Service learning and dance education: A pilot project for emerging teachers

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Dance educators' professional identities are often complex and overlapping with their identities as artists, scholars, and collaborators. University dance education coursework should facilitate undergraduate students' adoption of multiple professional identifications while they are still immersed in the study and reflection processes that are hallmarks of the student experience. Service Learning dance courses can provide an important avenue for supporting this transition.

Service Learning is a pedagogy of experiential learning that combines service with deliberate planning and reflection to support understanding of course content, engagement with social issues, and preparation for future pursuits. A university course, Creative Dance and Drama for the Elementary School, was restructured as a service learning course, allowing the students to apply their on-campus coursework in an elementary-school setting and providing an important opportunity to develop their identities as teachers and collaborators prior to their fourth-year internship.

Dance education students were asked to share their thoughts regarding their engagement in this course in an ongoing research project. One question asked them to "describe a moment when you were successful in a teaching or leadership role in this course."

> I think I did the best the second time when I was able to repeat and lead the brain dance. I took what I noticed I should have done differently the first time and applied it the second time around. (Kathleen)

> I was able to react to the needs of the students at that specific moment. I was seeing that the students were having a hard time with the difference between action and shape as we entered into the museum exercise and that is when I had the two groups split up … I was

> impressed with myself simply because this was not something that I planned to happen as I thought through the lesson beforehand. (Anna)

A reflection on all the data collected from the students as well as the process of teaching this course brings up several issues that were discussed in this project dialogue:

Status of teacher education students

This course was taught within a program where the majority of students are not required to take pedagogy. How do we create a culture within a BFA program that values the expertise and interests of future educators? How do we make the work of dance education students visible within their community of dance peers? How do we help promote the value of teaching young children?

Educating for democracy

This course included a strong development of practical skills, but did not include significant opportunities for increasing awareness of social justice issues. How do we build more social justice teaching into an already "crowded" course? How do we do this in a politically and socially conservative community?

Compensation versus service

The students in this course are young, female, artists, and teachers — attributes that position them unfavorably for earning a substantial income in our culture. What is our responsibility as faculty to teach students to command a fair monetary value for their work? Is this at odds with "service"?

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