

6-1-2018

Experiential Learning in Teacher Education: Increasing Awareness of Diversity Through the Immersion Experience

Nadine Dolby
Purdue University

Jubin Rahatzad
Purdue University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/elthe>



Part of the [Educational Methods Commons](#), and the [Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Dolby, Nadine and Rahatzad, Jubin (2018) "Experiential Learning in Teacher Education: Increasing Awareness of Diversity Through the Immersion Experience," *Experiential Learning & Teaching in Higher Education*: Vol. 2 : No. 1 , Article 7.

Available at: <https://nsuworks.nova.edu/elthe/vol2/iss1/7>

This Research Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at NSUWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Experiential Learning & Teaching in Higher Education* by an authorized editor of NSUWorks. For more information, please contact nsuworks@nova.edu.

Operationalizing the Roles of Experiential Learning: Bringing the Partnership to Life

ADAM M. LEWANDOWSKI, DEBBIE G. DEPALMA,
REBECCA S. ENGLUND, & MELISSA M. CARTWRIGHT
Nazareth College & Discovery Charter School

ABSTRACT. This article focuses on the partnership between Discovery Charter School of Rochester, New York, founded in 2011, and Nazareth College Partners for Learning. The Partners for Learning program engages Nazareth College students in partnerships with the children, teachers, and staff of eight urban sites. The authors examine the four critical roles that work to foster program success: (1) Associate Director for the Center for Civic Engagement, (2) Student Site Coordinator, (3) Site Representative, and (4) Classroom Teacher. We describe each of the four roles, how the roles support experiential learning, and, most importantly, how we consistently collaborate to ensure success for all parties. We have gathered multiple forms of reflection, and we share data focusing on the impact of student learning for both personal and professional growth. Finally, Discovery Charter School students describe what having a Partner in their classroom means to them, how the Partners have improved their learning, and how the relationships that have formed over the semester/year(s) have had an impact on them.

© 2017 Southern Utah University Press & Design.
Correspondence should be sent to Debbie Godsen DePalma and Adam Lewandowski,
Nazareth College, 4245 East Avenue, Rochester, NY 14618
Email: dgodsen2@naz.edu, alewand8@naz.edu

ELTHE: A Journal for Engaged Educators, Vol. 1, No. 2 (2017), pp. 7–24

Operationalizing the Roles of Experiential Learning: Bringing the Partnership to Life

Experiential learning collaborations can take many forms and apply a wide range of administrative support structures. This article focuses on the partnership between Discovery Charter School of Rochester, New York, founded in 2011, and Nazareth College Partners for Learning (PFL). This successful collaboration was awarded a President's Community Service Honor Roll Award in 2013 and was recently recognized with a 2016 NASPA Grand Silver Medal and Gold Excellence Award in the category of Civic Learning, Democratic Engagement, Service-Learning, and Community Service. The Partners for Learning program engages Nazareth College students in partnerships with the children, teachers, and staff of eight urban sites. Over 135 Nazareth College students participate in this program annually, with 20 of those students placed with Discovery Charter School. These partnerships are designed to help raise the academic performance and educational aspirations of the children, while heightening the social awareness and sharpening the professional skills of Nazareth College students. Open to all academic majors, Partners for Learning is part of the federal work-study program that provides students with a rich experiential learning framework that employs many of the most effective practices of service learning.

The highly collaborative partnership between Discovery Charter School and PFL began in fall 2011, when the school first opened. With each semester, we grow stronger in our ability to provide a unique and enriching experience for college student "Partners," as well as improve educational outcomes for the elementary students. The goal of this article is to articulate the functions of the partnership which make it a success: their roles, the process to ensure a reciprocal relationship where all parties benefit, and first-hand accounts of the scope of learning through service.

The roles within experiential learning partnerships have been developing over time, with research leading to refinement of a list of critical elements. These critical elements outline good practices across a spectrum of activities, including academic service-learning, internships, practica, and co-curricular service. The Wingspread Special Report document on "Principles of Good Practice for Combining Service and Learning" identifies important tasks for

faculty, staff, students, community partners and members that support the operationalization of roles, including:

- clarifying the responsibilities of each person and organization involved;
- articulating clear service and learning goals for everyone involved;
- training, supervision, monitoring, support, recognition, and evaluation to meet service and learning goals;
- providing structured opportunities for people to reflect critically on their service experience;
- allowing for those with needs to define those needs; and
- committing to program participation by and with diverse populations (Honnet & Poulen, 1989).

In “Principles of Good Practice in Community Service-Learning Pedagogy,” Jeffery Howard identifies the importance of providing “educationally sound mechanisms to harvest the community learning” and providing “support for students to learn how to harvest the community learning” (1993). These guidelines assert the importance of thoughtful consideration by faculty, staff, and community partners to the tasks necessary to facilitate learning.

While exploring the essentials of academic service-learning, Barbara A. Holland and Sherril B. Gelmon (1998) identify that community partners should participate in planning, defining needs, and designing service activities. Community partners can assume key roles in the student learning experience by providing professional expertise and knowledge of professional networks. Over time, the partnerships can evolve to become the basis for more complex joint planning and evaluation. In “An Introduction to Service-Learning: Or, An Open Letter to College and University Leaders Committed to Creating Conditions for Students to Contribute and Learn,” Robert Sigmon (1996) asserts that “establishing conditions for students to engage with others in a shared search for doing what needs to be done (Service) and pursuing what needs to be learned (Learning)” is important work for colleges and community. In identifying the fundamental intentions and actions for service-learning, Sigmon identifies two commitments that inform a college student’s role in experiential learning: “the desire to and practice of contributing (serving, caring, loving, and being connected)” and “the desire to and practice of learning and growing.” The rich history of principles and

practices from the fields encompassing experiential learning provided a solid foundation upon which the roles within PFL were created.

Four critical roles in PFL work in tandem to foster program success: (1) Associate Director for the Center for Civic Engagement, (2) Student Site Coordinator, (3) Site Representative, and (4) Classroom Teacher. As authors, we will each explain what our role is, how this role supports service learning, and, most importantly, how we consistently collaborate to ensure success for all parties. Gathered from multiple forms of reflection, the data we share focuses on the impact of student learning for both personal and professional growth. Finally, the Discovery Charter School students will describe what having a Partner in their classroom means to them, how the Partners have improved their learning, and how the important relationships that have formed over the semester/year(s) have had an impact on them.

Program Description

Partners for Learning (PFL) is an innovative co-curricular service program that focuses on poverty reduction, education, and community empowerment by building partnerships with schools, education centers, and human service organizations. The unique “partnering” aspect of the program enables our community of faculty, staff, college students, and youth to develop effective working relationships that meet individual needs while achieving community-based goals. Critical to the mission of Nazareth College, the PFL program empowers college students to develop the skills necessary for the pursuit of meaningful careers while building diverse relationships and heightening their social awareness. PFL was founded in 1994 as a federal work-study program. Developed within the Student Development Division, this co-curricular service experience applies the best practices for service-based learning and the achievement of community outcomes. PFL was founded to support the mission of the college “to inspire dedication to the ideal of service to their communities” (“Mission and Vision”) and to respond to a great community challenge: the low graduation rates of Rochester city school children.

Hallmarks of this program included best practices, such as the Eight Principles of Good Practice for Experiential Learning Activities from the National Society of Experiential Education (“Eight Principles of Good Practice” 2013) and Dr. George Kuh’s High Impact Educational Practices

(2008). Student success is also at the forefront of our work. The best practices include identified student learning outcomes; program assessments; reciprocity; sustained service experience over months and often years; progressive student leadership; and reflection demonstrating civic learning, professional skills development, and personal growth.

Starting with Hope Hall and Rochester City School #36, 20 students traveled from campus into the community and spent six to eight hours each week serving as tutors and mentors. Paired up in classrooms, the Nazareth students worked in small groups, floated around each classroom, or worked one-on-one with elementary students. The focus was to enhance the academics and educational aspirations of the young students and to build relationships within our community. Today, PFL has grown to employ 135 Nazareth College students yearly, providing service to eight schools and afterschool centers, including the Discovery Charter School.

Discovery Charter School Overview

Discovery Charter School (DCS) opened its doors in August 2011 and was built on the tenets of serving urban students living in high poverty—approximately 98% meet federal guidelines for poverty—through an extended school day and year focused on a challenging and engaging curriculum grounded in national standards and strong character education. DCS enrolls approximately 280 students in grades K–6, with two classes at each grade level. Teachers are highly dedicated, putting in long hours to ensure strong instruction while also meeting the social and emotional needs of the students.

DCS follows the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) model, which advocates the importance of supporting the whole child through five components: health, safety, engagement, supportive environments, and challenging experiences (Saia & DePalma, 2013). At DCS, each student enters school healthy and learns about and practices a healthy lifestyle. Students are provided a healthy breakfast, lunch, and fruit or vegetable for a snack through the school partnership with Wegmans Healthy Snacks Program. Students have scheduled play time daily and physical education up to four times a week. Each student learns in an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for students and adults. Supporting this environment are a primary and intermediate dean, a school counselor

to support students who struggle, and assistant teachers to ensure student safety. The culture of the school maintains this intentional focus on the whole child. Each week, the entire school comes together for community circle to celebrate students in many ways and showcase learning at various grade levels.

Throughout the school day, each student is actively engaged in learning and is connected to the school and broader community. As DCS is an EL Education School, each grade level focuses on two learning expeditions, which have students working with local and global community entities. Each student has access to personalized learning and is supported by qualified, caring adults. The student-teacher ratio is roughly eight students to one teacher. Each classroom has two teachers, each grade level has access to an intervention teacher for targeted instruction, and all non-teaching staff interact with students strategically to support both academically and emotionally as needs arise. Each student is challenged academically and prepared for later success through a highly rigorous curriculum based on state and national standards. Technology is also a central focus: each student in grades 2–6 has a Chromebook, which is used in all content areas throughout the day. Grade-level teams collaborate daily and meet with instructional coaches twice a month to plan, reflect, and improve instruction.

Unique and Innovative Practices

The PFL program is an example of effective collaboration between Student Development and Academic Affairs. One very innovative approach that highlights this connection is the integration of PFL into the new Liberal Arts College Core Curriculum. Implemented in fall 2013, all students under the new core curriculum must participate in one Experiential Learning (EL) opportunity. In order for a program to be designated as EL, students submit an application that must be approved by the EL Committee, a multidisciplinary, curricular and co-curricular team of faculty and staff. PFL was one of the first successfully implemented co-curricular EL opportunities at Nazareth College. The methodologies of PFL were very influential to the development of the new EL standards and have become a template for both curricular and co-curricular programs seeking EL status at the College.

Assessment of Outcomes

The PFL program employs a student learning and success model that utilizes student learning outcomes and substantial assessment to ensure that program goals are achieved. The assessment process includes:

- student survey self-reports of learning;
- formal formative feedback from community partners, teachers, and agency staff;
- rubric-based assessments of written reflections; and
- assessment of group discussions and reflective activities occurring each semester.

Below are the student learning outcomes data for 2014–2015:

- 96.7% of Nazareth College students improved their leadership and professional skills.
- 100% of Nazareth College students demonstrated personal growth through their experiences.
- 98% of Nazareth College students gained a greater understanding of social issues facing the community.
- 98.2% of Nazareth College students improved their ability to build relationships and work effectively with youth and adults with backgrounds and experiences diverse from their own.

In the 2014–2015 program year, PFL provided 16,324 hours of service to the community. PFL students work in Rochester City Schools, a district that has a 43.4% high school graduation rate, with less than 10% of those graduates considered to be college ready. Data collected from teachers, administrators, and staff members of our partnering sites show that in all cases, Nazareth students were able to meet the educational needs of students. Elementary students increased the number of assignments completed and improved their understanding of concepts. Those surveyed reported an increased understanding of college possibilities and high educational aspirations for themselves.

In meeting college goals, Nazareth students in the program reported increases in social awareness (85% of students) and professional skills (98% of students). Focusing on concepts of diversity, the Nazareth students reported

increases in understanding differences (98%), enhancing their ability to work with diverse communities (89%), and improving their abilities to differentiate their teaching methods (87%).

The Administrative Structure

Partners for Learning utilizes a unique administrative structure that incorporates faculty and staff advisement, community partner oversight, and student leadership. The structure addresses community engagement challenges, including the development and measurement of mutually agreed upon goals, orientations and progressive developmental training, supervision, reflection, mechanisms for providing formative feedback, processes to address shortfalls, and open lines of communication. The administrative components create an agile, responsive organization that empowers college students, increases the capacity of community partners, and ensures that the work of the program is meeting community goals. Several administrative positions are crucial to the success of our partnerships, and the following sections provide descriptions of the job responsibilities for each position accompanied by narratives that provide examples of these roles in action.

Staff and Faculty Leadership

The PFL program employs one Nazareth College staff member who is part of the College's Center for Civic Engagement. This center reports to both Academic Affairs and Student Development divisions and has oversight for Academic Service Learning as well as co-curricular service ("Civic Engagement"). Coordinating the PFL program in collaboration with the community partners and student leadership comprises approximately 45% of one full-time position, held by the Associate Director for the Center for Civic Engagement. The responsibilities of that position include:

- managing program budgets, including accountability for spending, identifying program needs, and developing budget proposals;
- providing strategic direction for initiatives that connect to College and community goals;
- supervising student workers, graduate assistants, and volunteers
- selecting, training, assigning work, setting and approving schedule and time records, processing payroll, and handling job performance issues;

- supervising members of the Partners for Learning Council who serve as student coordinators, transportation coordinators, site coordinators, and liaisons with each site;
- planning and implementing leadership development opportunities;
- managing community partnerships and limiting liability by implementing program and College policies at each site;
- making periodic site visits to meet with site representatives and partners, maintaining Memoranda of Understanding;
- in collaboration with student leaders, planning and implementing orientations, trainings, and meetings that provide opportunities for students to learn and gain leadership and job skills necessary to complete service projects;
- creating opportunities that help students reflect on and process their experiences;
- educating students by implementing the Experiential Learning component of the core curriculum;
- creating program assessments and reports;
- planning and carrying out publicity in collaboration with Campus Marketing; and
- identifying areas for funding in collaboration with College Advancement, including grant writing.

College Faculty and Staff Support

Part of the program's success is a result of leveraging the resources of the faculty and staff at the College. Faculty and staff provide program advisement, trainings, and discipline-specific workshops. Integrated into the scholarship of Nazareth College, the PFL program depends upon the strong academic development that occurs in our classrooms. As a direct result of instruction, students bring the knowledge and skills gained through their academic disciplines into their work in the program. In addition, the students bring their experiences from PFL into the college classroom by enriching dialogues, connecting theory and practice, asking informed questions, and providing insights from authentic experiences.

Some of the trainings and workshops include:

- Mandated Reporting
- Code of Ethics
- Panel Discussion on Urban Education, including students, parents, and educators
- Positive Behavioral Interventions
- Safe Zone Training
- Poverty and Education
- Kwanzaa Observance (ways to incorporate Kwanzaa into educational settings)
- Stress Management for Human Service Workers
- Community Youth Development Principles
- Assets Development
- Time Management and Other Professionalism Topics
- Teaching Communication, Problem Solving, and Conflict Resolution to Children
- Sex Trafficking Awareness
- Tutoring for Reading and Math
- Public and Charter Schools Community Panel
- MLK Campus Commemoration and Day of Service
- Exploring Leadership Styles
- Public Speaking
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Active Listening/Effective Communication

Community Partner Leadership

An important part of our program is the site representative, a position that is held by a teacher or staff member who works for the community site. The Curriculum Coordinator at Discovery Charter School has served as the site representative since the inception of the program. This person works with the Partners for Learning and the classroom teachers who host them. Each semester, approximately 8–12 undergraduate students work in classrooms for two-hour blocks at least twice a week. The goal of the site representative is to (1) be highly intentional with the placement and purpose of each Partner, (2) ensure the Partner feels empowered by their work, and (3) make sure the classroom teacher and students gain exceptional support

focused on improving academic outcomes for students. At the beginning of each semester, Partners attend an orientation led by the site representative and often a classroom teacher when time allows. Here, Partners learn the school history and mission, as well as the impacts Partners have made over the last five years. Partners share their stories, why they became Partners, and what they hope to gain from this experience. During this initial meeting, the goal is for Partners to know they are considered part of our school family, and to promise them that as the semester unfolds, they will undoubtedly feel that sense of family and purpose in the work they do each day at the site. During this meeting and throughout their service, the site representative checks in, reminding Partners that one goal is for them to be excited to come to DCS each week. If there are any concerns, adjustments to roles and responsibilities will be shifted to ensure a mutually beneficial experience.

Making this collaboration meaningful requires reflection and feedback from all parties. Obtaining feedback is done formally through surveys and informally through conversations, with the goal of making the partnership as beneficial as possible. As an example of collaboration, three years ago, a site representative decided to change how Partners were placed and concentrated them in Kindergarten classes, where they worked with students one on one and in small groups. The reflection and feedback the Partners gave allowed for a lower teacher-student ratio and highly intentional instruction targeted at student needs. This is one of many examples of how site representatives ensure cohesion and increase communication with all parties. The duties of the site representative are:

- serving as a liaison with teachers, administrators, college students assigned to the site, and program coordinators;
- assisting with program planning by meeting with the program coordinators twice each semester at minimum;
- identifying classrooms, teachers, and staff members who are enthused about the program, and placing college students;
- aiding with the orientation of new college students to the building, and to their partnering teachers/staff members;
- instructing teachers/staff members how best to utilize the college students; and
- facilitating the distribution of program evaluations twice per semester.

After six years of the program running two college semesters per year, staff and students have fully embraced this multi-layered partnership. First, students receive both academic and emotional support from a caring, invested partner whom they see minimally twice a week. As a result of the PFL presence, there is a 5:1 student-to-adult ratio during intervention block, ensuring critical targeted instruction that Partners have been trained on through modeling and co-teaching. Many outside organizations attempt to offer support in schools (host sites) and fail for many reasons, most often because the host site provides little support to the outside organization. If the host site, in this case a school, does not invest time and resources, such as naming a site representative who engages with the program several times a week, it most likely will not succeed or, at best, will not fulfill its potential. Having a dedicated site representative who works in tandem with the Partners, the site coordinator, the teachers, and the Associate Director for the Center for Civic Engagement is critical to ensure clear communication and foster success with all members of the partnership.

The Classroom Experience

There is no question that the Partner's experience comes to life in the classroom, and the classroom teacher is the day-to-day contact that ensures Partner support and success. The classroom teacher's roles include:

- modeling instruction and providing explicit plans and materials in collaboration with the Partner;
- troubleshooting and providing ongoing support as needed;
- providing an orientation to the classroom culture and an introduction to the children;
- developing the tasks the college students will perform, ensuring that the work most often involves child interaction focusing on academics and raising educational aspirations;
- providing guidance and support that enables the college student to be successful in their work;
- providing a mid-semester and semester-end evaluations of the college student's work; and
- examining and discussing attributes of an "engaged" partner and possible obstacles.

Melissa Cartwright, a co-author of this paper, has been a kindergarten teacher at Discovery Charter School for six years and part of the PFL program since it began. As a classroom teacher, she knows that having strong supports in place is necessary in order for students to achieve the academic outcomes we hope for, which is why she gladly welcomes Partners for Learning into her kindergarten classroom: She truly consider herself, her team, and her students lucky to have the support of this highly collaborative program. The classroom teacher's main responsibilities as a host teacher include developing a positive and supportive relationship with Partners, modeling instructional practices, and providing meaningful feedback.

Partners In Action

The Partners for Learning program truly benefits all parties involved, especially students. Partners, or as my students call them, "our college helpers" support our entire Kindergarten program in a variety of ways. Each morning around 9:00 they arrive, and the excitement builds in our students. Here is an opportunity for additional academic support but also emotional supports as well—strong connections are formed between our partners and students over the course of a semester, which we have found to mutually beneficial—an added perk to our collaboration. During their time in the classroom partners reinforce whole group instruction, lead small groups, work with students one on one, and assist with lesson preparations. The instruction delivered by partners is always highly intentional and catered towards students' individual needs. As a classroom teacher I brief our "college helpers" each morning on the events of the day. While our structure remains the same, there are always nuances which change—having a quick chat in the morning keeps everyone on the same page. As the year progresses, so does the day-to-day role of the partner. This is another area where daily communication is critical; if students are moving into a new skill, I or the site representative are there to explain the instruction model, and provide ongoing support to ensure the partner is set up for success.

I attribute a great deal of student learning to the collaborative efforts of this partnership. I recall an instance where a student that was struggling with letter identification was assigned to work with a Partner for ten minutes a day to practice this targeted skill. After a short time, this student's letter recognition abilities doubled. It has been a pleasure working with some of

the same partners year to year and watching them develop personally and professionally. I have seen so much growth and development in the partners' communication skills, leadership skills, and overall confidence level.

When I asked my students what they liked about our college helpers, 18 of the 22 students shared statements that equated to "they help me learn." Student responses validate the partners' work in support of the whole child. Many students alluded to safety and support from strong statements, such as "I feel really safe around our college helpers, and they always help me when I need help. We just raise our hand and they help us", to more simple but still important statements, such as "They help us zip our jackets." While the day-to-day support has become an integral part of our routine and instruction, our college helpers have also left lasting impressions on our students by planting the seed of going to college. As stated by one of my students, "They help us with something that we need and our college helpers always give us compliments. I can't wait to be a college student". The Partners for Learning program reinforces this desire by annually bringing students from Discovery Charter School to the college for "Discover Nazareth College Day." Over the past five years the kindergarten children who have worked so closely with "college helpers" visit the college as third, fourth, fifth, and sixth-grade students. They tour the campus with their 'college helpers', see dorm rooms, the cafeteria, meet student athletes and have conversations with college students about going to college. We are grateful to be a part of a collaboration that supports our daily instruction at such a critical juncture in our students' academic career, as well as fosters relationships and organically inspires our students to see themselves as a future college student.

Student Leadership

The Partners programs utilize a progressive student leadership structure. The programs are staffed by student program coordinators who work with the Associate Director for Civic Engagement at the top level of program administration. Experienced students serve as Site Coordinators working to ensure that the programs at each site are running effectively on a daily basis. Transportation Coordinators assist with the maintenance of six college minivans that transport the college students into the community each day. An Assessment Coordinator works with the Staff Coordinator to develop assessments, analyze data, and develop reports and recommendations for

program improvements. All of these students come together to form a council that ensures the program is meeting its goals, troubleshoots program challenges, and provides vision for the future of the programs. Leadership training, coaching and mentorship by peers and Nazareth staff and faculty members as well as support from community partner professionals, enhance the knowledge and skills of the students.

The Site Coordinator's responsibilities include:

- serving as a liaison with teachers, administrators, and Partners assigned to each site;
- aiding in the orientation of new Partners to their site building and to their cooperating teachers/staff;
- assisting in planning, making placements, and ordering materials; and
- taking an active role in leadership for daily activities at the sites, i.e., reflecting, planning and troubleshooting.

The Assessment Coordinator's responsibilities include:

- working with the Associate Director for Civic Engagement to develop, administer, and analyze assessment data;
- working with the Associate Director for Civic Engagement to map assessment questions onto program, division, and college outcomes; and
- creating Partners semester-based outcome reports, presenting findings to the Partners Council, and facilitating the development of a plan to address report results.

The Partners Council Member's responsibilities include:

- working with the Program Coordinator and Student Coordinators regarding staffing assignments;
- reviewing and updating the goals, orientations, workshops, and handbooks for the program;
- working together to resolve problems concerning Partners;
- sharing communications with Coordinators, Partners, teachers, and administrators as appropriate; and
- supporting each other by offering suggestions, highlighting outstanding work, and providing creative insights on how to improve leadership skills.

Rebecca Englund, one of the authors of this paper, has served in multiple roles over her four years at Nazareth College, including as Partner, Assessment Coordinator, and Site Coordinator. Below, she describes firsthand several of her experiences within the program:

My work as a Partner constantly kept me on my toes because no day was exactly like the previous one. Initially, I thought that I would simply be a tutor for struggling students, but I was wrong. In addition to being a tutor, I was also a leader and mentor in the classroom. More specifically, I led small groups, worked one-on-one with students who needed additional support with their schoolwork, and supported the classroom teacher during whole class instruction. In turn, I built a great rapport with the students and became a positive role model in the classroom. These relationships made coming to work worthwhile because I truly cared about the students' successes. Even though every day was unpredictable, I knew that my work in the classroom allowed my classroom teacher to do her job more effectively, which reflected positively in the student's academic performance.

It is without a doubt that I became a more competent professional because of my work as a Partner. Having this hands-on experience at DCS alongside my schoolwork allowed me to implement ideas and methodologies discussed in my courses. For example, leading a phonemic awareness group gave me the opportunity to practice my scaffolding skills as well as my ability to teach to different learning styles. Ultimately, I benefited from this experience just as much as the students, the teachers, and the administrators at DCS. Although I motivated my students to do their best schoolwork, they pushed me to do my best work and think outside of the box.

As Assessment Coordinator, I evaluated the outcomes of the PFL program from both the Partner and administrative perspectives. In other words, I assessed how the PFL program influenced the Partner's professional development as well as how it influenced the students' academic performance and aspirations. Once I identified the major themes related to the program outcomes, I assembled a summarizing report and presented it to the PFL Council. This presentation generated a dialogue among council members to address the program considerations. As the Assessment Coordinator, I worked diligently to convey the overall impact of the PFL program and to make suggestions regarding the future of the program.

The role of Assessment Coordinator made me a better Partner because I became more knowledgeable of the PFL program's outcomes and expectations. As a result, I took more initiative in the classroom and gained more confidence in my work. Additionally, I developed the ability to think critically and the ability to advocate for my students and myself. I was privileged to have such a unique opportunity because my responsibilities as Assessment Coordinator allowed me to sharpen many professional skills and gain a better understanding of the PFL program.

In the Site Coordinator position, I served as the liaison between the Partners and the PFL administration (the PFL Council, the Associate Director for the Center for Civic Engagement, and the Site Representative). Not only did I communicate with all of the parties involved, but I also collaborated with my fellow Site Coordinators to troubleshoot when problems arose at site, to plan site meetings; and to lead workshops. I felt like the eyes and the ears of the PFL program along with the other Site Coordinators because no other position worked as closely with the teachers, the students, and the PFL administration.

Strong interpersonal communication skills and adaptability were essential to being an effective Site Coordinator. At times, it was challenging to negotiate several personalities and work styles; however, it served as great preparation because my future profession will require me to work with fellow employees and with clients. Although I had more responsibility as a Site Coordinator, I gained practical leadership experience that will suit me well as I enter the workforce.

Conclusion

When identifying successful components of a service-learning community engagement collaborative, clearly defined roles are critical. The highly collaborative partnership between DCS and PFL would not function effectively if it were not for the four critical roles which work in tandem to foster program success: (1) the Associate Director for the Center for Civic Engagement, (2) the Student Site Coordinator, (3) the Site Representative, and (4) the Classroom Teacher. Dividing the programmatic tasks into these positions provides a supportive experiential learning environment for college students and ensures that our collaboration meets our community outcomes. This administrative structure ensures that college students can supportively

apply their academic training in real-world situations, learn professional skills, and develop leadership capabilities. The structure increases the capacity of teachers to support students in an elementary classroom through the support of college students, and it supports the Elementary School striving to achieve their educational goals. These four critical roles provide an efficient, effective network that enhances experiential learning collaborative partnerships.

References

- Holland, Barbara A. and Sherrill B. Gelmon. 1998. "The State of the 'Engaged Campus': What Have We Learned about Building and Sustaining University and Community Partnerships." *AAHE Bulletin* 51, no. 2: 3–6.
- Honnet, Ellen Porter and Susan J. Poulsen. 1989. "Principles of Good Practice in Combining Service and Learning." *Wingspread Special Report*. Racine, WI: The Johnson Foundation. <https://www.coastal.edu/media/academics/servicelearning/documents/Principles%20of%20Good%20Practice%20for%20Combining%20Service%20and%20Learning.pdf>.
- Howard, Jeffrey. 1993. "Community Service Learning in the Curriculum." In *Praxis I: A Faculty Casebook on Community Service Learning*, edited by Jeffrey Howard, 3–12. Ann Arbor, MI: Office of Community Service Learning Press, University of Michigan.
- Kuh, George D. 2008. "High-impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter." Washington DC: Association of American Colleges & Universities.
- National Society for Experiential Education. 2013. "Eight Principles of Good Practice for All Experiential Learning Activities." <http://www.nsee.org/8-principles>
- Nazareth College. 2018. "Civic Engagement." <https://www2.naz.edu/civic-engagement/>.
- . 2018. "Mission and Vision." <https://www2.naz.edu/about/mission-and-vision/>.
- Saia, Joe and Debbie Godsen DePalma. 2013. "The Whole Teacher and a Beginning Charter School." *Impact on Instructional Improvement* 38, no. 1: 17–22.
- Sigmon, Robert. 1996. "An Introduction to Service-Learning: Or, an Open Letter to College and University Leaders Committed to Creating Conditions for Students to Contribute and Learn." In *Journey to Service-Learning: Experiences from Independent Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities* edited by Robert Sigmon, 3–7. Washington, DC: Council of Independent Colleges.