

Student teacher experiences in a service-learning project for children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder

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Background: Service learning (SL) is a collaborative relationship between university professors, their students, and community partners who combine academic learning and active participation to address community issues. Previous studies in SL and physical education teacher education (PETE) found SL projects increased opportunities for learning and applying pedagogical methods, prepared PETE students to teach children from diverse backgrounds, and promoted an understanding of individual teaching responsibilities. Given the number of PETE university programs in SL emerged over the past decade, minimal research has supported the specific use of SL in PETE. It was suggested that PETE programs provided content knowledge and pedagogical strategies to deal effectively with immediate instructional challenges but paid less attention to anticipate future challenges through student teaching experiences. A SL project for children with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) was designed which enabled PETE students to learn how to manage behavior while teaching physical education.

Purpose: To explore the experiences of PETE students in a SL project for children with ADHD.

Participants and setting: Four female and two male PETE students were the participants in this study which investigated their project experiences in SL at a major mental health institute in a large urban Canadian city.

Research design: A phenomenological approach was used to describe the lived experiences of PETE students in the SL project.

Data gathering: Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted and videotaped to acquire rich and deep knowledge of PETE students' SL experience. Each student was requested to bring unit plans, lesson plans, written reflections, and final term papers to enhance the interview process.

Data analysis: Each interview was transcribed verbatim and a line-by-line thematic analysis was performed.

Findings: Three higher-order themes emerged from thematic analysis. The 'where have I been' theme suggested past teaching and community work experiences shaped decisions to become physical educators. The 'it's all about caring' theme involved reduction of stigma linked to teaching children with ADHD and merging theory and practice through application of instructional models and deliberate lesson plans. The 'teaching to play' theme revealed various benefits linked to PETE student participation in SL and challenges inherent with team teaching.

Conclusions: Future research recommendations include capturing the experiences of other participants in the SL project for children with ADHD to gain much greater insight into the whole SL experience and help to shape future projects. Much research

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