learning seems well positioned to make an important contribution to universities' multicultural education efforts (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Koulisch, 2000; O'Grady, 2000).

Setting

The present study took place in a Southern state experiencing some of the fastest growth nationally in its Latino population (Kochhar, Suro, & Tafoya, 2005). Much of this rapid growth is represented by immigrants from rural Mexico and Central America, settling in areas with little preparation or infrastructure to accommodate and support this new population's needs culturally, linguistically, and educationally (Bohon, MacPherson, & Atilas, 2005; Wainer, 2004). Additionally, with some quarter-million undocumented Latinos in this state (Kochhar et al., 2005, p. 14), issues of immigration policy and the impact of the Latino presence on educational systems, health care, public services, employment, etc., continually occupy positions of

prominence in public debate, the media, and the legislature. As authors such as O'Grady (2000) have pointed out, these broader contexts reflecting political and social justice issues have a direct and important impact on faculty, on students, and on how multicultural and service-learning education is undertaken.

Service and outreach are among the missions of the state's large public land-grant university, where the present study took place. While the university is aware of the importance of preparing its graduates to work effectively with diverse populations, a disconnect nonetheless remains between the university (including its predominantly White, affluent students) and the high-poverty African-American and Latino communities in the town housing the campus. In fact, the county housing the university is ranked on most measures as having among the highest rates of poverty in the state and the nation (Partners, 2006). With only 1-2% of the undergraduate student body identified as Latino/Hispanic, the campus demographics do not reflect the state and the community's changing make-up. As Gay points out, therefore, "[b]ecause most people in the U.S. live in ethnic and cultural enclaves, they have only tangential interactions with and superficial knowledge of people who are culturally different from themselves" (1994). Clearly, given the political, economic and demographic context surrounding these ongoing changes, university graduates regardless of their major or field would benefit from being well prepared to participate effectively in such discussions and to be cross-culturally competent in their interactions with Latinos and other new populations (Portes, 2005).

Service-Learning and Multicultural Education

As described above, service-learning theory and research posit that direct work with members of the non-university community can pay multiculturally competent dividends for students. Service-learning entails a chance not only to provide helpful interactions with other groups, but also to link those experiences to theory and to reflect on the affective and cognitive elements of the undertaking. As Christine Sleeter has noted:

Universities specialize in providing students with interpretive frameworks, but not with experience off-campus... [E]xperience in communities other than our own, and help in interpreting that experience..., is essential. Service learning, when connected with multicultural education course work, can provide such a learning experience. (Sleeter, 2000, p. 274)

Past "research suggests that service learning can assist the aims of multicultural education" (Boyle-Baise with Efiom, 2000, p. 209). However, O'Grady (2000) has pointed out how multicultural education and service-learning both occupy "contested territory"; despite sharing many goals and approaches, the two do not necessarily align seamlessly (Densmore, 2000). Indeed, multicultural education itself comprises a range of orientations towards the field's assumptions and goals, as models such as Sleeter and Grant's (1987) catalog of approaches to multicultural education amply demonstrate. How can the tenets of multicultural education be consolidated in order to help assess their aptness for evaluating service-learning outcomes? In her synthesis of multicultural educational scholarship, Geneva Gay traces points of commonality across the spectrum of multicultural education definitions. She notes:

Multiculturalists explicitly value diversity and agree that the specific content, structures, and practices employed in achieving multicultural education will differ depending on the setting. Therefore, it is useful for educators to develop their own definitions of

multicultural education, within the general boundaries outlined above, to fit their specific needs, rather than imposing a universal structure to implement multicultural education. [...] The expected outcomes of multicultural education are embedded in its definitions, justification, and assumptions, and they exhibit some clearly discernible patterns. While specific goals and related objectives are quite numerous, and vary according to contextual factors such as school settings, audiences, timing, purposes, and perspectives, they fall into seven general clusters. They cover all three domains of learning (cognitive, affective, and action) and incorporate both the intrinsic (ends) and instrumental (means) values of multicultural education. These goal clusters are ethnic and cultural literacy, personal development, attitude and values clarification, multicultural social competence, basic skills proficiency, educational equity and excellence, and empowerment for societal reform. (1994)

With Gay's (1994) ideas serving as a conceptual framework, the present study investigates the multicultural educational outcomes associated with a community-based K-12 service-learning tutoring program working with Latino children. While fulfilling the service-learning side of the equation, e.g. "collaboration with the community, the importance of reflection, active learning, and the development of a sense of caring" (O'Grady, 2000, p. 8), the program described did not have an explicit multicultural or social-justice orientation. To what extent do student reflections on their participation and its outcomes nonetheless reflect these issues?

Methods and Data Sources

The present study investigated the impact of the service-learning course and experience for upper-division university undergraduate students (N=46) in three semesters (Fall 2005, Spring 2006, Fall 2006) of the same service-learning course taught by the researcher at a large, public university. As Jordan (1994) and others have found that quantitative pre-/post-tests may not capture significant change on measures of students' attitudes towards diversity in service-learning, the study employed descriptive qualitative methodology.

Participants represented a diverse cross section of the university community: while participants were predominantly White (n=30) and female (n=37), each course also included tutors of Latino (n=4), Asian (n=6), and African-American (n=6) backgrounds. Although the course was housed in the college of education, participants were drawn from a broad range of majors, e.g., Spanish (n=3), sociology and psychology (n=7), sciences (n=10), and business (n=11), with few actual education majors (n=3).

Depending on the semester, the service-learning course met either once per week or twice per month (a total of four hours per month), and included readings and class discussions focused on tutoring strategies, math and literacy support, principles of language acquisition and bilingual development, and similar topics. Unlike the more frequent "add-on" of service-learning via alternate assignments within the context of a broader course, this course was specifically identified as a service-learning tutoring course, providing a "balanced" emphasis on both the service and the learning outcomes (Furco, 1996), with grades based on participation in tutoring, course participation, and reflective and evaluative writings. Participants had therefore self-selected for participation in service-learning.

The service-learning tutoring programs were sponsored and administered by three community organizations: a small Boys and Girls Club center, a Catholic-sponsored outreach program in a trailer park, and a community library branch in the same trailer park, all in the same city as the university. The population served at these programs was characterized by relatively recent arrivals to the state and the U.S., living in poverty in Latino enclave neighborhoods. Students tutored at one or more of these venues, one to three times per week for the semester, working predominantly with elementary-aged Latino students with different levels of academic preparation and English proficiency. Activities at each session entailed homework help and reading to and with children, and in some cases also included leading or participating in indoor and outdoor educational and socializing games, art, science enrichment, and computer activities. Each program provided tutor orientation and supervision as well as administrative support (e.g., tracking of tutor participation and attendance).

Data included reflections submitted by students biweekly throughout the course as part of their assignments, as well as course-end small-group open-ended focus group discussions and written feedback. Bi-weekly reflections were submitted electronically to the course WebCT website, and responded to prompts that included opportunities to describe their experiences tutoring and their affective responses, and to link their experiences and thoughts to course discussions, lectures, and readings. The final reflections specifically asked how participation affected the students (skills, attitudes and beliefs) as well as for any learning events or recommendations for program improvement, and these questions were also included in the group discussions.

Student data were entered into Atlas.ti, coded thematically by graduate students and the researcher, then categorized and analyzed further for emergent themes relevant to the impact of the experience on the participants. Next, these clusters were referenced with Gay's (1994) seven major "goal clusters" for multicultural education: developing ethnic and cultural literacy; personal development; attitude and values clarification; multicultural social competence; basic skills proficiency; educational equity and excellence; and empowerment for societal reform.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis revealed that students identified five primary outcomes related to their participation in the service-learning programs, each of which can be mapped directly to one of Gay's (1994) multicultural goal clusters: increased awareness of Latino cultures; development of personal relationships with children from the community; reduction of stereotypes and increased compassion; improved ability to work with children from the Latino community; and commitment to action and social justice.

These outcomes are triangulated well with written, open-ended feedback (only available from one semester, Fall 2006) from students responding to the end-of-course prompt "The top three things I learned through this service-learning were:" all (19) students' responses matched these categories. Table 1 presents the results of their learning outcomes. Each of these themes was also prevalent in students' reflections each semester, as described below.

Table 1: Multicultural Learning Outcomes

Course Learning Outcome	Multicultural Education Goals (Gay, 1994)	Number of items (N=49; 19 students)
increased knowledge of Latino culture	developing ethnic and cultural literacy	11
increased knowledge of Latino education and barriers	developing ethnic and cultural literacy	4
development of patience	personal development	8
importance of establishing relationships with tutees	personal development	2
development of caring/cultural sensitivity	attitude and values clarification	4
developing effective tutoring and teaching strategies	multicultural social competence	14
improved student management	multicultural social competence	5
“importance of giving back”	empowerment for societal reform	1

Increased Cultural Competence and Awareness

The first multicultural educational goal cluster identified by Gay (1994) in her synthesis of multicultural education scholarship is “developing ethnic and cultural literacy,” which she characterizes as “to learn about the historical backgrounds, languages, cultural characteristics, contributions, critical events, significant individuals, and social, political, and economic conditions” of various groups. Tutors in the service-learning programs participated in, and took leadership roles in planning, various activities to promote increased awareness of Latino cultures, such as a Cesar Chavez day, Day of the Dead celebrations, and other Mexican holiday activities. While geared towards the children participating in the programs, such events also provided important cultural awareness and learning opportunities for the university students. Some of the programs offered on-going cultural or artistic activities designed to promote biculturalism and bilingualism among the children, and many tutors also took part, allowing for reflection on issues such as these: “Sadly, I feel like our American culture too many times degrades the Mexican culture, and I can tell that the students sometimes feel like they are less. I do feel like the culture days that are every Friday are wonderful because the kids really are going to need to feel connected to Mexico even if they never return.”

Course participants specifically cited several ways they were developing increased “knowledge about the history, life, and culture of ethnic groups” (Gay, 1994) they were working with: “As the semester has progressed, the readings that we have done have taught me a lot of things that I was unfamiliar with having to do with the Hispanic culture. I realize that there is a learning process that differs for children that are learning another language.... The more a tutor is familiar with the cultural difference the better able that tutor is to deal with culturally diverse students.” Another tutor commented, “After working with the students that attend [the program], I feel that my eyes have been opened wider to the Latino culture.”

Tutors expressed their attitudes of curiosity and openness to learning Spanish and to modeling and encouraging bilingualism in the Latino children they worked with: “Not only have I sharpened my Spanish speaking and comprehension skills, but also learned to appreciate and respect the culture and values of the Latino community.” Another commented, “Knowledge of languages different than your native tongue allows you to fully participate in a different culture, or maybe even many different cultures. I believe that one’s life can be so much more fulfilling if they have a deep understanding for something other than their own culture and language.”

Through their opportunities to engage in readings, reflections and discussions about bilingualism, cultural influences on education, and other topics, tutors demonstrated their ability to synthesize and extend their understanding, moving beyond shallower understandings of “culture.” One tutor, for instance, reflected that the student she worked with “attended school in Mexico City and from what she tells me and from noticing her work ethic, it seems like she is used to having a more strict and advanced education. From what I know about the schools in Mexico City, unlike the educational system in the ranchos or in the more rural areas, the students who do attend school receive a good education. I think that this is one of the reasons why [she] is such a hard worker and has such a strong work ethic.” Participants also struggled with the implications of such programs on language loss, for instance, “These students are getting a great grasp on English but in the process are losing their native tongue.”

As Howard (2007) suggests, cultural competence also entails the “ability to form authentic and effective relationships across differences” (p. 18). This aspect is fleshed out more fully in the next learning outcome identified by the service-learning participants.

Personal Development and Relationships

Gay notes, “a better sense of self contributes to the overall intellectual, academic, and social achievement of students” (1994); while her multicultural education goal of personal development for students is more oriented towards promoting positive self-concept for minority groups, participants in this service-learning program identified several aspects of their own personal development through the experience. In particular, the university students identified the transformational value of building relationships with the tutees and community members: “Upon first coming into the program, I had some doubts on whether I would be able to connect with the kids... The more and more I worked with the kids, the more I felt like a part of their world.”

Another commented passionately in the semester’s final reflection: “I cried on my last day of tutoring; I am not quite sure how I am going to get through the summer without seeing them. These kids have become an important part of me, and I am greatly appreciative for this program for putting such beautiful people in my life.” Participant quotes reflect the university students’ development of increasing tolerance and compassion through their relationships with people different from them, something which does not necessarily happen in the absence of meaningful interaction with the community. In the words of one participant, “You really get involved in their school life and their real life.” Another tutor specifically reflected, “I guess I [had] never actually stepped out of my little suburban... box and intimately known anyone dissimilar,” while another noted, “The biggest change [participation] has had upon me is the realization that there is life outside of the college bubble that I have been a part of for 4 years.”

As the university students got to know their tutees and work with them over time, their understanding of the children also changed: “I believe that I developed authentic, trusting relationships with the students that I worked with. I think that this attention and commitment translated into their attitudes about working with me. I found that students, who at first struggled to stay motivated after a long day at school, would give their all when they knew that I was there for them. It was inspiring to experience this appreciation and fostered an incredible reciprocal relationship. It was inspiring to experience success after struggle with students. I think that the positive attitude that I brought each day translated into the students’ positive attitude and in return was rewarding for all of us.”

Another theme which emerged from the reflections was the extent to which participating in the programs provided the opportunity for tutors to develop positive personal characteristics, most notably, patience—specifically cited by at least 16 participants. For example, one tutor reflected, “In addition to the children benefiting, I am also benefiting. I have gained a lot more patience”; another agreed, “Working with these kids has made me more patient... Looking back I think working with these kids has improved my people skills”. One tutor noted, “[the children] have forced me to develop a higher level of tolerance, which is an area of my personality that I needed to improve”; another commented, “They have taught me the meaning of perseverance and to never give up.” Likewise, “They have also generally raised my level of compassion.” Clearly, participants found that the service-learning tutoring program provided both the motivation and the means for important personal development as individuals and as students.

Attitude Change and Stereotype Reduction

Gay (1994) names “attitudes and value clarification” as an important goal of multicultural education, including “confronting prejudices, stereotypes, ethnocentrism, and racism” as well as “developing new, more positive, and enriched ethnic attitudes, beliefs, and values”. While prior research on service-learning experiences has suggested that “the process of confirmation or disconfirmation [of participants’ prior beliefs] is not simple” (Boyle-Baise with Eflom, 2000, p. 223), this learning outcome was one of the most evident themes in the course participants’ reflections, surfacing repeatedly throughout their reflections: “The greatest impact that tutoring had on me was through the breaking down of stereotypes.” The university students explicitly described how their views and stereotypes of Latinos changed through their service-learning experience: “Before I began, I was one of those who stereotyped Hispanic students as ones who were not willing to learn and lack any future goals and ambitions. My attitude has changed, however...” Another tutor noted, “I went into this program with many preconceived notions about how this community would appear and operate... Being a part of this community, and seeing what positive things go on has really opened my eyes and taught me many things.” Many tutors completed the experience with a newfound sense of understanding and appreciation for members of the Latino community and their values: “Being around children and families of a different culture also has changed my beliefs and attitudes of Mexican immigrants in America. As guilty as I am to admit, I had biases and stereotypes towards Mexican-Americans before I took this class last semester. But being around these wonderful families and especially the children has changed my mind about many prejudices that I previously held.”

Sleeter (2000) has suggested as a key point of overlap between service-learning and multicultural education, the importance of understanding the strengths of a community and its members,

something which often requires the dismantling of stereotypes: “Multicultural education must rest on an assets model of children and their communities, rather than on a deficit model” (p. 265). Service-learning experiences can effectively provide “a venue to explore notions of similarity and diversity, closeness and distance” (Boyle-Baise with Eflom, 2000, p. 223). Indeed, several participants found that the experience of direct work with the children allowed them to see individual differences within the “Latino” group label as well as similarities across ethnic and socioeconomic lines, as with a tutor who acknowledged, “I realize now that I was entering this situation with an elevated sense of my own superiority and a rather imprudent sense of pity. However, I was quickly grounded by their humanness.” One participant clarified her changing attitude: “I have realized that [Latinos] are really just like other kids. Some are really smart and can do their math homework in a snap; others have more trouble. This has changed my previous views...” Another commented, “I have learned to leave the stereotypes behind when I am tutoring because they don’t apply to each child. I try to focus on that child and what they need help w[ith] because each child has a different potential.” Yet another noted, “Most everyone at [the university] has only a limited perspective to lower-class type lifestyles, and I think that these perspectives are often skewed. I know, personally, that I thought the children would somehow be different. But they aren’t. They are just normal, happy, energetic, eager to learn kids. The fact that they do not have as much as other children does not make them different.” As Boyle-Baise and Sleeter (2000) found with their study of pre-service teachers working with African-American youth, participant attitudes did not necessarily “transform” but rather “shifted from perceptions of [diverse] children as troubled to perceptions of children as ‘all alike’” (p. 39).

While it is possible to suggest that such a “color-blind” rhetoric (“they’re just like us”) does not appropriately acknowledge the structural inequalities and cultural differences that do exist in our society and schools (Delpit, 1994), the breaking down of monolithic deficit assumptions about particular groups of students is an important step (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000). As one of the participants said, “I thought that all of the students were going to need a lot of help or that they were not as smart as other students their age because they are underprivileged and have limited resources. I now realize that is not the case for all of the students. Although some need extra help, many of them are really smart and can do the work.” Another admitted, “I’m biased toward thinking these kids are struggling with English but as it were, they are proficient English speakers and don’t need to be coddled and babied just because they are Hispanic.” Some participants did begin to express more sophisticated understanding of some of the structural inequities present, as with the tutor who noted, “I believe that these children have been labeled the ‘bad kids,’ the ‘problem children,’ and the ‘slow ones.’ Not intentionally, but as a result of their status as poor and immigrants, they have been made to be outsiders; they have been alienated.” Another tutor commented, “The economic gaps are obvious when you go to [the program] and see what [it] and elementary schools lack.”

Cross-Cultural Skill Development

Another important goal of multicultural education from Gay’s (1994) survey is for “students [to] learn how to interact with and understand people who are ethnically, racially, and culturally different from themselves.” Perhaps unsurprisingly, given that the focus of this service-learning was on tutoring children, participants identified as a primary learning outcome the development of skill and confidence in working effectively with Latino children. Tutors commented, “I definitely believe that I have become a better tutor as the semester progressed” and “I feel that I

improved quite a lot in my tutoring abilities.” While Boyle-Baise (with Efiom, 2000) found that for some service-learning participants in multicultural educational settings “the desire to know [more] was often couched in behavioral rather than in cultural terms” (p. 223), tutors in the present study did not focus only on issues of “managing” presumed difficult children, but were able to deepen their knowledge and their curiosity: “Now, I’ve come to know some more about young learners. Different kids have different learning styles.” Participants also recognized the cross-cultural implications of their experience, as with the tutor who noted, “Not only have I learned a lot about how to successfully tutor children, specifically Latinos, I have also learned more about the Latino community as a whole.” One participant summed it up concisely: “I think that this tutoring opportunity that we are taking a part of is a way for us to learn through experience about other cultures.”

Such multicultural competence was also identified by the tutors as potentially professionally valuable: “As a future teacher, I have gained incredible insight into the cultural influences and differences that affect many of the children and families I will encounter in my classroom. Tutoring at [program] has given me first-hand, one-on-one experience that leads me to a deeper understanding of the social, cultural, and academic challenges faced by second language learners. I have gained an appreciation for the cross-cultural, dual identity that many children and families struggle with.” Another noted, “I honestly feel like tutoring so much this semester (and really enjoying it) has helped me choose a major that will work more with children.” Though most participants were not future teachers, they still recognized the value of their developing multicultural competence: “I think hands-on experience such as ours is a way to overcome cross-cultural barriers that exist whether or not one is going into the teaching profession.” In fact, Portes (2005) has likewise argued for the critical need for all university students (as future businesspeople, politicians, voters, and community leaders) to experience hands-on work in multicultural settings and to understand issues such as the educational achievement gap through direct experience.

Commitment to Service and Action

Importantly, participants also noted that their service-learning experience led to additional commitment to action on behalf of the Latino community beyond the service-learning course. This aligns well with Gay’s final multicultural education goal of “personal empowerment for social reform... so that [students] can become social change agents who are committed to reforming society” (1994). Most participants in the service-learning tutoring recognized and reflected on the direct social-justice impact of their work with the children, as for the participant who stated, “It may sound cliché, but these children really are the future of America. If we help these children now, they will benefit our country, and themselves, even more in the years to come.”

Participants also repeatedly identified their growing understanding of the complexity of broader political and social issues such as immigration, coupled with a commitment to act upon their new awareness: “My attitudes have changed about immigration over the course of the semester. Before tutoring, I was fairly indifferent to the immigration policies in the United States. But, after meeting so many wonderful students and people in the Latino community, I have changed my opinions about immigration in the United States.” The experience of work with the Latino community put a human face on what had been for many an abstract concept: “For so long,

immigration, to me, had been just an issue in our society; now, immigration has faces and names because these kids occupy a part of my heart, and every news story about immigration becomes, to me, a question of how certain policies and measures will effect the kids that I care about so deeply.” Another tutor commented, “This experience has really affected how I feel about immigration reform. Many people back home want to ‘send them back.’ Now I realize how ignorant that point of view really is. I would like for some of those people to look in the eyes of the kids I have tutored and tell them that they have to leave America, or tell them that their parents cannot buy them food because they are not allowed to get a job.”

For many students the impact moved beyond merely a shift in perspective and attitude, to a direct action orientation: “Through [the program] I have gotten to know the kids, seen where some of them live and recognize the plights of some of the children, and it makes me want to help people.” Another noted, “I hope that I will continue to help these and other children.” An extended quote shows the effect that program participation had on some students: “When I made the presentation to my sorority recruiting tutors and talking about the injustices and hard times for immigrants in our country right now, I became very emotional and even teared up... I have found myself talking about the children that we tutor and the many others like them to my family, friends, and even strangers. Although I sometimes find myself discouraged when I see all the negatives towards these people in our culture, I must find hope in uniting with others that want to help as well. I must continue to spread awareness of these problems and support organizations working against them.”

The commitment to service took multiple forms allowing tutors to extend their academic learning as well. One student “actually went a parent/teacher conference in [local] Elementary School, and it was actually kind of fun.” Another participant announced “I have also attended events tied to the tutoring organizations but not directly related that have taught me so much about the Latino culture... I also went to a couple of panels on immigration.” Finally, one tutor reflected on how program participation resulted in her “new-found desire to participate in community service. This is undoubtedly the most pronounced, direct result of my tutoring. Around this time in years before I’ve squirmed and fought my way out of holiday volunteer work... Now, I run to sign up with my church effort to feed the less privileged and I’m sincerely disappointed in the fact that Student Activities won’t let me host a canned food drive in the Plaza.”

Conclusions

Service-learning programs and theory may well fall short of the far-reaching goals of social-reconstructionist multicultural education requiring an “explicitly political stance” to foster social justice and community change (O’Grady, 2000, p. 16; Densmore, 2000). Nonetheless, the present study suggests that there are substantive and important multicultural education outcomes for participants, even when the service-learning course and experience are not specifically focused on social or personal transformation. As Bennett (2007) points out, effective multicultural education provides opportunities for the integration of cultural groups, encourages positive expectations towards other groups, and creates learning environments supportive of positive interracial contact. Of Gay’s (1994) seven “major goals” for multicultural education, only two more geared towards K-12 outcomes—basic skill proficiency, and educational equity and excellence—were not explicitly found in the learning outcomes identified by the community

tutoring program participants in this study. (In fact, a case can be made that participation in experiences such as service-learning does involve both these goals; however, the level of analysis for these two must go beyond the data available for analysis in the present study.)

Given the rapid growth of Latino populations in many parts of the country that were not previously traditional destinations for Latino immigration, it is important to consider how universities—with limited resources—can provide effective venues for students to learn about, work with, and support such groups. “The expectations for higher education to graduate students who are knowledgeable, skilled, and critical thinkers and who can also effectively live and work in a growing ethnic and culturally diverse society is higher than ever before” (Simmons & Roberts-Weah, 2000, p. 189). By engaging in service-learning, university students such as those in the present study—the next generation of leaders in government, business, education and social services in the state—have meaningful opportunities to get beyond the hyperbole of public debate about immigrants and “others,” to diminish their acceptance of popular, negative stereotypes, to develop skills in interacting and communicating cross-culturally, and to commit themselves to positive action. “When it is guided carefully, such [community-based] learning can provide the experiential basis for constructing a view of children and their families that recognizes their strengths, and that situates community problems within a larger network of power relations” (Sleeter, 2000, p. 264). As this study’s results demonstrated, university students’ participation in service-learning can also help create opportunities for personal growth and for more effective intercultural understanding, leading to a more truly multicultural educational experience for these participants that benefits the state, the university, the students, and the Latino community itself. In the words of one participant, “I truly believe that there is no greater education than service learning; experience such as this, is something you could never learn from text books or multiple choice exams. You are able to learn and grow as a student while doing some good in our community and helping make the future brighter for many students; what more could you ask for?”

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