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To cite this article: Janet L. Losser, Paul Caldarella, Sharon J. Black & P. Elizabeth Pate (2018) Factors affecting service learning implementation: a comparison of novice and veteran teachers, *Teachers and Teaching*, 24:6, 659-672, DOI: [10.1080/13540602.2018.1464906](https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1464906)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2018.1464906>



Published online: 25 Apr 2018.



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Factors affecting service learning implementation: a comparison of novice and veteran teachers

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigated factors that facilitate and hinder implementation of service learning for novice and veteran teachers. We conducted case studies of three novice teachers and three veteran teachers, using a cross-case analysis within and across groups. Confirming prior research, facilitating factors included teachers' knowledge of service learning and availability of time for planning and enacting it. Some novel factors contributing to the literature included student characteristics and common core pressures. Findings indicated differing needs of novice and veteran teachers for learning about and implementing service learning. Study implications and limitations are addressed.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 5 January 2017
Accepted 11 April 2018

KEYWORDS

Service learning; novice teachers; experienced teachers

Service learning can be both philosophy and methodology: a philosophy grounded in experiential learning and a methodology for applying students' academic skills in community service (Schine, 1997). Considering this methodology involves examining education purposes, student needs, and teaching philosophy. For students' test preparation, traditional practices may suffice. However, educators' purposes go beyond covering concepts (McClung, 2013), as do perspectives of the public, teacher educators, researchers, and politicians (Twombly, 2014) – such desires justify innovative methods. Slavin (2015) labeled teachers who focus on students' needs and problem-solving abilities as *intentional teachers*. Intentional teaching enables students to build their knowledge as they work collaboratively to discover significant ideas and address challenging issues, preparing for life-long learning outside the classroom (McClung, 2013).

Benefits and challenges

In today's diverse classrooms, it can be challenging to unpack some of the complexities associated with service learning practice. Chong (2014) shared that the term *service learning* can be defined and implemented in a variety of ways. For the purposes of this research, we used the definition of Bringle and Hatcher (1995, p. 112) of service learning as;

A type of experiential learning that is mutually beneficial by design, allowing students to apply their learning outside of the classroom while genuinely addressing community issues. It is a course-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility.

Researchers describe several benefits to service learning (e.g. Celio, Durlak, & Dymnicki, 2011). Students benefit academically, personally, and civically by participating in service learning: completing schoolwork more accurately (Melchior, 1998), achieving higher test scores and better grades (Billig, 2000), engaging in higher-level thinking, increasing in academic motivation, and developing problem-solving skills (Zeldin & Tarlov, 1997). In their personal development students feel more group connection and less alienation than in traditional learning experiences (Fiske, 2002), with more sense of belonging and greater social competence than non-participants (Carver, 1997). Service learning both reinforces and challenges students' values and beliefs, requiring them to take responsibility (Conrad & Hedin, 1991). Communication skills improve, contributing to increased self-esteem and personal efficacy as students take risks and explore new roles and interests (Tucker & McCarthy, 2001), learn about career opportunities, and become authorities in their areas of service, thus gaining respect from peers (Gibson-Carter & Hiott, 1998).

Many have commented on the sense of civic responsibility gained through service learning (Berkas, 1997; Melchior, 1998), which increases students' knowledge of and commitment to the community, feelings of altruism (Fiske, 2002), spirit of caring, and aptitude for lifetime service (Anderson, 1991). In a nationwide survey of 4000 participants, 75% reported learning more in service learning classes than in others, discussing the 'significance' of the experience, and asking fundamental questions like 'Who am I? Where am I going? Is there any point to it all?' (Conrad & Hedin, 1991, p. 749).

Teachers also benefit from service learning opportunities to collaborate and work with motivated students with fewer behavioral problems (Bowers-Sipe, 2001). Schools and communities benefit from educator collaboration and from the creativity and enthusiasm of youth, as well as receiving direct aid from students invested in community service (Bowers-Sipe, 2001). The National Commission on Service-Learning (2002) noted stronger connections between teachers and students, between students and their school, and between schools and communities, including positive citizen perceptions of youth (Fiske, 2002).

While there are numerous benefits of service learning, there are also potential challenges. The academic calendar can limit students' opportunities for service learning during the summer (Honnett & Poulson, 1989), and time constraints may limit the kinds of projects they can do (Grossman, 2005). Marullo, Moayed, and Cooke (2009) warned that socially uninformed service learning projects may cause students to negatively judge the community they serve; the risk increases when students are 'turned loose' with insufficient university oversight (McKay & Rozee, 2004). According to Strand (2000), limited preparation and insufficient close mentoring throughout the service learning experience may leave negative stereotypes and misconceptions that can cause harm. Despite such challenges, service learning has the potential to have a positive impact on student learning and community involvement.

Deterrents and facilitators

Although beneficial outcomes outnumber implementation challenges, service learning is implemented in fewer than 30% of K-12 schools (Furco, Root, & Furco, 2010). Deterrents include pervasive pressures for test scores, which foster rote memorization rather than independent thinking and reasoning or love for learning (McClung, 2013; Twombly, 2014). Carter (1997) lamented, ‘Our vision of the kinds of schools we want often collides with the daily tasks of surviving in the schools we have inherited’ (p. 69). Teachers may not attempt service learning if professional development does not provide awareness or encourage commitment (Greenberg, Domitrovich, Graczyk, & Zins, 2001). The time service learning requires can also challenge classroom scheduling (Carter, 1997; Wade, 1997). Tasks like coordinating community contacts to ensure collaboration and strengthen relationships increase demands on teacher time (Schine, 1997). Service learning is further hindered by lack of teacher support networks, with inadequate principal support being particularly discouraging (Wade, Anderson, Yarbrough, Erickson, & Kromer, 1999). Another challenge is access to resources (Scales & Koppelman, 1997), particularly necessary funding (Wade et al., 1999).

These hindering factors are balanced by facilitating factors. Findings show experienced teachers more inclined to implement service learning (Seitsinger & Felner, 2000) and educators with more personal service learning experience more likely to recognize its importance (Magelssen, 1997). Many are more enthusiastic when service to a community or church is involved, even with minimal connection to academics (Wade, 1997). Additionally, alignment of a teacher’s perception of service learning with best practice contributes to successful implementation (Schine, 1997); a school principal who understands service learning and makes it part of the school improvement plan is even more important (Kinsley, 1997). Some factors facilitate or hinder according to adequacy: teacher knowledge, time, support system, social trust among colleagues, and access to needed resources or funding.

Novice and veteran teachers also respond differently to pressures of teaching. Teachers in their first years in the profession are often designated as *novices* (Mulder, 2016), with those who have taught for more than three years classified as *veterans* (Adjei-Boateng & Amapdu, 2018). Experienced teachers tend to make decisions based on students’ needs: including adaptations to learning styles, approaches to enhance lessons, and strategies to promote student participation (Bailey, 1996), perhaps because their basic skills become spontaneous so they can focus on unpredictable factors (Leinhardt, Weidman, & Hammond, 1987), including new methodologies. Many novice teachers, unprepared for classroom realities, have difficulty addressing students’ individual needs (Johnson, 1996) and are less likely to respond effectively to unexpected challenges of new strategies.

Purpose

This qualitative study investigated novice and veteran teachers’ similarities and differences regarding service learning implementation. While research has identified factors that facilitate or hinder implementation, comparing novice and veteran teachers’ experiences has yet to be addressed. Two research questions guided this study:

- What factors do novice and veteran teachers perceive as facilitating classroom service learning?
- What factors do novice and veteran teachers perceive as hindering classroom service learning?

Methods

Design

Data were gathered, interpreted, and analyzed through collective case study design, with multiple cases considered in one overall study (Johnson, 2014). Three novice teachers and three veteran teachers, who had completed a service learning course and were teaching in public schools, shared insights, and explanations concerning factors they perceived as enhancing or hindering service learning implementation, offering suggestions for research and teaching.

Participants and context

We first identified teachers and teacher candidates (K-8) who had completed an undergraduate/graduate-level service learning course at a local university; we then worked with the course instructor to identify and locate potential participants. After contacting the teachers to assess their agreement with the service learning philosophy and their willingness to participate, we found six who met the participant criteria (see Table 1). Of the novice participants – Chelsea, Emma, and Sheila – only Chelsea was continuing to implement service learning after completing the course; the others recognized its potential benefits and anticipated implementing it in the future. Of the veteran teachers – Whitney, Sarah, and Sharon – the first two were implementing service learning in their classes; Sharon considered it powerful but felt too overwhelmed to practice it. Prior to taking the service learning course, none of the participants had implemented service learning with their students.

The university course taken by the participants was designed to help them (a) understand the service learning philosophy and methodology and (b) design, plan, and implement a project. The instructor differentiated the concepts volunteerism, community service, and service learning – sharing a variety of project portfolios to give participants a framework for the critical service learning components. Projects completed by participants while taking the course varied from building a greenhouse in a local school to creating pamphlets to teach younger children in the school about the importance of good hygiene. This approach allowed the course instructor to guide her students as they completed their service learning

Table 1. Participants' professional and educational experience.

Participants	Years of experience	Grades taught	Degrees	Certificates
Novice				
Chelsea	1	7	BA	Grades 7 - 12
Emma	2	4, 5, 7	BS, MEd	Grades 4 - 8
Sheila	1	7	BS MEd	Grades K - 8 Gifted, Math
Veteran				
Whitney	7	6	BS, MEd	Grades K - 5
Sarah	33	K, 1	BS, MEd	Grades K - 5
Sharon	11	Pre-K, K, 1, 2, 4	BS, MEd	Grades Pre-K - 5

projects. Though participants had conducted a service learning project while taking the service learning course, not all continued to implement the method in their classroom after the course was completed.

Data sources

Data sources included individual interviews, demographic questionnaires, artifacts, and fieldwork journals – a combination that triangulated findings to strengthen reliability and internal validity (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Participants provided descriptive information on their school district, school, team, classroom, and service learning experiences, as well as educational background, teaching experience, and teaching philosophy.

At least three one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant on her experiences learning about and implementing service learning. To end each interview, the participant was invited to contribute any additional relevant insights. After responses had been gathered from all participants, a comprehensive list of factors was compiled and emailed to them, inviting further contributions. Most interviews occurred at the participants' schools; however, some chose to meet at their home or a restaurant. Generally, interviews lasted an hour with follow-up questions addressed through e-mail or telephone conversations. As the first interview sought to establish the context of participants' experiences (Seidman, 2005), all answered the same questions. In the second interview, participants reconstructed their service learning experiences, each responding to specific questions based on her experiences during and following the university course. At the third interview, participants reflected on meanings derived from their experiences, including ways their feelings about service learning had evolved and factors they interpreted as facilitating or hindering implementation. They noted helpfulness of the university course, school administration or district support, and ways they envisioned using service learning in the future. Each was given a list of contributing or hindering factors she had mentioned during her first two interviews and asked to provide additional factors or insights.

Portfolios, a third data source, grounded the investigation in its context and added richness. These included the participant's service learning course project, her writings (e.g. evolving service learning philosophy), her (required) reflection journal, and additional information she chose to include. With the participants' consent, the course instructor (who had kept a copy of all student work) facilitated access to the participants' portfolios completed while taking the course. The portfolios allowed researchers to understand participants' projects, experiences, and beliefs, noting how beliefs changed with time and experience. Additional artifacts were selected at the researchers' discretion, including evidence from service learning in classes that the participants taught (e.g. web pages, newspaper accounts, notes to parents, or collaborators). The final data source was a fieldwork journal maintained by the lead researcher documenting the details of data collection and analysis, as well as problems and ideas affecting the research process (Silverman, 2011).

Data analysis

Data were analyzed by a constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), the most appropriate method for (a) exploring factors previously identified in the literature as well as new ones and (b) informing the organization and content of interviews conducted to access

further understanding. This method can include both within-case and cross-case analyses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Together the first and fourth author analyzed participant data across the six cases to establish an aligned agreement about common and differing factors. Analyses included five of Bogdan and Biklen (2007) six recommended steps: (1) collecting case data, (2) identifying important issues and recurring events to form factors, (3) collecting additional data for examples or elaboration, (4) describing how factors accounted for documented events, and (5) identifying patterns and relationships among factors.

Data collection and analysis were conducted sequentially. After the first interviews, we transcribed the data and conducted a preliminary analysis, identifying common factors that we organized according to participants' perception as facilitating or hindering implementation. Thus, we could evaluate what we had learned and select topics to pursue in the second interviews. Following the second interviews, we compared the data from both interviews; during the third, we added to the list of common factors. Along with the interviews, researchers maintained communication through email and telephone conversations to further address questions surfacing from the data. This recursive process continued until saturation was reached and no new factors were uncovered.

To effectively organize and accurately represent the information, we created a matrix. We categorized the factors contributed by each participant as suggested during her interview, even if another participant suggested different labeling. For the cross-case analysis concerning the first research question, factors facilitating service learning, we first examined responses of the novice teachers then responses of the veteran teachers to identify similar or differing perceptions. The cross-case analysis of the second question, factors hindering service learning implementation, followed the same sequence. Finally, we examined factors across all six participants.

Participants authenticated the data as collected and analyzed, establishing a foundation of what Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen (1993) termed as *trustworthiness* and *authenticity*. All participants read the analysis and contributed further input or clarification throughout the study. The collaborative nature of this research contributed to *internal validity* as participants discussed and edited descriptions of analyses. The final assurance for trustworthy results is *external validity*, the extent to which the results can be applied to different situations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Thus, we provided detailed descriptions of the information involved in each study phase so others might conduct relevant investigations.

Results

Analysis revealed 21 factors perceived by novice and veteran teachers to facilitate and/or hinder service learning implementation. We present the nine most commonly mentioned: (a) support systems, (b) time, (c) teaching experience, (d) student characteristics, (e) resources, (f) teacher knowledge, (g) common core pressures, (h) high stakes testing, and (i) teacher characteristics. Most of these factors could facilitate or hinder implementation by their presence or absence.

Factors mentioned by all

All teachers – novices and veterans – perceived a strong support system as important for service learning implementation. Novice teacher Chelsea implemented service learning with

encouragement and support from another teacher on her team: ‘The other science teacher on the team and I have worked together trying to do a lot ... She has had more experience ... She helps me to adjust things.’ Novices Sheila and Emma felt that having support of team members might have made service learning possible for them. All veteran teachers commented that support systems significantly facilitate service learning. Sharon specified,

Having another person involved makes it a little easier. A good support system, as far as parents, as far as personnel in your classroom, as far as buddies at grade levels – whatever it is – is crucial.

All teachers commented on time as a factor in attempts to implement service learning: personal time to plan and class time to carry out. Novice Emma explained her internal battle:

Coming up with your own stuff takes just a lot of time ... And sometimes you do find yourself looking at the textbook and ... going ‘Wow, look at that nice easy lesson right there’ ... It is like an internal battle, to use it or not to use it ... And I am like ‘No, don’t do it!’

Veteran teachers also struggled to meet the demands of classroom time, as represented by Sarah:

We have so many mandated things to do ... We never have time to do all that we need to do. I guess the time crunch was the one thing that made it difficult ... the concern of just being able to get everything done.

All participants also mentioned teaching experience as a factor in service learning use. Emma described her novice situation: ‘a time when you are learning the ropes ... a time when you are getting to know those with whom you work as well as the community within which you work.’ She felt overwhelmed: ‘like learning how to deal with parents – [and] all the other things that you ... don’t know about until you are actually there doing it.’ Sheila echoed Emma’s novice concerns: ‘I have all these things in my mind; service learning and other things will come later in my career. But right now, it is all about surviving.’ Sheila lacked self-confidence that comes over time:

I feel ... not that my voice doesn’t matter but that I’m not confident in expressing it. I don’t have the experience or whatever to back up anything that I say. I just have my gut, my heart, and my thoughts to back up what I think.

All veteran teachers acknowledged that teaching experience made implementation easier. Taking the service learning course while teaching enabled them to predict benefits and obstacles. Whitney’s experience taught her what students were capable of doing. Sharon acknowledged,

I’m not playing the survival game anymore ... I have a bigger bag of tricks, and I have a bigger wealth of background knowledge, so it’s not as much work for me to do certain things, and certain things I [can] do instinctively now that I didn’t when I was first teaching.

Sharon had improved in organization and management. Sarah noted one of her greatest facilitators in implementing service learning was confidence from 33 years of teaching.

Factors mentioned by most

All participants except veteran Sarah claimed that student characteristics affected service learning success. Novice teachers mentioned student backgrounds and motivation, as well as management issues. Emma elaborated,

With my first class, I could have done anything with them. This class would be a lot more difficult. This class has a lot more behavior issues ... [and] kids that conflict with each other ... Behavior problems could be a potential negative if you had a lot.

Veterans Whitney and Sharon discussed the power of service learning for all students, regardless of behavior, but recognized that class ambiance made a difference. Whitney noted,

Every year my kids have been different ... and you see different sparks with different groups. I have had groups that were so bad that all I wanted to do with them was bookwork ... all I could possibly think about doing. And then groups come in [that] have something extra, and they are fun and ... energetic and it makes you energetic. I think the group of kids ... [can] make you want to go a step further.

Both Whitney and Sharon commented that knowing the students personally and tapping into their motivations must be foundational to service learning.

All participants except veteran Whitney commented on the necessity of resources to support implementation. All novices mentioned resources like transportation, facilities, funding, and materials; 'lacking resources' was a barrier. Chelsea said,

Had I had the resources we could have gone to an elementary school and talked about washing hands – how germs are spread and how they make [children] sick. But we just didn't have the busses to go ... [or] a classroom readily available for the number of seventh grade classes I would ... take.

Veteran teachers commented on resources as facilitating implementation. Sarah stated, Funding would make a difference ... It's just a part of [teachers] to be creative in getting what we need ... [It] pretty much makes or breaks a project if you have the material and supplies that you need.

Factors mentioned by some

Four participants suggested that increased teacher knowledge enhances implementation; lacking knowledge hinders it. Novices Chelsea and Emma as well as veterans Whitney and Sharon stressed varying degrees of intensity in projects; scaling a project back can facilitate implementation. Sharon commented, 'I see how I can do this on a much smaller scale, and it can actually be more meaningful ... The more I think of service learning projects on a smaller scale, the more doable they seem.' All participants who discussed teacher knowledge noted that students benefit regardless of project magnitude. Emma shared that learning about the potential impact on students intensified her drive to include service learning in her practice. She explained,

[It] builds on their self-worth. I think that individuals naturally get a feeling of confidence ... [and] just a little bit of joy out of helping other individuals and seeing other individuals get help. So knowing that they can learn while they are helping someone else learn ... [is] just a really great way to teach.

Participants also suggested that because service learning varies from the norm, teachers might have to justify doing it. Thus, they need knowledge of its practices and benefits. Whitney expressed,

It is important ... how you present it ... Other teachers [were] upset because I wasn't following the exact curriculum. Sometimes there is a concern through parents ... especially if they have twins or other children in that same grade level.

Two novices and two veterans commented feeling pressure to cover the core. Novice Emma was frustrated that political trends pushing the common core compromised her teaching time with students. Sheila felt pressure as her students' core-based performance reflected on her:

It's scary to think about because my kids' performance determines my performance ... But I realize ... it's letting go and realizing that my standing in front of them is not going to be the only way they are going to learn. They are going to learn other ways and it's equally valid.

Veterans Whitney and Sharon struggled with pressures to cover the core. Whitney felt that many teachers decide what and how they teach based on pressure from administrators and others. Sharon agreed.

Both novices Emma and Sheila and veterans Whitney and Sharon also mentioned pressures over high-stakes testing as hindering use of service learning. Emma disparaged system requirements forcing teachers to focus more on testing than on teaching as taking away her instructional time: 'I only have 45 min classes – a very short time. And then of course the focus [must be] on standardized testing, particularly for fourth grade because they are the scores that are published.' Sharon reported that high-stakes testing pressures made it hard to justify the time required for service learning, especially to those who did not understand or share the philosophy. She thought service learning would be easier in a private school with less testing pressure.

I think [it] is what we need to do, but ... a lot of things make it hard. Things like a big test you have to give and your students have to score above this level and you better make sure they can do x, y, and z. The progression toward standardization and accountability really ... ties your hands.

Novices Sheila and Chelsea, as well as veteran Whitney, noted that teacher characteristics affect use of service learning. Sheila stated that teachers must be open to learning and implementing new things: 'You can train and train and train, but it really just depends on the teacher's own philosophy and beliefs ... and willingness for an adventure.' Chelsea likewise related service learning to motivation and personality:

When I say I am going to do something ... nobody is going to stop me ... I think [your] mindset reflects in your project too. If you are really excited about it and you really want it to work, then you are going to work harder to make it work.

Whitney commented on individual personality: 'I think that you have to be someone who is outgoing ... [not] shy and inhibited. More outgoing people try things more often than people who are shy.'

Discussion

In efforts to deepen our understanding of factors that facilitate and/or hinder teachers' implementation of service learning, we found both factors confirming prior research and factors not previously discussed in the literature.

Support for prior research

Our findings confirmed six areas described in earlier studies. All participants recognized that lacking a strong support system decreases the likelihood of service learning success

(Wade et al., 1999) and that initiatives break down and projects are more difficult when resources are not relatively available and easily accessible (Carter, 1997; Scales & Koppelman, 1997). Teachers' comments supported Seitsinger and Felner's (2000) assertion that teacher knowledge is a critical foundation for successful implementation and that teachers with more teaching experience are more inclined to adopt it. All veteran teachers recognized their experience as a facilitating factor. As might be expected, all novice teachers mentioned their lack of experience as a hindrance. Pressure related to high-stakes testing was a fifth factor common to current and previous research. As pressure for improved test scores inundates public schooling (Twombly, 2014), many teachers are wary of hands-on student-centered pedagogy like service learning (Krebs, 2008). Finally, all participants acknowledged that they struggled to incorporate service learning with planning and instructional time, supporting past findings (Billig, 2000; Carter, 1997; Scales & Koppelman, 1997; Wade, 1997).

Findings of additional concerns

Three factors of concern identified by at least half of the study participants but not covered in previous research are covered in this section: (a) student characteristics, (b) teacher characteristics, and (c) core curriculum pressures. In the following section, we compare novice and veteran teachers' experience with each, providing insights and classroom implications.

Varied perspectives emerged from participants' comments on student characteristics. Some focused on behavior, remarking that well-behaved students facilitate service learning, while misbehaving students hinder it, or that motivated students encourage service learning, while unmotivated students may prevent it. Of course, older, more mature students can assume more responsibility. Another perspective involved broadening the academic experiences of students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Veteran Sharon was excited to extend students' learning into the community to expand their awareness of ways they could contribute to society.

Teachers bring their prior experience and personal characteristics to their classroom decisions (Minor, Onwuegbuzie, Witcher, & James, 2002). Study participants mentioned that teachers' affinity for service learning includes (a) a teaching philosophy aligned with such projects, (b) motivation to act on beliefs, (c) stubbornness sufficient to change from the teach and test paradigm prevalent in schools, (d) initiative to follow through on tasks, (e) an outgoing personality, and (f) a disposition toward reflection. Teachers must understand service learning and be motivated and enthusiastic, believing in their own and their students' abilities. In addition, they must reflect on their practices and continually improve (Minor et al., 2002).

In this study, pressure to cover the common core was interpreted as a constraint requiring teachers to stay within mandated curriculum, overriding teachers' prerogative to make curricular decisions. All participants stated that these pressures conflicted with their personal philosophy of teaching and learning, and they felt it wrong to focus more on covering core concepts than on teaching in significant ways. Nevertheless, novices and veterans had adjusted their instruction due to external pressures from administration, district, and state.

Comparison of novice and veteran teachers

Comparison of the novice and veteran groups showed major differences in needs, concerns, and perspectives (Leinhardt et al., 1987). Addressing support systems, novices focused only

on their team, while veterans expanded the perspective to include parents, administration, and community. Although both groups were concerned with inadequate time for service learning, overwhelmed novices focused on planning time, while veterans spoke of adjusting classroom time with curriculum and other competing responsibilities.

Teaching experience was another area of contrast. Veteran teachers, who responded easily to typical demands, focused on atypical and often unpredictable pedagogy (Leinhardt et al., 1987) – like service learning – facilitating implementation. Novices were overwhelmed by classroom demands; thus, their limited teaching experience hindered non-traditional methodologies. Both groups focused on the complexity of managing service learning with students who were unmotivated to learn or to behave appropriately, and all emphasized a positive relationship with students as essential to minimizing such concerns. Differences between novice and veteran teachers were subtle yet apparent in the depth of their perspectives and in their ease and flexibility with new practices.

Implications

We suggest three implications for implementing service learning. First, because novice teachers feel stress with a non-traditional approach, we recommend providing them a mentor who understands service learning. In addition, we encourage new teachers to reach out to colleagues, even outside their school or district, for support in negotiating challenges and opportunities of service learning. When teachers and students see the positive effects, interest spreads.

Second, since student characteristics and behavior are implementing factors, we recommend that teachers attempt to involve students who may make the experience more difficult and seem unlikely to benefit from it – giving them equal opportunities to learn and be successful with the projects (Fritzberg, 2001). Some particularly difficult groups of students are those who could benefit most. We also encourage teachers to reach out to parents or community volunteers who might assist. More adult participation helps in monitoring students, and local volunteers may provide powerful insights and opportunities for students less eager for traditional learning.

Finally, learning about service learning as undergraduate students, limited novices' experiences implementing it. Veteran teachers receiving instruction through professional development, or as master's students, conducted service learning simultaneously in their classes, and this application was a significant component of the learning experience. We suggest that undergraduates would benefit from the opportunity to apply their learning in a school practicum during their teacher education program.

Limitations and recommendations

Some limitations of this study are acknowledged. First, the limited number of participants enabled us to explore their experiences with more depth, but hindered generalization to larger populations. Large-scale research focused on experiences of novice and veteran teachers implementing service learning would be valuable. Second, participants were elementary and middle school teachers. Investigating the experiences of high school teachers would bring an additional dimension to existing research. Third, additional research is needed to determine how service learning is operating and perceived in cultures other than the United

States. Differences in factors such as high stakes testing and specific teacher experience may result in significant similarities and differences across cultures.

A final area worth investigating is academic performance related to service learning, including standardized test scores of students who have and have not participated in projects. As pressures for test preparation will likely continue, such information might ease the anxiety teachers feel in having to choose between surrendering to testing pressures or practicing what they perceive as good teaching. Teachers must learn how to connect their core curriculum to the goals of service learning to increase the likelihood that students will perform well on mandatory tests. More investigation in this area could suggest specific ways service learning can complement the core curriculum and support student learning requirements.

Conclusion

We sought to identify influential factors involved in implementing service learning by novice and veteran teachers, providing insights and support for those currently or potentially involved with this strategy. The multiple cases enabled us to explore and compare the viewpoints of those with and without extensive teaching experience, identifying differences in their needs and recommending ways of supporting their efforts. With such understanding, we anticipate that teacher education and in-service support programs can be designed to prepare and support teachers who desire to implement this valuable classroom learning experience.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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