

INVOLVEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION SPECIAL EDUCATION FACULTY  
IN SERVICE-LEARNING COURSE DEVELOPMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION

BY

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DISSERTATION

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the perspectives of higher education faculty with expertise in service-learning (SL) course development and implementation. Using semi-structured interviews, 13 special education faculty members were interviewed. Transcripts and course documents were analyzed to investigate motivators, challenges, and recommendations to SL course development, implementation, and sustainability. The overall perceptions of SL implementation in the field of special education were compared to the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) *Special Education Professional Ethical Principles* (2010) to determine alignment with the field. Faculty motivation for SL implementation revolved around student learning, community advancement, and personal connections. Challenges and recommendations pertained to students, faculty, community, and common elements to SL. CEC principles closely aligned with SL implementation in higher education courses related to special education.

*To Regina*

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In 1996, Ernest Boyer boldly wrote in his posthumously published article titled *The Scholarship of Engagement* that:

Increasingly, the campus is being viewed as a place where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the nation's most pressing, civic, social, economic, and moral problems (p.14).

In response to these concerns, a growing number of Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs) are developing opportunities for faculty, students, and community members to work collaboratively by developing service-learning (SL) courses across a wide range of disciplines in an effort to address shared goals (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). Butin (2005) suggested that SL involvement causes shifts in what it means to be a faculty member because it forces faculty to rethink the foundational beliefs that learning comes from them (i.e., the faculty), takes place in a lecture hall, and follows a prescribed text. He also warned that with this shift there are challenges in that SL may not align with tenure and promotion guidelines, be accepted by colleagues, and has the potential to backfire in the eyes of the public.

Despite these barriers, the number of faculty members and IHEs implementing SL has grown over the last decade providing evidence that many faculty believe that the rewards outweigh the risks. The rise in SL has resulted in professional organizations (e.g., American Educational Research Association Special Interest Group on Service-Learning and Experiential Learning, International Association for Research in Service-Learning and Community Engagement) and professional journals (e.g., *Journal of Research in Service-Learning and Teacher Education*, *Michigan Journal of Community Service-Learning*) dedicated to the improvement of SL. Within these outlets, there have been numerous conversations related to the challenges of clearly defining SL as pedagogy. SL in teacher education can be best defined by

what it is not. SL is not community service, volunteer work, or placing preservice teachers in a field based practicum. SL differs in that it aims to be mutually beneficial to all participants and is directly tied to course content (Anderson, 1998, Bringle & Hatcher, 1996; Mayhew & Welch, 2001; Neeper & Dymond, in press).

As the SL literature base expands, there are several gaps that need to be filled. One of the greatest areas of need is developing an understanding related to faculty involvement in SL (Abes, Jackson, & Jones, 2002; Driscoll, 2000; Hammond, 1994; Harwood et al., 2005; Pribbenow, 2005; Root & Swick, 2001; Schnaubelt & Statham, 2007). Faculty are solely responsible for implementing quality SL courses, yet we know very little about their motivation to do so, the challenges they face, and the supports they need to be successful (Driscoll, 2000). This leads one to wonder how faculty address Boyer's (1996) concerns and navigate the barriers outlined by Butin (2005).

A review of the teacher education literature reveals that faculty incorporate SL in teacher education courses to provide students access to communities, expose students to diversity issues, and enhance personal and social growth among preservice teachers (Anderson & Erickson, 2003). Moreover, the perceived benefits of SL courses are that they provide hands-on experience with instructional strategies, increase problem-solving skills, and help solidify career choices for preservice teachers (Potthoff et al., 2000; Root, Callahan, & Sepanski, 2002; Wade, 1997). Common challenges to SL implementation reported by teacher education faculty are localized in the areas of community, curriculum, and institutional barriers (Anderson & Pickeral, 2000).

Abes et al. (2002) found that faculty who chose not to use SL were deterred by a concern that SL was not relevant to their discipline. The authors suggest that faculty success stories that highlight the academic rigor of SL among faculty with SL experience are needed within specific

disciplines to promote its use. Several descriptions of SL courses exist within the special education literature; however, no studies outline the experiences of faculty from a wide range of IHEs with SL teaching expertise. Aside from these program descriptions and survey data on the types of SL courses (e.g., undergraduate, graduate) collected by Neeper and Dymond (in press), we know very little about how SL is implemented in the field of special education. Several models and guides (e.g., Root et al., 2000, Swick et al., 2001) for implementing quality SL courses have emerged in the field of teacher education. These models outline the core components of SL such as reflection, celebration, and evaluation that correlate to quality outcomes for all stakeholders. Special education faculty with SL experience agree that these components are necessary to developing quality SL courses; however, little is known about how they implement these components in their courses (Neeper & Dymond, in press).

Studies investigating faculty motivation to implement SL are non-existent in the special education research literature; however, there are several possible motivators outlined in the literature that relate to the field of special education. For example, research from higher education and SL reveals that faculty are often motivated to use SL if their discipline aligns with a social cause; they see gains in their students that were not possible using traditional teaching methods, and increased collaboration with others as a result of their participation in SL (O'Meara, 2008). Given the connection between special education and social advocacy and civil rights, SL makes a logical pedagogical match for promoting such causes. Several authors noted increased student learning related to using effective teaching strategies (e.g., progress monitoring, literacy instruction, individualized instruction, behavior interventions) when involved in SL courses (see Al Otaiba, 2005; Griffith, 2005; Muscott, 2001; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999). Not surprising, special education faculty with SL experience reported that SL

implementation resulted in increased collaboration with community members and faculty within and outside their department (Neeper & Dymond, in press).

A host of barriers associated with SL implementation are well documented in the higher education and teacher education literature. Neeper and Dymond (in press) found that collectively, special education faculty members with SL experience did not report significant barriers to implementation; however, some individuals reported significant challenges. The field needs to understand these challenges as well as successful and unsuccessful methods for addressing the challenges if quality SL projects are going to be developed that promote positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities. In addition, faculty recommendations for improving the use of SL in special education courses could contribute additional discipline specific success stories that encourage other faculty to incorporate SL in their teaching (Abes et al., 2002). For example, Jenkins & Sheehey (2009) stated that SL in their special education courses evolved over time and the challenges to implementation decreased.

From the existing literature base on SL and special education we know that faculty are engaged in SL teaching (Mayhew & Welch, 2001; Neeper & Dymond, in press), but no one has asked faculty how they use SL in their courses or investigated why it is used in special education courses. Therefore, the purpose of this investigation was to build on the research conducted by Neeper and Dymond (in press) in an effort to improve our foundational understanding of how SL is used by special education faculty with SL teaching experience and to provide recommendations and insight into the possible benefits of SL for faculty members who are interested in developing or enhancing their own SL courses. Interviews and document analysis were used to investigate the following areas of research interest: (a) how SL is used in special education courses, (b) faculty motivators and challenges to implementing SL, and (c) recommendations for SL involvement.

## **Overview of the Manuscript**

Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature in the areas of (a) defining SL, (b) historical and legislative background of SL in higher education, (c) SL prevalence, (d) faculty involvement in SL course development and implementation, and (e) research methodologies for studying SL. The synthesis of the literature pertaining to SL in higher education, teacher education, and the field of special education resulted in the research questions that guided this investigation. Chapter 3 provides an outline of the methodological practices used to conduct the study. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were the basis for the investigation. In Chapter 4, an overview of the use of SL is provided and how it aligns with the field of special education is explored. In Chapter 5, an analysis and discussion of results related to faculty motivators, challenges, and recommendations for SL course development, implementation, and sustainability is provided. Chapter 6 is a summary of the overall findings across all of the research questions.

## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

A review of the literature pertaining to service-learning (SL) and special education reveals that there has been growth in the literature related to special education and higher education over the last two decades; however, there is a paucity of literature that pertains specifically to special education faculty (Neeper & Dymond, in press). While there is a great need for additional research that focuses on special education faculty to fully explore the benefits and potential pitfalls to implementation, there is a broader literature base related to faculty and SL that is non-discipline specific related to higher education in general and teacher education. Therefore, this chapter will synthesize the SL literature related to faculty involvement within the larger contexts of higher education, teacher education, and finally special education, to inform the reader about the use of SL in higher education courses, motivators and barriers to implementation, recommendations for best practice, and methodologies used to investigate faculty involvement in SL. Before delving into the literature pertaining to faculty involvement, an overview of SL (e.g., definition, historical context, prevalence) will be provided.

#### How is SL Defined?

One does not need to look too far to realize that there are concerns with the clarity of the definition of SL within the literature. Often, terms used to describe various forms of *community engagement* are used interchangeably such as *community service* and *service-learning*. At times, multiple forms of community engagement (e.g., action research, service-learning, volunteerism) are lumped under the umbrella term community engagement. This is most notable when efforts are made to quantify the prevalence of SL (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009).

In recent years, there has been a strong push toward clearly distinguishing SL from other forms of community engagement without limiting its flexibility as pedagogy. Perhaps the most widely referenced definition of SL in higher education is that of Bringle and Hatcher (1995) who define SL in higher education as 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 (p. 112).

As Bringle and Hatcher (2009) noted, this definition highlights key elements that set SL apart from other forms of community engagement such as academic and curricular matches to service, community voice, assessment of service impact, and the importance of student reflection.

The effort to clearly define SL as distinct pedagogy from other forms of community engagement (e.g., community service, student teaching) is also evident in the teacher education literature. Anderson (1998) stated that community service focuses solely on service, and the main beneficiary of the service is the community. Field based practicum (e.g. student teaching) focuses solely on learning, and the main beneficiary is the preservice teacher. SL combines the focus of community service and field based practicum to benefit multiple groups. In SL, preservice teachers provide a service to the community that is directly related to their own learning goals and benefits both the preservice teacher and community equally.

While several authors have provided clear definitions of and guidelines for SL within their articles related to SL and special education, it appears that the field of special education has not escaped the definitional concerns faced by other fields. For example, Neepor and Dymond (in press) found that few special education faculty with SL experience reported that their



department had a shared definition of SL. In addition, there was disagreement about whether student teaching was considered a form of SL.

### **Historical and Legislative Background of SL in Higher Education**

In the field of higher education the pedagogical practice of SL may be viewed as “new” when compared to traditional instructional methods, yet the theoretical framework supporting it has been evolving for decades. For example, John Dewey’s book *Democracy in Education* (1916) is often cited in the teacher education literature as the philosophical origin of SL. In his book, Dewey emphasized education that promoted the application of learned skills through active engagement in one’s community. He argued that education should lead to direct action that supports the growth of society. Dewey’s work was critical to the development of SL as a form of pedagogy. The following section provides an overview of several key markers since Dewey that have contributed to the evolution of SL within higher education.

- In 1969, the city of Atlanta hosted the Atlanta Service-learning Conference which provided an arena for leaders in various organizations such as the Atlanta Urban Corps, Peace Corps, Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), and the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare to develop recommendations for furthering service engagement on university campuses across the country. The core recommendations stemming from the conference were: a) encourage students to participate in service that is linked to academic learning, b) encourage faculty to participate in the planning and running of SL programs, and c) encourage universities, private agencies, and government programs to provide opportunities and funds for students interested in SL (National Service-learning Clearinghouse, 2008).

- The presidents of Brown, Georgetown, and Stanford Universities created Campus Compact in 1985, a resource for universities to collaborate and further develop SL and community service nation-wide. Campus Compact emerged to combat the growing opinion that students attended universities solely to better themselves financially and therefore were not interested in bettering the communities in which they lived. Currently, there are more than 1,100 institutions of higher learning across the nation affiliated with Campus Compact (Campus Compact, 2009).
- The SL movement continued to build momentum by the passage of The National and Community Service Act (1990), which led to the development of Serve America (predecessor to Learn and Serve America) and the National Service-learning Clearinghouse. The Clearinghouse is responsible for the dissemination of SL resources (e.g., curriculum materials, publications, informational packets). Serve America provided funding for SL in K-12 and higher education settings. Additionally, the Act promoted SL as a key component in preservice teacher training (National Service-learning Clearing House, 2008).
- In 1993, the National and Community Service Trust Act was passed which united Senior Corps, AmeriCorps, VISTA, and Learn and Serve America into one federal agency known as the Corporation for National and Community Service. Learn and Serve America is responsible for providing funding, resources, and technical training to K-12 schools, community groups, and higher education institutions interested in developing SL programs. According to Learn and Serve America, the current goal in SL is to move beyond individual faculty programs toward fully engaged institutions that provide

opportunities for students to connect with citizens to create better communities across the nation (National Service-learning Clearing House, 2008).

- In 1996, Ernest Boyer challenged institutions of higher education (IHEs) to use their resources to address society's issues through community engagement.
- In 2008, the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching developed the Community Engagement Classification to recognize IHEs for their community engagement efforts (Carnegie Foundation, 2008).
- In 2009, the Edward Kennedy Serve America Act was passed, which expanded the mission of the Corporation for National and Community Service. Two highlights of the Act include increased funding for AmeriCorps, and the establishment of the Summer of Service program which will engage 6<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> graders in SL (Learn and Serve America, 2009).

Although it is not possible to pinpoint the exact origins of SL in special education, the literature provides some insight. In 2001, Mayhew and Welch published their "Call to Service" to the field of special education, which outlined the benefits associated with implementing SL in special education courses. This position paper was the first of its kind and is often cited in the SL literature on special education and higher education. Since 2001, there has been a steady increase in the literature related to SL suggesting that it is gaining traction in the field.

### **SL Prevalence**

Quantifying the prevalence of SL in higher education is difficult due to differing definitions of SL, inconsistent sources of measurement (e.g., courses, service hours), and reliability of data across IHEs (Bringle & Hatcher, 2009). Campus Compact was developed to help IHEs interested in the spread of SL and other forms of community engagement by training

faculty to integrate community engagement in their teaching and research. Campus Compact has increased in membership from four institutions in 1985 to over 1,045 in the year 2006 (Campus Compact, 2006). One of the primary roles Campus Compact plays in the spread of SL is tracking its use across member campuses. A yearly survey conducted by Campus Compact reveals that over a five-year span (2001-2006) there was an increase in the percentage of a) students engaged in service, b) campuses that reward faculty for SL in tenure and review, and c) SL courses offered per campus (Campus, Compact, 2006). Moreover, SL is implemented most frequently in the field of education (Campus Compact, 1999).

A survey conducted by the National Service-learning in Teacher Education Partnership (1998) reported that more than 225 of the 1,325 teacher education programs in the U.S. offered SL experiences, and another 200 programs were interested in implementing SL (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001). SL in teacher education has a strong presence at some institutions and is limited or non-existent at other institutions (Furco & Ammon, 2000). Currently, there are no studies that have investigated the prevalence of SL specifically within the discipline of special education; however, there has been an increase in the literature related to SL and special education in higher education. Survey data reveal that special education faculty with SL experience are represented across all institution and community types and the majority have several colleagues involved in SL (Neeper & Dymond, in press).

### **Faculty Involvement in SL**

While there is growing evidence to support the positive impact of SL courses on future educators and non-educators, there has been minimal emphasis on the role faculty play in developing SL courses (Driscoll, 2000; Hammond, 1994; Harwood et al., 2005; Pribbenow, 2005; Schnaubelt & Statham, 2007). Driscoll (2000) called for increased research in the

following areas related to faculty involvement: a) motivation and attraction of faculty to SL, b) faculty supports for SL implementation, c) impact or influence of SL on faculty, and d) challenges to implementing SL in higher education courses. This section will outline the literature related to faculty implementation of SL, motivation for using SL, challenges to implementing SL, and methods for overcoming the challenges to SL.

### **Implementation of SL**

SL as a pedagogy is extremely flexible (i.e., duration of service, course objectives, service location) in its implementation, and as a result, it may look vastly different across classes, departments, and institutions (Butin, 2007; Rowls & Swick, 2000). SL has been implemented in higher education across IHEs (e.g., public, private, research focused, teacher focused, four-year, community college) and disciplines (e.g., engineering, sociology, nursing, education); however, a full investigation of the implementation of SL in higher education goes beyond the scope of this review. Therefore, this section highlights some of the ways SL has been implemented in teacher education and more specifically the field of special education.

SL has been implemented across a wide variety of teaching disciplines such as special education (see Al Otaiba, 2005), social studies (see Palmer, 1998; Wade, 1995), science (see Barton, 2000), music (see Doyle, Hotchkiss, Noel, Huss & Holmes, 2004), physical education (see LaMaster, 2001), art education (see Jeffers, 2000), educational psychology (see Shastri, 2001, 2003), early childhood education (see Freeman & Swick, 2003), and technology education (see Leh, 2005). It is most prevalent in the area of multicultural education (see Bollin, 2007; Boyle-Baise, 2005; Boyle-Baise & Kilbane, 2000; Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 2000; Catapano, 2006; Hale, 2008; Li & Lal, 2005; Romo & Chavez, 2006).

To investigate how SL was implemented in teacher education Rowls and Swick (2000) conducted a document analysis of 11 SL syllabi pertaining to teacher education. The syllabi represented multiple disciplines (e.g., elementary education, special education, social studies) and included a variety of course types (e.g., introductory courses, methods courses). SL projects ranged in duration from 12 to 50 hours and included direct and indirect service projects. (Direct projects such as tutoring and mentoring allow students to work directly with service recipients and are usually conducted in the community. Indirect projects such as developing an informational brochure for an organization provide a service that will indirectly benefit a specific group, are usually conducted within the context of the classroom and do not involve direct work with service recipients.) Some of the syllabi provided students the option of developing their own service projects and placements. Differences in grading and evaluation of programs were also noted. Despite the variances across courses in how SL was incorporated, all syllabi described the need for preservice teachers to reflect on their learning.

There is a dilemma in SL pedagogy within teacher education that is not found in other academic disciplines. Faculty in teacher education must incorporate SL in their courses as well as teach preservice teachers the skills necessary to implement the pedagogy in their K-12 classrooms (Erickson & Anderson, 2005). In contrast, university faculty outside the field of education can focus solely on using SL as an instructional strategy to enhance their courses. Anderson and Erickson (2003) indicated that teacher education programs provided exposure to SL, but few prepared preservice teachers to develop and implement SL in their future classrooms. Several authors have stated that programs that provide multiple opportunities for preservice teachers to experience quality SL increase their likelihood of implementing SL as a future teacher (Anderson, 2000; Harwood, Fliss, & Gaulding, 2006; Root et al., 2002; Wade,

1997). A survey of teacher education faculty conducted by Furco and Ammon (2000) identified four commonly used approaches to implementing SL in teacher education courses. These include a) discussing SL as a possible teaching strategy in preservice pedagogy courses, b) having preservice teachers participate in SL projects with their instructors, c) offering stand alone courses on SL pedagogy, and d) placing preservice teachers with K-12 teachers who use SL in their classrooms. Additional research is needed to determine the benefits of each approach.

Neeper and Dymond (in press) surveyed special education faculty with SL experience to gain insight into how SL is used in the field of special education. First, faculty were in strong agreement regarding the elements (e.g., reflection, link to course content) that are most closely aligned with quality SL courses. Second, the majority of participants that taught SL courses reported that they require their students to be engaged in service for an average of 11-30 hours. Third, they believe final projects such as portfolios or final papers to be the most effective for evaluating student learning. Fourth, they used personal correspondence (e.g., email, telephone) to evaluate community participants' level of satisfaction. Lastly, participants were involved in several SL teaching activities including offering a SL component to an existing course, conducting conference presentations on SL, developing SL instructional materials, participating on a committee about SL, mentoring a faculty member interested in SL, conducting workshops on SL, teaching undergraduate courses about SL, and teaching graduate courses about SL.

The implementation of SL outlined in the special education literature parallels the literature in general education and the survey data collected by Neeper and Dymond (in press). For example, special education faculty have used SL in introductory courses (see Griffith, 2005; Lodato-Wilson, 2005; Mayhew & Welch, 2001; Muwana & Gaffney, 2011; Santos, Ruppard, &

Jeans, 2011), methods courses (see Al Otaiba, 2005; Griffith, 2005), and graduate courses (see Kennedy, 2005; Regan, 2006). Some faculty have required SL projects (see Al Otaiba, 2005; Curran, 1998) and others have made projects voluntary (see Griffith, 2005). One of the differences noted in the special education literature is that SL courses are offered for special education majors (see Al Otaiba, 2005), non-majors (see Novak, Murray, Scheuermann, & Curran, 2009; Smith, 2003), and both non-majors and majors (see Mayhew & Welch, 2001; McHatton, Thomas, & Lehman, 2006).

SL courses detailed in the special education literature have included a myriad of hands-on experiences working with students with high incidence disabilities (see Griffith, 2005; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999), students with low incidence disabilities (see Curran, 1998, 1999; Smith, 2003), culturally and linguistically diverse students (see Woods & Conderman, 2005), urban communities (see McHatton et al., 2006), rural communities (see Davis, Emery, & Lane, 1998), and specific skills such as tutoring and mentoring (see Al Otaiba, 2005; Griffith, 2005; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999). Some special education programs provide multiple experiences with SL to ensure future special educators can successfully implement SL in their own classrooms (see Cepello, Davis, & Hill-Ward, 2003).

Although there are no studies that have investigated faculty recommendations for implementing SL within the field of special education, there are recommendations that can be gleaned from the existing literature base. Three special education articles included a "lessons learned" section that outlined recommendations for implementing SL in higher education (see Cepello et al., 2003; Jenkins & Sheehey, 2009; Muwana & Gaffney, 2011). Recommendations for the field included providing preservice teachers with multiple SL experiences to improve



their ability to use SL in their classrooms, keeping open communication with students and community partners about requirements and progress, and developing detailed syllabi.

### **Motivation for Using SL**

There are several possible motivational factors (i.e., perceived benefits) that may contribute to faculty members' decisions to implement SL in their courses. O'Meara (2008) investigated faculty motivations for using SL in higher education and found that motivational factors often overlapped across multiple categories. These categories will be used to outline potential motivators that may apply to teacher education and special education. Currently, there are no studies that focus specifically on faculty motivators within the field of special education; however, one can draw conclusions from the existing special education literature that may translate to faculty motivators.

First, faculty appear to be motivated to use SL because they believe it can facilitate student learning and growth (O'Meara, 2008). Higher education faculty believed that SL can develop critical thinking skills, deepen understanding of course content in real world-world settings, and develop civic consciousness within their students (Abes et al., 2002; Bowen & Kiser, 2009; Hammond, 1994; Holland, 1999; McKay & Rozee, 2004; Pribbenow, 2005). Anderson and Erickson (2003) surveyed teacher education faculty members regarding their rationale for including SL in their courses and the three most common responses included (a) exposing students to communities, (b) exposing students to diversity issues, and (c) enhancing personal and social growth. Interestingly, improving preservice teachers' academic achievement was the least frequently reported rationale for including SL in teacher education courses. SL courses outlined in the special education literature provide evidence that service linked to course objectives creates opportunities for preservice teachers to gain structured hands-on experience

using effective teaching strategies (e.g., progress monitoring, literacy instruction, individualized instruction, behavior interventions) that translate to positive outcomes for students with disabilities (see Al Otaiba, 2005; Griffith, 2005; Muscott, 2001; Muscott & O'Brien, 1999). Several authors reported that students increased their knowledge of course content and understanding related to individuals with disabilities as a result of their participation in SL projects (Al Otaiba, 2005; Jenkins & Sheehey, 2009; Novak et al., 2009; Muwana & Gaffney, 2011, Santos et al., 2011). SL may also provide opportunities for preservice special educators to become reflective practitioners (Mayhew & Welch, 2001; Novak, 2010; Welch & James, 2007).

The use of SL for developing student growth is a dominant theme throughout the teacher education literature. For example, Root (1994) stated that SL provides opportunities for higher order thinking and cooperation by allowing students to identify community problems and potential solutions. Donahue (1999) argued for the adoption of SL in teacher education because it requires candidates to move beyond the technical aspects of teaching to think about and manage dilemmas that are more contextual and cannot be taught using traditional methods. Additionally, SL experiences allow preservice teachers to extend their learning, provide opportunities for problem solving and reflection on teaching practices, and promote empowerment by placing preservice teachers in leadership roles (Wade, 1997). Preservice teachers engaged in quality SL gain first-hand experience needed to solidify career choices (Flottemesch, Heide, Pedras, & Karp, 2001; Malone, Jones, & Stallings, 2002; Root et al., 2002; Wade & Yarbrough, 1997). A few authors have suggested that SL courses may act as a recruiting tool for special education departments by giving students outside the discipline opportunities to interact with persons with disabilities (Kennedy, 2005; Muwana & Gaffney, 2011; Pugach, 2001).

Second, faculty are motivated to use SL when they perceive a fit between their discipline and community engagement (O'Meara, 2008). SL advocates have suggested that there are certain disciplines such as education that lend themselves to SL implementation (Abes et al., 2002; Holland, 1999). Several authors within the field of teacher education have made claims that SL provides opportunities that cannot be reproduced within the context of the classroom setting. For example, SL programs that focus on the needs of K-12 students provide opportunities for preservice teachers to gain insight into the lives of their students, particularly those with diverse learning needs (Harwood, Fliss, & Gaulding, 2006; Potthoff et al., 2000; Root, 1994; Root et al., 2002; Wade, 1997). These sentiments are echoed in the special education literature, in that SL allows faculty members to provide authentic experiences with specific populations (e.g., English learners, persons with severe disabilities, urban communities, rural communities, families) that would not otherwise be possible (see Al Otaiba, 2005; Davis et al., 1998; Jenkins & Sheehey, 2009; McHatton et al., 2006; Muwana & Gaffney, 2011; Novak et al., 2009; Smith, 2003).

Third, faculty are motivated to use SL because they have a personal commitment to specific social issues, people, and places. Nowhere is this commitment to social issues more evident than the field of special education. One of the greatest differences between special education and other educational disciplines is its focus on the advocacy of individuals with disabilities. Special education departments often have two teaching missions. One is to prepare future special educators and the second is to educate the public regarding disability issues such as inclusion and disability law (Gallagher, 2006). As a result, most special education departments offer courses on disability awareness to non-special education majors as well as non-education majors. Nepper and Dymond (in press) found that over 50% of the special

education faculty that were surveyed reported that their department offered SL courses to non-majors.

Social issues such as the inclusion of persons with disabilities have been addressed using SL pedagogy. For example, SL programs within the field of special education have been used to promote public awareness regarding the contributions persons with disabilities make to communities (see Curran, 1998, 1999; Jenkins & Sheehey, 2009; Karayan & Gathercoal, 2003; Mayhew & Welch, 2001; Smith, 2003). Kennedy (2005) used a SL course to promote the inclusion of new special educators and students with disabilities in their schools and communities. Additionally, some special education faculty have used SL courses as a means to promote inclusion and increase positive perceptions of students with disabilities within their schools and communities (see Cepello et al., 2003; Karayan & Gathercoal, 2003; Lodato-Wilson, 2005; Muwana & Gaffney, 2011; Novak, 2010; Parker, 2009; Santos et al., 2011). In many cases, SL courses are the first structured experiences students have with individuals with disabilities; therefore, it is essential that SL projects do not reinforce negative stereotypes (Gent & Gurecka, 2001; Mayhew & Welch, 2001; Novak, 2010). Although there is the potential for negative outcomes, authors have reported positive feedback and satisfaction from community partners involved in SL projects in special education courses (Muwana & Gaffney, 2011; Santos et al., 2011).

Fourth, faculty may be motivated to implement SL because it is grounded in their personal and/or professional identity (O'Meara, 2008). Faculty report that autobiographical experiences such as race, gender, disability, religious beliefs, or previous experiences with service have contributed to their alignment with SL pedagogy (Holland, 1999; O'Meara, 2008). Some SL faculty have engaged in SL throughout their careers until it has become part of their

professional identity (Hammond, 1994; O'Meara, 2008). It is worth noting that a handful of special education faculty with SL experience reported having over 20 years of SL experience which suggests that SL has become a part of their professional identity (Neeper & Dymond, in press). In the field of special education, faculty are closely tied to issues in the community that promote positive outcomes for persons with disabilities (Mayhew & Welch, 2001). Moreover, special education is a "service-based" field that closely aligns with the goal driven emphasis of SL pedagogy.

Fifth, faculty may be motivated by the desire for collaboration, relationships, and partnerships (O'Meara, 2008). Collaboration is at the crux of SL pedagogy. Pribbenow (2005) found that faculty who were engaged in SL in higher education were able to develop faculty networks due to their common interest in SL pedagogy. Neeper and Dymond (in press) provided evidence that SL may increase special education faculty collaboration between community partners and faculty within and outside their department. A review of the literature on SL in the field of special education reveals that faculty members develop partnerships that focus on their interests (e.g., individuals with severe disabilities, families, English language learners); thus creating opportunities for faculty members and students to collaborate on SL projects that address the goals of these populations.

Lastly, faculty motivation for implementing SL may be grounded in their institutional type and mission, appointment, reward structure, and institutional culture toward SL (O'Meara, 2008). Neeper and Dymond (in-press) found that special education faculty with SL experience reported that their departments valued SL and their institutions had initiatives to increase its use; however, in most cases it did not align with their rewards structure. Moreover, special education

faculty with SL experience had access to several institutional supports such as SL colleagues, campus-wide SL centers, faculty training programs, and Campus Compact membership.

In summary, several factors can be extrapolated from the literature that may motivate special education faculty to implement SL in their courses. First, SL has the potential to positively impact student learning and growth. Preservice teachers can apply their skills in authentic structured experiences while developing reflexivity. Additionally, students can be placed in leadership roles. Second, there appears to be a close fit between SL pedagogy and the field of special education because of the focus on identifying and working toward goals. Third, special education faculty are closely tied and passionate about social issues and people such as improving the outcomes for persons with disabilities. SL has the potential to assist individuals with disabilities, and the community agencies that support them, achieve their goals. Quality SL projects have the potential to increase awareness and positive perceptions of individuals with disabilities. Lastly, the field of special education is collaborative by nature, advocacy driven, and community focused.

### **Challenges to Implementing SL**

Numerous researchers have investigated the challenges that deter faculty from implementing SL in higher education. Common barriers in higher education include lack of time, lack of resources, lack of alignment with mission, difficulty establishing and sustaining community partners, giving up control of the classroom, negative views toward SL by colleagues, lack of alignment with promotion and tenure, lack of alignment with discipline, logistics and liability, and lack of understanding about SL (Abes et al., 2002; Hammond, 1994; Harwood et al., 2005; Holland, 1999; McKay & Rozee, 2004; O'Meara, 2008; Welch, Liese, & Berderson, 2004).

Anderson and Pickeral (2000) categorized the barriers to implementing SL in teacher education into four categories: a) institutional, b) curricular, c) K-12 and community, and d) faculty and student issues. These four categories parallel many of the studies found within the broader context of SL and higher education.

**Institutional.** SL may not align with the priorities of an institution or department resulting in few faculty members using SL and minimal opportunities for preservice teachers to connect theory to practice (Anderson & Erickson, 2003). For example, most institutions do not recognize SL in decisions regarding awards, promotions, and tenure. Likewise, lack of funding to support the development of SL courses may reduce the number of faculty members providing SL opportunities for their students (Anderson & Pickeral, 2000). Although funding is sometimes viewed as a barrier, Anderson and Pickeral (2000) found that faculty with SL experience did not believe funding was necessary to implement quality SL courses.

**Curricular.** Many faculty members believe that the teacher education curriculum is already overcrowded and that SL does not align with teacher education standards (Anderson & Pickeral, 2000; Furco & Ammon, 2000). Moreover, faculty may view the lack of a formal SL curriculum as a potential barrier to SL implementation (Anderson & Pickeral, 2000).

**K-12 and community.** Coordination and collaboration with various community sites may present a variety of challenges. Anderson and Pickeral (2000) identified the following barriers associated with community collaborations: a) difficulty developing long-term partnerships with community partners, b) difficulty communicating with community partners, c) increased liability and safety issues associated with community sites, d) lack of transportation to community sites, and e) difficulty locating community partners interested in SL. These challenges may be present when coordinating service projects with schools as well as other

agencies and organizations where SL occurs. Ledoux and McHenry (2008) cautioned teacher educators regarding potential pitfalls associated with community partnerships such as differences in partner expectations, curricular mismatches, and negative modeling.

**Faculty issues.** One of the top barriers associated with the implementation of SL is lack of time (e.g., planning time, implementation time) to develop quality programs (Anderson & Pickeral, 2000; Furco & Ammon, 2000). Faculty may perceive the additional time needed to develop quality SL programs as outweighing the benefits associated with their use (Anderson & Pickeral, 2000). Moreover, faculty may be unprepared to use SL as a teaching method, lack understanding regarding SL pedagogy, or be uninterested in using SL (Anderson, 2000; Potthoff et al., 2000).

**Student issues.** Some preservice teachers may have a lack of interest and negative perceptions of SL (Anderson & Pickeral, 2000). For example, preservice teachers may view SL as an “add-on” requirement to a course that requires extra work. Learning styles may also affect preservice teachers’ interest in SL. For example, some preservice teachers may prefer to be taught using traditional lecture methods depending on their preferred learning styles.

Neeper and Dymond (in press) investigated barriers to implementing SL in special education courses. Special education faculty reported minimal barriers to implementing SL pedagogy in higher education courses. Identified barriers related to time (e.g., supervision, preparation), a challenge that is well documented in the teacher education literature on SL (Anderson & Erickson, 2003; Anderson & Pickeral, 2000; Furco & Ammon, 2000). Barriers related to curricular issues which are commonly reported in the teacher education literature as challenges to implementation were ranked among the lowest among special education faculty with SL experience. Faculty variables such as type of institution (i.e., teaching or research) or



size of community (i.e., rural vs. urban) appear to have an impact on faculty views. Participants from teaching oriented institutions reported greater barriers such as meeting accreditation standards, liability issues, and student recruitment than their colleagues from research-oriented institutions. Additionally, faculty from rural institutions reported greater barriers to connecting SL to course content than their peers from urban institutions. Lastly, Muwana and Gaffney (2011) encountered student issues related to coordinating student schedules and transportation to community placements and differences in student expectations.

### **Overcoming the Challenges to SL Implementation**

Currently, there are no studies that have investigated special education faculty with SL teaching experience regarding their recommendations for overcoming the many challenges associated with SL implementation. Several SL faculty in higher education have reported that despite the challenges associated with SL implementation, the benefits outweigh the barriers; therefore, there has been an increased focus in the field of SL to combat the many challenges associated with developing and sustaining quality SL programs (Bowen & Kiser, 2009).

Facilitators of SL implementation within teacher education can be categorized into three main areas. These include faculty support, student involvement, and authentic experience.

**Faculty support.** SL programs are often spread by one or two members of the faculty that act as “champions” of the pedagogy (Anderson & Callahan, 2005; Callahan & Root, 2003; Furco & Ammon, 2000), although relying too heavily on one faculty member could inhibit the growth of SL programs (Anderson & Callahan, 2005; Furco & Ammon, 2000). Administration and faculty support (e.g., pedagogical understanding, financial support) are key to the sustainability and long term impact of SL (Furco & Ammon, 2000). To increase faculty support, Anderson and Callahan (2005) recommend that institutions committed to SL consider SL interest

and experience when hiring new faculty. Campus-wide SL centers may provide faculty members with valuable supports such as arranging community placements, professional development, and funding (Anderson & Erickson, 2003). There is research that suggests that institutions that have a campus-wide SL initiative are more likely to include SL in their teacher education programs (Anderson & Callahan, 2005; Furco & Ammon, 2000). Special education faculty with SL experience reported several institutional supports such as SL colleagues, campus wide SL centers, campus initiatives to increase SL, faculty training programs, and membership in Campus Compact (Neeper & Dymond, in press).

**Student involvement.** Preservice teacher satisfaction is essential to the spread of SL through teacher education programs and K-12 schools. Furthermore, faculty members are more likely to implement SL when preservice teachers have given personal testimonies as to the benefits of SL pedagogy (Furco & Ammon, 2000). One method to increase preservice teacher satisfaction is to provide opportunities for students to have a voice in the selection and development of the SL opportunities (Furco & Ammon, 2000). Although giving choices of SL projects is important, not all students find it easy to take control of their learning. Flottemesch and colleagues (2001) found that some preservice teachers struggled to identify SL projects and make decisions related to project choice. Student variables such as previous SL experience may have had an impact on student involvement. Additionally, SL programs that are directly aligned with student interests are likely to have the greatest impact on student learning and increase the likelihood that preservice teachers will implement SL in their future classrooms (Wade et al., 1999).

**Authentic experience.** Participating in SL projects that are specifically designed to be implemented in higher education settings may not provide preservice teachers with experience in

authentic teaching environments because they may not be instructional based or directly involve students in K-12 settings. There is an increased likelihood that teacher education programs will include SL pedagogy in their curricula when local school districts have SL initiatives (Furco & Ammon, 2000). Teacher education programs that have an ongoing direct connection with community partners or school personnel (e.g., principal, SL coordinator) may increase the effectiveness of SL programs by giving preservice teachers access to quality SL experiences.

### **Measurement of Faculty Involvement**

Although the literature base pertaining to faculty involvement is limited, it provides a foundation from which to build. This section will outline the methodological practices that have been used to investigate SL implementation, faculty recommendations, motivators and challenges to implementation as well as the limitations within each area.

Studies that focus on the implementation of SL typically employ survey methodology and are conducted across all disciplines and institutions in an effort to investigate the use of SL. For example, Campus Compact conducts a survey of its members each year to determine the number of faculty involved, courses developed, and hours completed. While beneficial to our overall understanding of SL implementation, these studies are not discipline specific and their primary focus is on prevalence rather than in-depth description. A review of the teacher education literature revealed only two studies that investigated how SL courses are implemented across multiple IHEs. Rowls and Swick (2000) used document analysis to investigate SL syllabi across a variety of disciplines in teacher education to develop an understanding of the basic components (duration, evaluation) used; though, there were no concrete examples of courses developed and the sole use of document analysis prevented the instructors from elaborating on how SL was implemented. Nepper and Dymond (in press) used survey methodology to investigate how SL is

being used in the field of special education; however, the use of survey methodology prevented them from gaining in-depth information.

Given the lack of research on how SL is implemented, it is not surprising that there is almost no research related to faculty recommendations for implementing SL courses. As mentioned earlier in this review, there are several handbooks that provide guidelines for implementing quality SL, but little to no research on how these guidelines are perceived by the faculty using them. Neeper and Dymond (in press) collected survey data related to components that are needed to develop quality SL courses. The survey methods (i.e., Likert Scale) used prevented participants from freely sharing their recommendations with the field. Three studies (see Cepello et al., 2003; Jenkins & Sheehey, 2009; Muwana & Gaffney, 2011) included a "lessons learned" recommendation section that acted as a self-reflection on the experiences authors gained from being a SL instructor.

Survey research has been the most widely used method for investigating faculty perceptions related to motivators and challenges associated with implementing SL in higher education (see Abes et al., 2002; Hammond, 1994), teacher education (see Anderson & Erickson, 2003; Anderson & Pickeral, 2000; Furco & Ammon, 2000), and special education (see Neeper & Dymond, in press). Much of the research has been conducted across educational disciplines (e.g., math, science, special education), but few studies address the differences that may occur within specific disciplines. A common limitation reported in the survey literature is the lack of in-depth responses that are possible when using quantitative methods. O'Meara (2008), who used document analysis to explore faculty motivators within community engagement scholar applications, voiced these same concerns. A handful of researchers have used qualitative methods (i.e., interviewing faculty members) to explore SL involvement in more depth (see

McKay & Rozee, 2004; Pribbenow, 2005); however, these studies focused on a single institution and were not discipline specific.

### **Statement of the Problem**

There are several indicators (e.g., increased Campus Compact membership, adoption of the Carnegie Classification of Community Engagement, increased literature base) that suggest that the use of SL is becoming more prevalent in higher education to meet a variety of community, curricular, and student needs. Moreover, further evidence suggests that SL is being increasingly used within the field of special education. Given the rise in SL implementation and its potential for positive outcomes for students and community partners, it is increasingly more important that we develop a solid understanding of how SL pedagogy is used within the field of special education and the impact it has on all stakeholders.

Driscoll (2000) and many others have realized the important role that faculty members play in developing quality SL courses that will address both the goals of the community and student learning. This realization has led to a call for additional research that focuses specifically on faculty involvement in SL. The current research on faculty involvement within higher education provides a glimpse of how SL is implemented, faculty recommendations for implementing SL, and motivations and challenges to implementation. If this body of research tells us anything, it is that variables such as motivations and challenges to SL implementation are closely linked to our disciplines and us as individuals. However, there is little research on the use of SL in specific disciplines such as special education- a discipline that is grounded on the principles of increasing community involvement, advocacy, collaboration, service, and achieving shared goals.

Abes et al. (2002) suggested that if we want to facilitate the implementation of quality SL courses, it is important that we identify SL faculty and give them opportunities to share their SL experiences within their academic disciplines so that others may learn from their expertise. Several faculty motivators to SL implementation can be gleaned from the literature on SL and special education that focus on specific SL course projects; however, there is not a collective understanding of the use of SL pedagogy in the field. Additionally, special education faculty with expertise in SL may provide recommendations for developing SL courses that maximize the potential benefits to all stakeholders. Much of what we know about faculty involvement in SL to this point in the field of special education has been self-reported or gathered using methodical practices that employ fixed responses (e.g., survey research), which prevent faculty from truly sharing their SL experiences. Therefore, if SL is going to continue to develop in the field of special education, research is needed that enables special education faculty with SL expertise to pass on their knowledge to enable other faculty members to develop courses that improve student learning and growth while meeting authentic needs in the community related to individuals with disabilities.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this investigation was to establish a foundational understanding of how service-learning (SL) is used by special education faculty with SL teaching experience, understand factors that motivate and deter faculty from implementing SL, and to provide recommendations for faculty members who are interested in developing or enhancing their own SL courses. The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. How do special education faculty use SL in their courses?
2. What factors motivate and deter special education faculty from implementing SL in their courses?
3. What recommendations do special education faculty have for implementing SL in special education courses?
4. How does the use of SL align with the field of special education?

This study employed qualitative methodology that included a survey, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. One of the choices a qualitative researcher must make is to determine whether the investigation requires a greater emphasis on breadth or depth to adequately answer the research questions. As Michael Patton (2002) stated:

No rule of thumb exists to tell a researcher precisely how to focus a study. The extent to which a research or evaluation study is broad or narrow depends on purpose, the resources available, the time available, and the interests of those involved. In brief, these are not choices between good and bad but choices among alternatives, all of which have merit (p.228).

A broad-scale approach was chosen for this study to better understand how SL is being used in special education courses across faculty members from different institutions of higher education (IHEs) to generate foundational understanding of the phenomenon rather than highlight specific case examples. As Patton (2002) stated, "less depth from a larger number of people can be

especially helpful in exploring a phenomenon and trying to document diversity or understand variation" (p. 244). Therefore, a design that placed greater emphasis on breadth was employed for this study to understand similarities and differences that will inform future investigations.

### **Research Biases**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis; therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge researcher bias that may inhibit impartial judgment on a particular topic (Lichtman, 2010). As the primary researcher, I view qualitative methods as a means to develop a deeper understanding regarding personal experiences and perceptions that cannot be accomplished through quantitative methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 2002). Having the experience of conducting an investigation that used survey methodology (Neeper and Dymond, in press) to investigate the use of SL allowed me to see first-hand that there was more to SL implementation that could not be explored without asking the experts.

As the primary researcher, I view SL as a beneficial instructional strategy that enhances classroom learning; however, it is not a panacea or a substitute for quality classroom instruction. I have studied the literature on SL, conducted research on its use, implemented it as a special education teacher, and assisted with the implementation of SL in higher education settings. The sum of these experiences has resulted in a personal framework for what I believe SL to be and what it is not. For example, I do not consider all forms of community engagement such as student teaching, community service, or volunteer work to be SL.

SL pedagogy aligns with my philosophy of education. In my opinion, teaching is most effective when it is student-driven, application-based, and occurs in natural contexts. I feel strongly that all students can learn and be engaged in their education if they are given the



opportunity; therefore, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide a variety of learning experiences to meet the needs of all learners. I consider the surrounding community an extension of the classroom rather than a separate entity and think that all students regardless of ability or educational trajectory should be prepared to meet the challenges of post-school life. For the aforementioned reasons, SL can be an effective instructional strategy if it is carefully planned, closely linked to learning objectives, and includes opportunities for reflection, action, and celebration. In my experience, when the instructor participates in SL alongside their students it lends itself to more positive learning outcomes than programs that require students to generate their own experience with little guidance. I question whether SL would match the learning objectives of all courses and feel that it should not be overused.

In my opinion, SL must be a reciprocal partnership between students and the community. Students of all grade-levels and abilities should have the option of participating in quality SL programs. Students ought to have a voice in the planning and implementation of the projects. Teachers must ensure that projects are developed that align with community goals rather than helping a specific population. In addition, information related to community partner satisfaction should be collected. As a general rule, students with disabilities should be placed in a position to be equal participants within higher education courses that incorporate SL. When possible same age peers with disabilities ought to be working alongside their peers without disabilities to engage in SL. For example, a preservice reading course that has partnered with an elementary school should focus on struggling readers not just struggling readers with disabilities. Moreover, this experience could be enhanced if preservice teachers partnered with high school students with and without disabilities to create tutoring sessions for elementary students.

As a future faculty member, I consider developing educators with an understanding of a range of instructional strategies as well as the ability to effectively apply them in a variety of settings to be a priority. In my opinion, SL in K-12 settings will improve if preservice teachers are trained to use it under the careful supervision of their instructors. Although I was not formally trained to use SL in the classroom, I feel that my SL instruction would have greatly benefited from experiences as a preservice teacher. I strongly believe that preservice teachers should have the opportunity to engage in SL as well as develop a SL program for students in their teacher education programs.

Although I have formed some general beliefs about SL pedagogy, my views are continually being shaped and challenged by colleagues, literature, conferences, and experiences in the field. For me, there is an internal struggle of wanting to promote SL, but feeling apprehensive that the field of SL has not been investigated to the extent that wide-scale adoption of quality SL is feasible. As I build my SL knowledge, I find myself in the position of trying to define and defend the use of SL to faculty that have not had experience using SL. These encounters can be compounded when I explain that I am interested in investigating SL in both higher education and K-12 settings. Some non-SL faculty view SL as a fad, a feel-good endeavor, or a non-priority in the field. I have chosen to focus on higher education because I feel that SL has merit as an instructional strategy within IHE contexts as a means to provide students with opportunities to work alongside persons with disabilities, gain a better understanding of the culture of disability, hone preservice teachers' skills in applied settings, and that the improvement of SL in preservice programs will translate to quality educational experiences in K-12 settings for all students.

Investigating faculty perspectives as a graduate student may present challenges. As a graduate student, I do not fully understand the culture of academia and the intricacies of teaching a "full load" while managing additional professional responsibilities. This inexperience naturally places me in the role of the learner, which is a positive dynamic in qualitative interviewing; however, it may also impact my credibility in the eyes of experienced SL faculty. Not having the insight of being a faculty member may limit my ability to elicit more in-depth responses.

The abovementioned experiences and beliefs have the potential to impact my investigation of SL faculty in many ways. First, I must be cognizant of the fact that many of the participants are going to have differing views regarding the use of SL. Remaining neutral in my reactions and responses will allow participants to remain comfortable detailing their experiences. Second, I need to be aware that my experiences and views have shaped the questions that I ask. Therefore, the ability to be flexible in my delivery of interview questions during the interview process will be critical if differing views are going to emerge. Third, being aware of my biases during data analysis will increase the likelihood that I view data with open mindedness. Lastly, as a SL advocate, I am excited about the opportunity to interview faculty members with SL expertise; however, I am mindful of the fact that I do not have experience with SL as a faculty member, thus I must keep my emotions in-check during the interview process.

### **Participants**

No set guidelines regarding sample sizes in qualitative research exist; therefore, it is recommended that greater emphasis be placed on the sampling strategy to ensure the participants match the study's purpose (Patton, 2002). Criterion sampling, a form of purposeful sampling, was used to choose participants based on specific criterion in an effort to sample cases that were most likely to be information rich. Criterion sampling is often used to identify specific cases

from previously conducted questionnaires so that more in-depth follow-up investigations can be employed (Patton, 2002). In this study, the criteria for selection was that the individuals be employed by a four-year IHE in the United States, be a member of the special education faculty or teach courses related to individuals with disabilities at their IHE, have taught SL courses in higher education, and have published peer-reviewed literature on SL. Publication criteria was included to ensure the selection of faculty members that were more likely to have a strong understanding of SL pedagogy and to have engaged in scholarly discourse on SL related topics.

Potential participants were purposively selected using two methods. First, a subset of the participants from Neepser and Dymond (in press) were identified that matched the selection criteria, which resulted in 12 potential participants. Methods used to identify initial survey participants included literature reviews, SL syllabi databases, conference programs, and Internet searches. Second, literature published since the Neepser and Dymond study (i.e., two years) was reviewed in an effort to identify additional participants using the same keywords and databases. Additionally, journals (e.g., *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning*, *Academic Exchange Quarterly*, *Journal of Higher Education Outreach and Engagement*, *Journal of Experiential Education*) that typically publish articles related to higher education and SL were individually searched for articles related to special education by going to each journal's website and scanning each issue. Four articles were identified using this method, which included five authors that met the selection criteria and had not been previously identified. In sum, these two methods resulted in the identification of 17 potential participants that met the selection criteria.

Qualitative researchers have recommended establishing a minimal number of participants to ensure there is enough breadth in the data to meet the purpose of the study (Lichtman, 2010). The goal of this study was to include as many of the 17 participants as possible to maximize the

breadth of the investigation. However, a minimum sample size of 10 was established to ensure there was sufficient representation from SL experts from varying IHEs, backgrounds, interests, and experience levels to provide a broad look at the use of SL in special education courses. Of the 17 potential participants, 13 agreed to participate, two declined to participate, and two did not respond to the invitation to participate. The 13 participants had varying levels of experience, represented various communities and IHEs, and reported differing levels of departmental engagement and support. Table 1 outlines the demographic variables of the participants.

Table 1

*Participant Demographics (N=13)*

Faculty Demographic Variables	n	%
Faculty Rank (N=13)		
Full Professor	4	31
Associate Professor	8	61
Assistant Professor	1	8
Years of SL experience (N=13)		
More than 10 years	4	31
6-10 years	6	46
1-5 years	3	23
Taught SL Course in Last 3 Years (N=13)		
Yes	11	85
No	2	15

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Department Demographic Variables	n	%
Number of Faculty in Department (N=13)		
21-30 faculty members	4	31
11-20 faculty members	8	61
1-10 faculty members	1	8
Faculty in Department of Participant Engaged in SL (N=13)		
More than 5	1	8
5 or Less	12	92
Department Prepare Preservice Special Education Teachers (N=13)		
Yes	12	92
No	1	8
Not Sure	0	0
Department Prepare Preservice Special Education Teachers to Use SL (N=13)		
Yes	2	15
No	9	70
Not Sure	2	15

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Department Demographic Variables	n	%
Department Prepare Inservice Special Education Teachers to Use SL (N=13)		
Yes	2	15
No	9	70
Not Sure	2	15
IHE Demographic Variables		
Funding of Institution (N=13)		
Public	12	92
Private	1	8
Type of Institution (N=13)		
Research	7	54
Teaching	6	46
Size of Institution (N=13)		
30,000 or more students	4	31
10,000-29,999 students	7	54
1-9,999 students	2	15
Size of Community (N=13)		
Urbanized Area (50,000+)	8	61
Non-Urbanized Area (1-49,999)	5	39

## **Data Collection**

Attempts were made to collect three forms of data from each participant. These forms included pre-interview survey data, interview data, and course documents. Participants were initially contacted via email using a formal invitation. Email correspondence is viewed as an effective tool to increase participation rates among populations that use email in their professional settings (Krathwohl, 1998). Neeper and Dymond (in press) found this method to be an effective means to initiate contact with university special education faculty who use SL. Two versions of the formal invitation were developed. One version (see Appendix A) was developed that addressed faculty in a manner that acknowledged that they had participated in the study conducted by Neeper and Dymond (in press), and a second version (see Appendix B) was developed for participants that were unfamiliar with the researchers. Both formal invitations included the purpose and significance of the study, selection criteria, participant requirements, a description of an incentive for participation, and an IRB approval letter (see Appendix C). Participants were prompted to reply to the email if they were interested in participation, needed additional information regarding the nature of the study, or additional IRB approval was needed. Faculty members that replied to the initial contact email who were not interested in participating in the research study were sent an email thanking them for their consideration. An email reminder (see Appendix D) was sent after one week to individuals that had not replied.

Building rapport with participants prior to conducting an interview is critical to developing a sense of trust that enables participants to freely share their experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). In an attempt to build rapport with participants, faculty members that were interested in participating were asked to reply to the initial email with their phone number and three available dates and times to discuss the research project in greater detail. The researcher



then contacted each participant via email to set-up and confirm a brief phone conversation regarding the study. Each participant was then phoned in an attempt to better familiarize them with the researcher and the goals of the study. During the introductory phone conversation participants were given information about the research project including the purpose, an overview of the interview questions, modes of interviewing (e.g., telephone, Skype™), examples of course documents and reasons for analysis, confidentiality measures, member checks, and an opportunity to ask questions. Additional questions that related to the selection criteria were asked in an effort to build rapport and confirm eligibility. A guide was used to ensure that all participants received the same information and that they were asked the same foundational questions (see Appendix E).

### **Informed Consent**

Following the phone conversation, a consent form was emailed to those faculty members who maintained interest in the study. The consent form (see Appendix F) explained the purpose of the study, risks and benefits associated with participation, confidentiality of data, and procedures for consent. The consent form included a prompt for participants to type an "X" on "I accept" or "I decline" to the following three statements (a) I agree to participate in the study, (b) I agree to have my interview audio recorded, and (c) I agree to provide SL course documents for analysis. Faculty members were not excluded from participation if they declined to have their interview recorded and/or declined to provide SL course documents. Participants were prompted to save their choices, print a copy for their records, and email the form back to the researcher. A reminder email (see Appendix G) was sent to faculty who had not returned their consent form after one week.

### **Pre-Interview Survey**

In an effort to maximize time spent discussing in-depth questions related to SL during interviews, a pre-interview survey (see Appendix H) was developed to gather demographic information about each participant prior to the interview. The pre-interview survey contained 13 questions and included single response questions (i.e., select one) and open-ended questions. Pre-interview survey questions were based on the SL literature and information that would be useful in describing participants for the purposes of disseminating research results.

Prior to distribution, the pre-interview survey was piloted with three special education faculty members from a university in the Midwest who have experience with SL teaching and research. Pilot data were collected related to length of time for survey completion, clarity of survey directions, clarity of the survey questions, appropriateness of the survey content, and clarity of the survey format. Each faculty member was given a copy of the survey and a questionnaire (see Appendix I) to obtain feedback. The final version of the instrument was revised using the collective feedback gathered during the piloting process (Czaja & Blair, 1996). The pre-interview survey was distributed to participants as an attachment in the same email that contained the consent letter. Participants were prompted to complete the survey, save it, and email it back to the researcher.

### **Remuneration**

Each participant was mailed a 25 dollar gift voucher at the conclusion of the study as a token of appreciation for their participation. Gift vouchers are prepaid cards that can be used anywhere credit cards are accepted.

### **Interviews**

One, 60 minute, semi-structured interview was conducted with each participant. An interview guide (see Appendix J) was developed to provide structure to the interview. Due to the

limited literature on special education and SL in higher education, questions were crafted based on the literature on SL that pertained to higher education in general. The interview questions were developed to address each research question. The majority of the questions pertained to the first research question because the primary purpose of the study was to describe the use of SL across special education faculty. Participants were emailed a list of major topics that were addressed in the interview in advance so that participants were aware of the focus of the interview.

A one-on-one interview can take on many different formats. The more free-flowing an interview procedure, the more likely diverse and unexpected answers will occur; however, the more structured an interview is the easier it is to generate a conceptual structure and focused analysis (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). For purposes of this study, a semi-structured interview format was employed to maintain focus on key SL components and allow flexibility for variations within a specific topic area (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982).

Due to geographical limitations, a commonly used online conversation tool known as Skype™ was the primary method used to conduct interviews. Skype™ was chosen because it provided the opportunity to talk "face-to-face" via video conferencing, which enhances the interview experience and allows the researcher to be cognizant of the interviewees' body language. Skype™ enabled the researcher to call landline and cellular telephones from a computer at a minimal cost. Therefore, if a participant preferred to use a phone, or if their IHE prohibited them from using Skype™ technology, a phone interview could be conducted. Individuals that requested information regarding Skype™ set-up were emailed directions (see Appendix K) to assist them in creating an account. One participant requested information

regarding Skype™ set-up. This information was attached to the post-phone conversation email that also included the consent form and pre-interview survey.

The interview questions and Skype™ technology were piloted with two special education faculty members (one with prior Skype™ experience and one without) from a university in the Midwest who have experience with SL teaching and qualitative research methods. Pilot data were collected using a faculty feedback form (see Appendix L) that requested information related to length of time for completion, clarity of questions, appropriateness of content, delivery, technology support needs, and the researcher's interview technique. The interview guide and the researcher's interview technique were refined using the collective feedback gathered during the piloting process.

Of the 13 participants, six chose to participate in the interview via Skype™, and six chose to participate via telephone. One participant initially opted for Skype™; however, due to technical difficulties the interview format was switched to telephone. Overall, the use of Skype™ technology proved to be an effective tool for conducting "face-to-face" interviews.

As a qualitative interviewer, it is important to develop rapport and a relaxed environment that will allow the interviewee to feel comfortable sharing their experiences during the interview (Lichtman, 2010). Several strategies were used to develop rapport with the interviewees. First, the interviewer had spoken with the participants and had several email communications prior to the day of the interview. Second, the researcher took on the role of a student. In this study, this dynamic was naturally occurring because the primary researcher is a doctoral student with an interest in developing SL courses as a future faculty member. Third, before delving into the formal aspects of the interview, the interviewer initiated small talk. Fourth, prior to the start of the interview, the interviewer briefed the interviewee on the purpose of the study, explained the

recording procedure, and provided reassurance of confidentiality. Fifth, a general question was posed prior to exploring complex topics and issues. For example, a simple introductory question such as "How did you first get involved in SL?" was used to start the interview. Lastly, the researcher was knowledgeable about the topic, but refrained from overusing jargon that may not have been familiar to all participants

The interview guide served as a framework for addressing the research questions; however, participants were allowed to skip questions that they preferred not to answer. Two questioning techniques were also employed to increase the richness of the data. The incorporation of elaboration questions was used in an effort to clarify participant responses. Elaboration questions such as "what else can you tell me about..." or "can you give me an example of what you mean..." were used as needed throughout the duration of the interview. Probing questions were used as follow-up questions to elicit greater depth and detail on particular topics. Probing questions were used when a participant did not fully address the question or if clarification was needed. Redirection was used in the case that the participant veered significantly from the purpose of the interview. For example, if a participant was significantly off topic the interviewer acknowledged the point made by the interviewee and then stated "In the interest of time, I'm going to move us on to the next question."

Following each interview, journal entries were made using word processing software. Each journal outlined the researcher's overall experience, reflection on biases, new ideas for questions, suggestions for improving interview technique, and chronicled the responses to each interview question in case of data loss or the lack of an audio recording. Journal entries were not analyzed but were used to inform the research.

Each interview was recorded with prior consent from the participant. CallGraph Skype Recorder software was used to convert Skype™ calls (i.e., Skype™ to telephone, Skype™-to-Skype™) to audio files for transcription purposes. An electronic file was created for each participant to manage data collection. To ensure confidentiality the names of all participants were replaced with a pseudonym. The pseudonyms were selected alphabetically in the order in which they were completed. For example, the first interviewee would be Alice, the second Barbara, and the third Carl. A list of participants' names and corresponding pseudonyms were stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Audio recordings were saved to the file that corresponded with each participant. The electronic files were stored on a secure server and a back up file was stored on a removable storage device. The removable storage device was locked in a file cabinet in a locked office. The converted hand written notes and journal entries that followed each interview were saved using the same procedures.

### **Course Documents**

In addition to interviews, course documents (e.g., course syllabi, lecture notes, assignment guidelines) were requested and reviewed when available in an effort to gain additional information about SL implementation. Rossman and Rallis (2003) define these artifacts as “material culture”, and suggest that they provide another perspective about the values and beliefs of their owners. Material data may provide confirmation of, or contradictions to, what participants report in interviews (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Altheide (1996) stated that the collection and review of documents can be particularly useful for investigating "how" questions because documents reflect the act or purpose.

When available, course documents were used to investigate how participants use SL (i.e., research question one). Course documents requested included course syllabi, assignment

guidelines, grading rubrics, service-learning project descriptions, and lecture notes. Participants that agreed to submit course documents were sent an email (see Appendix M) prior to their interview that outlined the types of course documents requested and procedures for submitting them to the researcher via email. The participants were informed during the introductory phone conversation and consent letter that course documents were not used to make judgments of quality but rather to provide further information about how faculty used SL in special education courses. Each participant's course documents were reviewed prior to their interview in an effort to become familiar with the SL procedures they used. If there were questions regarding the course documents or if the researcher needed further clarification, the participant was contacted via email.

The course documents collected were added to their corresponding participant's electronic file. The electronic files were stored on a secure server and a back up file was stored on a removable storage device. The removable storage device was locked in a file cabinet in a locked office. Twelve out of 13 participants submitted course documents. Of those that submitted course documents, 11 submitted course syllabi, four submitted assignment guidelines, two submitted lecture notes, and one participant submitted a student assignment.

### **Data Analysis**

Two forms of data including pre-interview survey data and interview data were analyzed for each participant. Course documents were primarily used to inform the researcher prior to conducting the interview in an effort to ask specific questions related to the participants' use of SL. Additionally, course documents were reviewed when available to elaborate on interview data, confirm participants' use of SL, and determine any contradictions. Variations (e.g., number, topic, detail) in course documents received prevented the researcher from completing a

formal analysis. This section first describes how each data source (i.e., pre-interview surveys, interviews) was analyzed and then explains how the analyzed data was used to answer each research question.

### **Pre-Interview Surveys**

Pre-interview survey data (Q1-10) were compiled to summarize demographic information (e.g., number of years of SL teaching experience) across participants. To provide insight into how participants defined SL (Q11), open-ended responses were reviewed prior to the interview and then compared and contrasted across participant interview responses. Questions that related to logistics (i.e., Q12-13) were not analyzed.

### **Interviews**

Interviews were transcribed by a professional transcriptionist. Each interview was transcribed verbatim. Upon completion of an interview an audio file was emailed to the transcriptionist. A set of guidelines (see Appendix N) for transcribing the data was emailed to the transcriptionist in advance. The guidelines included recommendations for confidentiality and strategies to ensure that data conveyed the social aspects (e.g., laughing, long pauses) of the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The audio recordings of each interview were compared to each transcript to ensure accuracy. If portions of the audio recordings were inaudible, interview notes were consulted in an effort to add missing data to the transcript. Sections of the transcripts that were modified with information from interview notes were bracketed and labeled.

Member checks were used in an effort to verify that the data gathered represented the beliefs and attitudes of the participants and to minimize researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). At the completion of each interview, participants were asked if they were willing to review a summary of their interview to confirm its accuracy and to be contacted if follow-up questions



were needed for clarification of data. Summaries were developed by reviewing the transcribed data for each interview question to generate condensed responses that included key points and ideas that could be quickly comprehended by each participant. The summaries averaged two to three pages in length and were organized according to interview question. A summary of the interview responses was emailed to each participant as an attachment for verification and/or correction of the data. The email message (see Appendix O) prompted each participant to read the summary, correct any errors in the accuracy of the information summarized by using the review function of their word processing program, and then email the edited document back to the researcher. If the participant feedback was unclear or if the researcher needed further clarification the participant was contacted via email. Participants that had no corrections were prompted to email the researcher to confirm that no changes were required. Participants were given one week to review the data. A reminder email (see Appendix P) was sent if the participant had not responded after one week.

All participants reviewed and responded to the summaries with positive feedback. Out of the 13 participants, three provided additional clarification regarding names of courses and community partners that had been purposefully omitted for confidentiality purposes. In addition, two participants provided further elaboration and clarification regarding their summaries; however, the additions were minor. The additional information was then added to their transcripts so that it could be taken into consideration during data analysis.

Once the accuracy of the data was confirmed, a content analysis procedure was used to analyze each interview. Michael Patton (2002) refers to content analysis as any qualitative data reduction and sense making effort that takes on the task of reducing qualitative material in an attempt to identify core consistencies and meanings. Content analysis involves identifying,

coding, categorizing, classifying, and labeling the primary patterns in data to determine what is significant. Qualitative researchers suggest that there is no “one way” to analyze data; however, the method used should be transparent and it should match the purpose of the study (Lichtman, 2010). Interview data were analyzed using the procedures for content analysis defined by Patton (2002) for developing codes, categories, and themes.

Data analysis began after the first interview was transcribed and it remained an ongoing process until data analysis was finalized. First, a manageable coding system was developed. Prior to systematically analyzing the data, initial codes for each interview question were hypothesized based on the SL literature and perceptions of the interviews that were conducted prior to receiving the first transcripts. As the transcripts were completed, an initial reading was conducted making general comments in the margin using word processing software. The first reading was aimed at further developing the initial ideas regarding codes to develop a formal classification system. After all the transcripts had been completed, multiple readings of all the data were done to record the emerging codes in a codebook. The codebook was an organized list of codes that included a description of each code, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and examples of coded text (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). A code could be represented by a word, phrase, or passage, and passages may include one or more codes. The codebook was organized by interview question and additional codes were added as the researcher became more familiar with the data (Patton, 2002). Several readings of the data were necessary before the transcripts were completely coded and the codebook finalized.

Once the codes were confirmed they were organized into categories. The focus of the data analysis shifted from developing codes that related to each interview question to categories that cut across the research questions. The codes were analyzed for regularities that revealed

patterns in the data that were then sorted into categories. Categories were representative of convergent and divergent cases, and were based on the ability of groups of codes to stick together in a meaningful way so that differences between categories were clear. A second researcher was consulted throughout the development of categories to ensure meaningfulness and consistency. If discrepancies occurred between the two researchers, discussion ensued to ensure that the categories were inclusive of the codes and outliers in the data were minimized. After the two researchers reached 100% agreement on the categories, the corresponding coded data were cut and pasted under each category using word processing software. Once the data were organized according to categories, a second research reviewed the entire data set to determine if the categories and corresponding data matched. If discrepancies occurred between the two researchers, discussion ensued to ensure that the categories were used consistently and that the categories were clearly defined. Once the researchers reached 100% agreement, the data was reviewed to determine themes across the entire data set.

### **Stages of Completion**

A timeline for completing the research tasks including email invitations, interviews, transcription, member checks, and data analysis was used to maintain organization of the research project. Data were collected, transcribed, and continuously analyzed over multiple stages of the research project. An outline of the stages of data collection and analysis is presented in Table 2.

### **Research Log**

An electronic spreadsheet was used to track all activities associated with the study including email contacts, phone conversations, and completion of tasks.

Table 2

*Stages of Data Collection and Analysis*

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Stage	Analysis
Stage 1	email potential participants, set-up introductory phone conversations
Stage 2	conduct introductory phone conversations, email pre-interview survey and consent forms to interested parties
Stage 3	analyze pre-interview survey data, gather course documents, set-up interviews
Stage 4	continue interview set-up, review course documents, conduct interviews, send audio files for transcription
Stage 5	conduct interviews, review course documents, send audio files for transcription, begin coding interview data and course documents
Stage 6	code interview data, generate summaries and email to participants, send email reminders regarding member checks

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**Trustworthiness of Data**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that sustaining the trustworthiness of a qualitative study depends on establishing confidence in findings that are defensible. Therefore, multiple measures were taken to ensure that the data collected for this study were credible. First, personal biases that may influence data collection and analysis were identified prior to data collection and considered throughout the study. Second, procedures for data collection and data analysis were systematically outlined. Third, peer debriefing was used throughout the data analysis procedures to ensure the researcher was representing the data accurately. Fourth, member checks were completed after each interview was completed. This allowed participants to confirm and/or challenge findings. Lastly, triangulation, a method for developing trustworthiness of data by gathering information from multiple sources and vantage points was used to investigate research

question one (Schwandt, 2007). Data were collected from multiple sources (e.g., interview, documents), and a second researcher collaborated on the analysis of data to verify the appropriateness and accuracy of the codes.

**Peer debriefing.** Peer debriefing is a method where a researcher consults with a knowledgeable colleague to discuss codes and data analysis procedures to validate the methods used (Schwandt, 2007). Throughout the analysis, debriefing sessions with a second researcher were used to ensure the codes, categories, and themes matched the research questions and were logical given the data collected. Peer debriefing sessions resulted in the refinement of codes, reorganization of codes and categories, as well as further clarification and explanation regarding examples and non-examples from the data set.

**Reflexivity.** Reflexivity refers to the act of critical self-reflection regarding personal biases, theoretical dispositions, and preferences (Schwandt, 2007). After the completion of each interview, journal entries were made regarding the perceived impact that personal biases might have played over the course of the interview. Entries included doubts about the quality of the interview and interview guide, personal reactions to interview responses, thoughts on what informants were "really" saying, similarities and differences in perspectives, and ideas to think about in future interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Journal entries informed the interviews by allow the research to adjust interview questions according to participants that had specific experiences (e.g., online teaching, teaching students to use SL pedagogy) in a effort to further elaborate on themes that were emerging. Prior to conducting data analysis procedures, journal entries were reviewed to inform the researcher regarding personal biases that may have an impact on data analysis procedures.

## Chapter 4

### Use of Service-Learning and Alignment With the Field of Special Education

The following results and discussion section focuses on two research questions regarding how special education faculty use service-learning (SL) in their courses, and how SL pedagogy aligns with the field of special education. The primary goal of this study was to interview "SL experts" to better understand the use of SL in the field of special education rather than to develop case studies of specific SL courses. Due to the interview questions posed and the willingness of participants to share their course documents, a foundational understanding of SL courses in the field of special education was possible. In an effort to build an understanding of how SL aligns with the field of special education, the Council for Exceptional Children's *Special Education Professional Ethical Principles* (2010) (see Appendix Q) will be used as a basis for analyzing and discussing results. Lastly, a discussion of the results and recommendations for SL implementation will be provided as well as limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and implications for practice.

One of the concerns commonly outlined in the literature that pertains to investigating the use of SL in higher education courses is the difference in faculty members' interpretations of the definition of SL. Quite surprisingly, responses across all participants in this study were fairly consistent. Throughout the interviews, participants emphasized differences between SL and other forms of community engagement such as community service and volunteerism. While there was overall consistency in the use of the term and definition of SL, the pedagogy was used in a variety of ways.

As a result of the variations in use, several terms will be used throughout this chapter to discuss SL across participants in a consistent manner. First, *SL course* is defined by any course

that includes a SL assignment for course credit; however, the main focus of the course is not SL pedagogy. Second, *stand-alone SL course* refers to a course that is specifically designed to teach students enrolled in the class how to design and implement SL on their own. In a stand-alone course, the main focus is SL pedagogy. Third, *SL project* refers to the assignment within a SL course that requires students to engage for a specified amount of time in service that is directly related to course content.

### **Use of Service-Learning**

As evidenced by the pre-interview data, participants in this study have multiple years of SL experience and some taught multiple SL courses resulting in a patchwork of their collective knowledge and experiences. Therefore, some participants seamlessly switched between discussing an individual course, multiple courses at once, and reflecting on their overall experiences, which reinforced Patton's (2002) recommendation that less depth from a larger group can be beneficial in exploring variation and diversity in a particular topic. In an effort to provide a basic overview of the variation and patterns of SL used in the field of special education, the results pertaining to design and implementation of SL courses are organized according to (a) course topics, (b) type of SL project, (c), course delivery methods, (d) community partners and service engagement, and (e) common SL elements.

### **Course Topics**

Participants used SL to meet a variety of curricular needs in their special education courses. Table 3 provides an overview of the course topics that were discussed by participants and/or identified through course documents submitted; therefore, it is not representative of all of the SL courses taught by the participants. Courses included a variety of introductory special education courses, methods courses (e.g., reading instruction, supported employment), special

topics courses (e.g., collaboration, deaf education), and stand-alone courses on SL pedagogy.

There was relatively equal distribution across introductory, methods, and special topics courses; however, only two stand-alone courses on SL were mentioned.

Table 3

*Service-Learning Course Topics*

Course Topic	Number of Courses	Number of Participants
Introduction to Disability/Special Education	4	4
Collaboration and Families	3	2
Reading Instruction	3	2
Methods/Introduction to Teaching Students with Moderate to Severe Disabilities	2	2
Assessment and Instructional Strategies	2	2
Stand-alone Course on SL Pedagogy	2	2
Sign Language	1	1
Advocacy and Self-Determination	1	1
Supported Employment	1	1
Study Abroad SL	1	1

**Enrolled Students**

The students enrolled in SL courses included graduate and undergraduate students. SL courses were developed for majors and non-majors, first-year students, as well as preservice and inservice teachers. Although there were few stand-alone SL courses, the two that were developed included inservice teachers. Most introduction to disability/special education SL courses were open to all majors. Multiple participants stated that introductory SL courses were



often the first time majors and non-majors interacted with individuals with disabilities. Participants that developed these courses were surprised by how many special education majors had not interacted with an individual with a disability prior to this experience. Two of the participants noted that having SL courses open to all majors served as a recruitment tool for their program.

### **Type of SL Project**

Three classifications of SL projects emerged from the data including: (a) student-directed, (b) instructor-directed, and (c) co-directed projects. Although none of the participants used these terms to describe their projects, there were clear characteristics discussed across participants that enabled the researcher to develop these three classifications. The following section provides an overview of each classification and insight into why participants might have chosen their SL project as well as any nuances that surfaced.

**Student-directed.** Student-directed SL projects are defined as SL projects that students in the course initiated and developed on their own or in groups. With guidelines and instruction on SL, students were responsible for recruiting a partner and then working with that partner to establish and achieve a shared goal. Instructors taught (to varying degrees) students the elements of SL (e.g., planning, evaluation, celebration) in an effort to ensure student projects were high quality and appropriate for the community partner, course content, and time frame. Project proposals were often used to guide students through the elements of SL, ensure alignment with course goals, and promote positive outcomes for community partners. Some participants required students to partner with a particular group of individuals (e.g., community agencies, families), but the students were responsible for recruiting their partner. Typically, participants did not directly observe students in the community.

In student-directed SL projects, students had greater control and ownership of the project; therefore, they were able to easily pursue an area of interest and capitalize on their own strengths. Student-directed SL projects appear to align with introductory level courses because the goals of the course often focus on exposure, attitudes, and perceptions of disability that are more global than skill specific. These courses typically included non-majors, which allowed participants to group students with varied interests and expertise.

Although most student-directed SL projects were linked to introduction to disability/special education courses, three non-introductory courses utilized them as well. Two courses focused on assessment and instructional strategies and one course addressed collaboration. Stand-alone SL courses also utilized student-directed SL projects. In these courses, participants taught inservice teachers to develop SL projects that included their K-12 students so that inservice teachers leave the course with the ability to develop and implement quality SL projects independently. Students typically developed proposals and then once the instructor and their school administrator approved the project they implemented their projects using the elements of SL. One participant noted that on occasion graduate students were enrolled in the course that included an instructor-directed SL project. The participant would occasionally work with graduate students to develop a student-directed SL project depending on the students' experience and background. This enabled the participant to appropriately challenge a student that had expertise on the course topic suggesting that student-directed SL projects can be used with students of all skill levels.

**Instructor-directed.** Instructor-directed SL projects are defined as SL projects that instructors initiated with a community partner(s). Instructors were responsible for recruiting a partner(s) and then worked with that partner(s) to establish a shared goal. Students would then

assist the community partner(s) in achieving their goals. Participants infused the elements of SL (e.g., reflection, evaluation, celebration) into the course to differing degrees, but they did not always explain or teach students about SL pedagogy. Project proposals were not used because the instructor was responsible for developing the SL project; however, needs assessments were often used to determine authentic needs of the community partner(s). Typically, participants directly observed students to varying degrees in their community settings.

Instructor-directed SL projects gave the instructor more control over the project and experience, allowing students to engage in the same service. Instructor-directed SL projects were mostly used in courses that focused on a specific topic or skill. Several examples of instructor-directed SL projects emerged from the data pertaining to the course topics of advocacy and self-determination, supported employment, sign language, and reading instruction. Out of the four introduction to disability/special education courses discussed, only one utilized an instructor-directed SL project, which was the only course to use multiple instructor-directed SL projects in one course. Multiple instructor-directed SL projects allowed students to have choice and follow their own interests while receiving a structured service experience.

Subtle differences surfaced across instructor-directed SL projects related to the use of training and preparation prior to student involvement in service. For example, some participants provided several weeks of instruction to ensure that students had the skills (e.g., job coaching, reading instruction) necessary to successfully complete their service component. However, pre-training was minimized in one course because the primary goal of the SL project was to change student roles and attitudes rather than skill acquisition. The participant purposefully limited instruction on adults with intellectual disabilities in an effort to diminish helper-helpee roles. When compared to student-directed SL projects, there are fewer opportunities for student

ownership (student ownership is considered to be an important element) because the instructor takes the lead in developing the project. Therefore, participants incorporated student ownership into their projects in different ways such as allowing students to take control of certain aspects (e.g., celebration) of the project and incorporating student choice within the projects.

**Co-directed.** Co-directed SL projects are defined as SL projects that contained two phases of development. The first phase involved the instructor recruiting community partners that were interested in working with students prior to the start of the course. The second phase involved the students collaborating with their assigned community partner to develop a project. In essence, co-directed projects differed in that the instructor recruits the partners, but the students develop the SL projects. Participants emphasized the elements of SL (e.g., planning, evaluation, celebration) to differing degrees. Project proposals were not reported, and participants did not report that they had observed students in their community settings. Of the three types of SL projects, co-directed were the least reported.

In co-directed SL projects, instructors controlled with whom their students interacted; however, the students had ownership over the projects. Co-directed SL projects allowed students to have increased autonomy and share similarities and differences across their experiences that revolved around the same focus. These projects appear to work well in courses that involve working with populations (e.g., families, individuals with intellectual disabilities) that may have differing needs because the projects are flexible.

### **Course Delivery Methods**

Three forms of course delivery methods were used including face-to-face, online, and hybrid (i.e., mixture of online and face-to-face). The vast majority of the SL courses that were discussed used face-to-face methods while only two were delivered online and one used a hybrid

format. As with most courses, face-to-face SL courses met during set times on campus; however, depending on the type of SL project selected the instructor might meet students at a specific location to work with a specific community partner. Face-to-face SL courses typically began with an introduction to SL pedagogy before students began to develop or engage in their projects.

Two participants used online courses to provide students access to SL in rural and urban settings. They believed that online SL courses provided exposure to SL pedagogy to many future/current teachers that would not otherwise be possible. Students enrolled in online SL courses completed online modules, readings, and discussions about SL that outlined and defined SL pedagogy, best practices, and how to effectively include individuals with disabilities in SL projects. Students then developed projects that involved individuals with disabilities in their schools and communities. In both of these courses an emphasis was placed on developing SL projects that included persons with disabilities as participants in service alongside their peers without disabilities. One of the participants had each of the 40 students (who were inservice teachers) develop a proposal that was approved by the instructor and the teacher's building administrator prior to implementation. The second participant facilitated the SL projects across multiple online sections of a large (i.e., approximately 400 students) introductory special education course while other instructors were responsible for course content. Due to the large enrollment, students were encouraged to work collaboratively on group projects when possible. Both participants required a variety of artifacts (e.g., student data, pictures, videos, presentations) to be submitted in an effort to ensure completion and quality.

One participant taught a hybrid course that included both face-to-face meetings and online sessions for inservice special educators that were developing SL projects at their home

schools. The hybrid format allowed the instructor to provide instruction related to SL pedagogy and develop a learning community during the face-to-face sessions that carried over to the online sessions. Additionally, the online portion of the course provided opportunities for students from different communities to freely share their experiences throughout the process so that fellow students and the instructor could learn about their progress and offer ideas and support as needed.

### **Community Partners and Service Engagement**

Community partnerships are the crux of SL. Some participants cultivated long-term partnerships with one community partner, some had students identify their own community partners, and some used a combination of both methods. In this study, community partners included local school districts, families, individuals with disabilities of all ages, and community agencies focused on disability issues. All community partnerships were developed in local communities; however, one participant developed an international partnership with a university and school for students who are deaf in Jamaica.

Community partnerships were formed in varying ways. Most participants sought out community partners that shared their same mission or ideals; however, two community members initiated partnerships by approaching faculty members with their ideas to get the individuals with disabilities that they work with more engaged in their communities. Moreover, a few participants noted that they had been contacted by community partners that had previously been involved in a student-directed SL in an effort to express their interest in future SL projects.

Community partners had differing levels of input depending on the SL project and who was the recipient of the service. Some SL projects emerged as a result of a personal request and were controlled by the community partner (e.g., parents that wanted additional information and training on the IEP process, adults with disabilities that wanted assistance with the development

of self-advocacy presentations, community agencies that needed assistance with various initiatives). Although participants established authentic needs, some SL projects were controlled primarily by the instructor or student, such as providing reading instruction to struggling readers, developing books for children who are deaf, and providing instruction on varying assessments to inservice teachers. Other SL projects had a specific focus (e.g., social interaction, supported employment), but the recipients had input on the activities in which participated (e.g., social outings or career interests of the recipient). Some participants required students to develop "exit plans" that prepared students and community partners for the end of the project, due to the connections and bonds that form between students and community partners over the course of a project. Exit plans often included reminders of final meetings, celebration plans, and resources to continue with SL project objectives.

### **Common Elements of SL**

SL elements cited in the professional literature (e.g., student voice, meeting an authentic need, planning, reflection, evaluation, celebration) were heavily emphasized across all participants in the study. Participants took great effort to revise and re-think the incorporation of SL elements to create optimum learning opportunities for their students. Incorporation of SL elements appeared to evolve with experience as participants revised their SL courses over time. The following section outlines how participants introduced SL pedagogy to their students as well as how they incorporated the elements of reflection, evaluation, and celebration in their courses. Although participants stressed the importance of many SL elements these three SL elements lend themselves to concrete examples that could be extrapolated from the data (i.e., interviews, course documents).

**SL introduction.** SL introduction refers to how participants introduced their students to SL pedagogy, and more specifically, the elements of SL. Participants used a variety of methods to introduce students to SL pedagogy in their courses such as online modules, literature, class lectures and discussion, guest lectures, and the provision of examples and non-examples of SL projects. Most participants used a combination of methods to introduce SL to their students. In general, there were varying degrees of emphasis and attention given to SL projects across courses. Several factors such as type of SL project, weight of the SL assignment, and significance of SL as an instructional strategy for preservice teachers appeared to play a role in the emphasis of SL in the course. For example, participants that developed student-directed SL projects (especially stand-alone SL courses) were more explicit in their introduction of SL pedagogy and common SL elements in an effort to ensure students had the skills to implement them on their own. Although the goal of most of the SL courses was not to teach students how to use SL pedagogy on their own, some participants reported that they briefly explained how SL could be used in their student's future K-12 classrooms.

**Reflection.** All participants stressed the importance of reflection as a necessary element for scaffolding learning in SL courses. In fact, reflection was the most heavily emphasized SL element in regard to student learning. Several methods were used to engage students in ongoing reflection of their experiences and learning. Participants often used a combination of written and verbal reflection. Examples of written reflection assignments included journals, blogs, online discussion, and written assignments. Verbal reflection activities included video blogs and in-class discussion. Class debriefing sessions were deemed as an important component of SL courses because it allowed students to problem-solve, share accomplishments and challenges, and diminish nervousness. Although both verbal and written reflection was emphasized, several



participants strongly emphasized the use of written reflections. These participants believed that written reflections provided more in-depth reflections and were critical to student learning.

Participants that taught preservice/in-service teachers to use SL in their own classrooms noted some subtle differences regarding the use of reflection in these courses. Students in these courses needed to gain the skills necessary to be able to develop, implement, and evaluate reflection activities in their own K-12 projects. Students in these courses were required to reflect on two different aspects of their SL projects. The first being their own personal learning and the second being their learning experience about how to teach K-12 students to reflect and engage in SL.

**Evaluation.** Participants noted that evaluating all aspects (e.g., student learning, community satisfaction) of SL projects adequately took a great deal of planning, time, and experience. Throughout the duration of SL projects students and instructors analyzed the process and impact of their service and learning through formal and informal measures. For example, students working with individuals with disabilities on a particular skill (e.g., reading, social interaction) collected data on the effectiveness of their interventions and then shared their findings in the form of poster sessions, action research papers, and presentations to the entire class. Participants gathered information related to student learning through the use of reflections, written assignments, class discussion, and final projects.

Several participants stressed that gathering feedback from community partners was an essential component to the evaluation of a SL course. Depending on who was responsible for directing the project, students and instructors collected informal information (e.g., questionnaires, personal correspondence) from community partners to determine their level of satisfaction with the service. Participants commented that they were continually revising and re-

visiting their evaluation techniques to ensure that their SL projects were closely aligned with course goals and current practices in the field of special education. Moreover, A participant that developed stand-alone SL courses for inservice teachers noted that students had the most difficulty with the evaluation component of SL; therefore, additional steps needed to be taken to ensure their understanding and ability to measure the effectiveness of their SL projects.

**Celebration.** The inclusion of celebration activities allowed students, instructors, and community partners to recognize and reflect on the work that was accomplished over the course of the semester. Celebration activities included end of the semester dinners and banquets, class presentations, poster sessions, slide shows, and video documentaries; however, participants stressed the importance of acknowledging progress along the way. Participants had students acknowledge their progress throughout the process by having students compare their current reflections to entries before they started the project, review progress monitoring data, and develop progress reports for community partners. Although there were exceptions, instructor-directed SL project celebrations often included all stakeholders as these projects revolved around a smaller nucleus of people. In contrast, student-directed SL projects tended to involve an end of the semester class session that focused on student presentations and sharing of the experiences with the instructor and students and/or a celebration with the stakeholders in their project. All participants that used instructor-directed SL projects allowed their students to be involved, to some degree, in the design and coordination of the celebration activities. Multiple participants noted that they required students to provide their community partners with a formal thank you, which often included artifacts (e.g., photos, personal stories) from their experience.

### **Alignment With the Field of Special Education**

In 2010, the Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) Board of Directors approved 12 ethical principles (see Appendix Q) as a guide for professionals in the field of special education. CEC recommends that special educators be committed to upholding and advancing the ethical principles in an effort to improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities and their families. A review of these principles reveals most of them are closely aligned with the manner in which the participants in this study designed their SL courses. In fact, only two of the 12 principles were not addressed. These principles pertained to involvement in professional organizations related to the field of special education and special education law.

In an effort to clearly determine alignment between the ethical principles and faculty perceptions of their SL practices, the principles were collapsed into four categories: (a) inclusive communities, (b) collaboration, (c) professional dispositions and advocacy, and (d) professional knowledge and skills. Participants' insight and examples will be used to make connections between SL and CEC's ethical principles. It is important to note that the participants were not directly asked their opinions regarding SL pedagogy and its alignment with CEC's ethical principles.

### **Inclusive Communities**

CEC's principles state that special educators should promote meaningful and inclusive participation for individuals with disabilities in their schools and communities. Participants reported using SL to change perceptions and attitudes, increase involvement of individuals with disabilities in schools and communities, and provide opportunities for students to work with individuals with disabilities in meaningful and relevant ways. As noted by participants, it is hard to truly change attitudes and promote inclusion in courses that do not involve significant interactions with individuals with disabilities. One participant stated, "SL humanizes course

topics" as it allows students to participate in structured activities alongside individuals with disabilities.

Participants suggested that SL can build inclusive communities because it provides opportunities for students outside the field of special education to interact in meaningful ways with individuals with disabilities and/or issues related to inclusion in their communities. Several participants reported that SL courses provided non-majors enrolled in their courses with their first interactions with persons with disabilities and that these students sought out SL courses because they provided opportunities to personally interact with individuals with disabilities and engage in their communities. For example, one participant relayed the story of an engineering student that developed a student-directed SL project that resulted in the development of an accessible tricycle for a child with a disability. The participant stated that the SL project was the first experience that this student had with individuals with disabilities, and that if it had not been for the SL course, this particular student may not have had any purposeful and positive interactions with individuals with disabilities. As noted by the participant, there is no evidence to suggest that this former student is now developing technology for persons with disabilities, but the student now understands the need and importance of assistive technology as well as the barriers that need to be addressed to develop inclusive communities.

Participants interviewed shared personal stories about how individuals with disabilities had increased exposure and access to individuals without disabilities, community experiences, and community resources as a result of their participation in SL projects. Participants, regardless of whether they taught preservice teachers to use SL or not, commented about the potential positive effects that SL as an instructional strategy in K-12 settings may have on the outcomes of individuals with disabilities. Multiple participants suggested that SL may provide opportunities

for students with disabilities to build self-determination, self efficacy, academic and social skills as well as engage in inclusive community-based instruction. These opportunities may contribute to better student outcomes. The two participants that developed stand-alone SL courses stated that SL projects facilitated the inclusion of special education teachers and their students in their respective schools and communities. SL provided opportunities for K-12 students and their teachers to be viewed as leaders and community resources.

### **Collaboration**

CEC's principles state that special educators should develop relationships with families based on mutual respect, involve families in educational decisions, and practice collegiality with professionals who provide services for individuals with disabilities. Special educators must effectively collaborate with a wide range of community members and professionals to appropriately support individuals with disabilities; however, collaboration is a complex process involving inter- and intra-personal skills. Moreover, students must understand and respect differing perspectives of individuals and the roles of varying professionals. Although collaboration is a critical and complex skill, participants noted that the topic of collaboration is typically addressed in university courses through passive learning (e.g., lecture, guest panels) or "infused" into a variety of courses with little focus on specific skills or experiences. SL appears to have a natural fit with collaboration courses as evidenced by the number of SL courses that focused on the topic. Although there were specific SL courses devoted to collaboration, participants provided multiple examples of how SL projects provided opportunities to collaborate within authentic contexts with a variety of individuals including school staff, community agencies, individuals with disabilities, and parents. One participant emphasized the alignment between SL pedagogy and the collaborative nature of the field of special education in

this way: "Special education is a service-based field, a special educator works with a team of individuals to determine goals, and then they evaluate their progress toward those goals... which is the definition of SL."

Although all SL courses involve collaboration between multiple stakeholders, some participants developed courses specifically to facilitate structured collaboration with certain individuals. For example, two participants developed SL courses that included parents of individuals with disabilities so their students could have the opportunity to gain an appreciation of family dynamics and the difficulties parents face trying to navigate the educational system. One participant wanted students to understand that special education is not something that is "done to" families and students as passive recipients. For this participant, SL provided a structured platform to teach reciprocity between stakeholders. A third participant developed SL courses that included community agencies because of the major role these agencies play in the lives of individuals with disabilities. Community agencies became the focus of the course because of the dissatisfaction with "one-shot guest panels" and other methods that are typically used to introduce students to community resources. Lastly, participants that developed SL courses that included majors and non-majors explained that these courses provided opportunities for students with varying perspectives, experiences, and professional trajectories to work together on a shared goal. Additionally, these courses allowed students to learn how individuals from different professions approached their own SL project and contributed to positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

### **Professional Dispositions and Advocacy**

CEC's principles state that special educators should maintain a high level of professional competence and integrity, respect backgrounds and develop collegiality, and advocate for

resources and conditions that promote the well-being of individuals with disabilities.

Participants suggested that students in SL projects develop a range of skills (e.g., problem-solving, follow-through, communication, advocacy, leadership) and are placed in a variety of authentic learning contexts that cannot be replicated in the confines of the classroom. They were skeptical of relying on practica and student teaching to address these skills because they do not provide structured opportunities for students to be placed in leadership roles or focus on issues outside the context of their K-12 classrooms. One participant captured how SL can facilitate student growth and development toward professional dispositions and advocacy skills: "How do you make students care? How do you make them want to be change-agents? You can't force someone to care, but you can put them in a position to care in order to foster their growth."

Special educators must advocate for their students and their families, their own resources and instructional space, as well as develop self-advocacy skills in their students. To accomplish these tasks, students must have strong leadership capabilities. Several participants discussed their ability to use SL as a means to take students outside their "comfort zones" in a semi-structured context, which they felt was a necessary component to developing leadership qualities and related skill sets. One participant noted that SL gave faculty a way to assess professional dispositions for accreditation standards because SL enabled them to closely monitor students in authentic learning experiences that required a variety of skills.

Participants discussed the potential for SL to take their students out of the role of the "helper or teacher" in an effort to develop advocacy skills. In fact, three participants developed SL courses to intentionally take their students out of their typical roles as a means to develop a greater understanding of adults with disabilities. These courses focused on advocacy, social interaction, community involvement, and access to community resources for adults with

disabilities. As one participant noted, "If students are always working in helper roles, preservice teachers cannot truly become advocates or see their students as self-advocates... Preservice teachers need to see where their students go and what they do after they graduate from school." Participants felt that SL projects had the potential to develop advocates outside the field of special education as well. As previously noted, SL projects allowed non-majors to gain a greater understanding of individuals with disabilities which was thought to lead to increased advocacy and awareness from the general public. Lastly, participants stated the SL projects could provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities to be placed in leadership roles and work on self-advocacy skills. In fact, one participant worked with a community agency to develop a SL project that revolved solely around the issue of self-advocacy.

### **Professional Knowledge and Skills**

CEC's principles state that special educators should maintain high expectations for their students, use instructional data and professional knowledge to inform practice, use a variety of teaching skills, and use professional judgment to make educational decisions. Participants that developed SL courses for preservice teachers stressed their concerns that students needed multiple opportunities to apply their skills in real-life situations prior to student teaching. Some SL courses were developed that focused on skills such as reading instruction, supported employment, and assessment. In these courses, students received training and practice within the context of their classroom and then participated in SL projects that allowed them to gain experience in a structured format. One of the participants that developed a SL course on reading instruction commented that practica and student teaching do not allow for the same amount of structured trials with a strategy as well as instructor guidance and feedback when compared to SL. Participants stated that SL allowed them to develop reflexivity in their students through



instructor guided reflections. Several participants mentioned that reflecting on what works and what does not in the classroom is a skill that takes time and practice to develop. Therefore, the use of structured verbal and written reflections was strongly emphasized. SL provided a framework for inservice teachers to think more in-depth about their teaching and what their students need to be successful in the community. A participant that developed a SL course to teach inservice teachers how to use SL noted that developing a SL proposal, linking standards to real-life applications, and thinking critically about the skills most useful for their students was a challenging process for teachers in the field.

Some participants (depending on the purpose of the SL project) stressed the importance of data collection and assessing student growth. Participants that incorporated SL into methods courses used poster sessions and action research projects to give students a way to evaluate and discuss their findings and experiences. A few participants noted that they used SL as means to discuss complex topics such as social validity because SL projects should focus on an authentic need that is determined through collaboration with multiple stakeholders. One participant noted that former students continually contact the instructor to report that the SL project was their most pivotal moment in regard to their understanding of problem-solving and instructional delivery. The participant stated that the SL project on reading instruction was their "go-to moment for challenges that arise that require problem-solving and critical thinking." Moreover, one participant that worked with inservice teachers to develop SL projects stated that SL provided opportunities to discuss the importance of data because increased engagement does not always equal increased learning.

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this investigation was to build greater understanding of the use of SL in higher education courses related to the field of special education. SL experts interviewed in this study provided evidence that SL is a viable instructional strategy that closely aligns with the goals of the field of special education. This discussion will focus on the key findings related to the use of SL pedagogy, alignment with the field of special education, and SL as a teaching strategy. Additionally, limitations and recommendations for future investigations will be explored as well as implications for the field of special education.

### **SL as a Pedagogy**

Participants used SL to meet specific needs within their courses and programs. Some participants used SL to enhance preservice teachers' ability to use a specific strategy, provide opportunities to interact with groups of individuals, or expose students to the field of special education for the first time. SL is often referred to as a "flexible pedagogy" because it has been used in wide-range of disciplines, can include a wide range of students, and address a wide range of curricular and community needs (Butin, 2007; Rowls & Swick, 2000). The results from this investigation support the notion of "flexibility" in terms of use and implementation; however, participants that developed SL courses were very deliberate in their design, and developed SL projects in an effort to achieve specific outcomes through constant evaluation and revision.

This investigation emphasized the importance of including SL elements (e.g., reflection, evaluation, celebration) in SL courses to achieve quality outcomes. SL differs from other forms of community engagement because there is a clear connection between service and course objectives and SL includes opportunities for structured reflection (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995). Participants used a variety of methods for including SL elements throughout the duration of SL

projects and continually revised and restructured their SL projects so that they met the needs of all stakeholders.

An unintentional outcome of this investigation was the emergence of three classifications of SL projects including student-directed, instructor-directed, and co-directed. These classifications reinforce the flexibility of SL pedagogy, but more importantly they provide a means to discuss and plan SL projects that will allow faculty to determine the SL projects that will best meet the goals of their courses. Rowls and Swick (2000) conducted a review of SL syllabi and reported the use of both direct and indirect SL projects among teacher education faculty. In general, direct SL projects are typically defined as projects that involve direct interaction with community participants, and indirect projects include projects that have little to no direct interaction with community partners. Participants in this study reported only direct SL projects in their courses. While there might have been indirect projects that were not discussed, it appears that direct involvement with community partners is a crucial element of SL projects in the field of special education. This is not surprising given the goals of the courses often focused on skill acquisition, changes in perceptions, and advocacy through direct exposure. The use of direct SL projects reinforces the need to develop projects that are reciprocal and result in positive experiences for all stakeholders. SL projects that provide direct interactions with individuals should ensure that SL projects do not reinforce negative stereotypes (Gent & Gurecka, 2001). This is especially important for projects that are providing the first, and perhaps the only, exposure to individuals with disabilities for students. Using project proposals for student-directed SL projects appear to provide a context for ensuring students are engaging in projects that promote positive outcomes for all stakeholders.

Special education faculty provided examples of SL projects that represented a wide-range of community partners. A survey conducted by Anderson and Erickson (2003) of over 500 teacher education programs revealed that the majority of SL projects that were implemented were school-based (i.e., occurred within K-12 settings or included K-12 students). Although participants in the current investigation noted school-based projects, numerous projects involved community partners that typically fall outside the purview of K-12 general education such as adults with disabilities, community agencies, and families. Differences in roles among general educators and special educators as well as the advocacy role that the field of special education plays lends itself to nonschool-based SL projects.

Although participants touted SL as a powerful instructional strategy for use in K-12 settings, very few departments were providing preservice teachers with explicit instruction on how to use SL in their future classrooms. Participants suggested that SL in K-12 settings could provide opportunities for students with disabilities to build self-determination, self efficacy, academic and social skills as well as engage in inclusive community-based instruction that may contribute to better outcomes. However, one must wonder how special education teachers would be able to implement quality SL projects that impact their students in positive ways without explicit instruction in their preservice programs. Anderson and Erickson (2003) noted that participating in SL projects in higher education provides exposure to SL pedagogy, but it may not translate to SL implementation as teachers. A few participants used online courses to provide greater exposure to SL pedagogy. Strait and Sauer (2004) coined the term "e-service" to refer to their development of online SL courses in teacher education. The authors suggested that "e-service" could provide greater exposure to SL pedagogy as well as facilitate a greater range of students to get involved in important issues in their communities. Well-planned and carefully

constructed e-service could provide an innovative way to introduce students to the field of special education and disability related issues.

SL projects could provide a gateway to the field by enabling students to gain hands-on experience with special education related topics. A few participants suggested that SL courses might act as a recruiting tool for special education departments. This finding aligns with other research in the field (Kennedy, 2005; Muwana & Gaffney, 2011; Pugach, 2001). Some participants reported that they were using SL projects as a way to introduce first-year students and non-majors to the field of special education and disability related issues. Neeper and Dymond (in press) found that SL courses in special education often include non-majors, which is not reported in the teacher education literature. In this study, participants reported that they purposefully developed SL courses that were open to all majors, while some developed courses that included special education majors and students from related fields. These courses provide students from various disciplines with opportunities to gain differing perspectives and collaborate with individuals with a wide range of expertise.

### **Alignment with the Field of Special Education**

Abes et al. (2002) found that faculty who chose not to use SL were deterred by a concern that SL was not relevant to their discipline. This investigation provides evidence that SL closely aligns with the major principles of the field of special education as outlined by the CEC. Moreover, participants expressed varying levels of frustration with common practices in the field of special education including the overreliance on observational-based practica, minimal use of quality reflection techniques, waiting until student teaching for opportunities to apply skills, lack of focus on community resources and outside agencies, an overuse of passive learning, and lack of emphasis on professional dispositions (e.g., communication, leadership, problem-solving,

advocacy). As emphasized by Darling-Hammond (2010), future teachers need opportunities to practice skills in natural contexts with ongoing support from individuals that have expertise in teaching. While SL is not a remedy for all of the challenges currently facing special education, strategically developed and implemented SL courses of high quality and rigor could provide valuable structured learning opportunities for students.

Social issues such as the inclusion of persons with disabilities have been addressed using SL pedagogy. SL courses discussed in this study have been used to promote public awareness regarding the contributions persons with disabilities make to communities. Other researchers in the field of special education have likewise used or promoted the use of SL in this manner (see Curran, 1999; Jenkins & Sheehey, 2009; Karayan & Gathercoal, 2003; Mayhew & Welch, 2001; Smith, 2003). Additionally, special education faculty have used SL to promote the inclusion of individuals with disabilities within their schools and communities (Novak, 2010; Parker, 2009) and provide opportunities for increased awareness of disability related causes, changes in attitudes and perceptions of persons with disabilities, and advocacy for positive outcomes (Novak et al., 2009; Santos, et al., 2011).

The potential for SL projects to provide opportunities for collaboration is endless. SL projects were developed to work with specific community groups; however, all SL projects require collaboration to be successful. SL humanized course topics and provided authentic opportunities to interact and problem-solve with various community partners. Donahue (1999) argued for the adoption of SL in teacher education because it requires candidates to move beyond the technical aspects of teaching to think about and manage dilemmas that are more contextual and cannot be taught using traditional methods. Additionally, SL experiences allow preservice teachers to extend their learning, provide opportunities for problem solving and

reflection on teaching practices, and promote empowerment by placing preservice teachers in leadership roles (Wade, 1997). These non-academic opportunities for growth were highly emphasized by the participants in this investigation and closely align with CEC's principles.

Participants in this investigation discussed the importance of providing preservice teachers with structured opportunities for practicing skills, enhancing self-reflection of their teaching practices, and providing feedback on their performance and growth. The potential for skill acquisition and development of specific academic skills is often overlooked or underemphasized because exposure to different experiences and community issues is often the focus of many SL projects (Anderson & Erickson, 2003). However, SL courses focused on reading instruction, transition to secondary outcomes, as well as assessment and instructional strategies appear to have a natural fit for students to achieve proficiency in structured ways within natural contexts.

As previously noted, SL allowed students from other disciplines to explore the field of special education. Courses that include a SL component provide opportunities for students to interact with individuals with disabilities in a variety of roles. Due to teacher shortages in the field of special education there has been an increased emphasis on recruiting students to the field. By providing opportunities for non-majors to work with individuals with disabilities early in their college career, students may decide that the field of special education is a professional fit. Conversely, early experiences may provide opportunities for students majoring in special education to realize that this field is not the best match for them. At a time when teacher education is becoming increasingly under fire, and more competitive due to alternative routes to certification (Darling-Hammond, 2010), it may be beneficial for departments to offer early experiences for structured hands-on experiences. For these reasons, developing quality SL

opportunities in an effort to avoid misrepresentation of the field or reinforcing negative stereotypes of individuals with disabilities is crucial.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the results of this investigation. The participants in this study were strong SL advocates and thus their responses may have been guided by their desire to spread SL implementation in the field of special education. Semi-structured interviews were conducted which may have prevented participants from freely sharing their SL experiences or opinions. For example, participants were asked "why SL?" but they were not directly asked how they believe SL aligns with CEC's ethical principles. Although there were several measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the results were interpreted through the lens of the investigator.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Additional investigations are needed to further explore the use and alignment of SL within the field of special education in higher education courses. First, more in-depth investigations need to be conducted across SL faculty from multiple institutions to better understand the complexities of SL implementation and faculty members' decision making process. Investigations related to the emphasis placed on variables such as the duration of service and the amount or type of reflection and their impact on student learning would help drive SL course development. Second, additional research is needed to explore methods for including SL pedagogy within preservice teacher preparation programs in an effort to understand how to best train current and future educators how to use SL in their own classes. Moreover, K-12 special education teachers that have successfully implemented SL should be investigated to determine their path to SL pedagogy, and the level of exposure that translates to best practices.



Third, investigations are needed to further explore the use of varying types of SL projects and their related outcomes. Lastly, additional research should be conducted on special education SL courses and their alignment with teaching standards in higher education.

### **Implications for Practice**

Several implications for practice can be gleaned from this investigation. Special education faculty that are using SL in their courses should take time to evaluate their SL projects to determine if they are the best fit for their curricular and service goals. Moreover, special education programs that are using SL in multiple courses should streamline the projects so that they build upon each other in systematic ways to ensure higher order thinking and advanced skill development. Special education programs that are not using SL projects should evaluate their programs to see if there are opportunities for students to adequately reflect on their practices, develop professional dispositions, be placed in leadership roles, and interact in meaningful ways with a variety of community partners. SL is not a universal remedy, but it is an instructional option that has potential to meet a variety of curricular and student developmental needs.

If SL projects are going to be used to change perceptions and improve outcomes for individuals with disabilities they must be carefully monitored and structured. Providing limited guidance in the development or follow-through of a SL project could result in negative consequences for all stakeholders. Therefore, the use of project proposals, exit plans, ongoing evaluation and high quality reflection activities are key to ensuring students are making a positive impact. SL should not be a one-shot experience, but rather an integral part of the course that is continually referenced and used as teaching tool.

Benefits to SL implementation in K-12 settings were noted in this study, which align with the literature on K-12 SL. Therefore, current and future special educators need exposure to SL

pedagogy and opportunities to develop and implement projects that include best practices.

Without proper instruction, it is unlikely that teachers will develop projects that are appropriate and maximize positive outcomes. SL can also be used as a framework to guide instruction because it requires teachers to think about the relevance of their instruction and how it applies to real-life contexts. Additionally, our general education counterparts need opportunities to develop inclusive SL projects that promote positive outcomes for all students.

The literature on SL has gaps that need to be addressed. In an effort to provide the field of special education with a clear understanding of SL, it is recommended that authors clearly outline their SL projects, the reasons why they chose to implement SL, the SL elements that were implemented, and the strategies (e.g., reflection activities, evaluation methods) that were used to address the SL elements. These recommendations will allow for greater understanding of SL pedagogy in the field of special education. Opportunities for comparisons and analysis across SL projects as well as a greater understanding of what methods result in best outcomes for all stakeholders could also be explored.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Motivators, Challenges, and Recommendations**

The purpose of this chapter is to gain insight and perspectives on the use of service-learning (SL) from special education faculty that have SL expertise. Results and discussion will focus on how faculty became involved in SL course development, factors that motivate them to continue to implement SL in their courses, potential challenges to SL implementation, and recommendations for special education faculty interested in developing or enhancing their own SL courses.

Due to the differences in SL projects implemented, two terms (instructor-directed, student-directed) will be used to illustrate the differences in challenges, motivators, and recommendations across SL courses. Instructor-directed SL projects refer to SL projects that the instructor facilitated by developing a community partnership(s) whereby all students enrolled in the course worked with an assigned community partner to accomplish a shared goal that had been previously established by the community partner(s) and the instructor. Student-directed SL projects refer to SL projects that students in the course initiated and developed on their own or in groups. With guidelines and instruction on SL pedagogy, students were responsible for recruiting a partner and then worked with that partner to establish and achieve a shared goal.

#### **How Do Faculty Become Involved in SL Pedagogy?**

In an effort to understand the adoption of SL pedagogy among SL experts in the field of special education, participants were first asked how they were initially introduced to SL pedagogy. Of the 13 participants, eight were introduced to SL as a faculty member, four as graduate students, and one as a special educator. Introduction to SL pedagogy occurred in different ways such as graduate school advisors, colleagues at their institution of higher education (IHE), SL initiatives on their campus, attending conferences, or community members

such as local teachers. One participant noted implementing SL as a former special educator. Participants often traveled different paths to SL pedagogy; however, once they "became hooked", there was a collective drive to gain a greater understanding of the pedagogy and refine the use of SL in their courses over time. Moreover, several participants were involved in SL committees and additional efforts on their campus to assist in SL awareness. The importance of on-campus resources (e.g., SL offices, SL colleagues, professional development, funding) devoted to SL development and sustainability efforts were strongly emphasized across participants.

Being introduced to SL changed the professional trajectory of numerous participants. One participant was introduced to SL pedagogy by chance as a graduate assistant when an opportunity to teach an existing SL course on campus became available. The experience made such an impression that the future faculty member decided to focus on SL as a dissertation topic and future research agenda. Another participant introduced to SL as a doctoral student sought out a position at a university that valued SL and community engagement. Although all participants have published on the topic of SL, some have focused their scholarly work on the topic and one participant was awarded a Fulbright to investigate the use of international SL and special education.

### **Why Do Faculty Members Use SL in Their Courses?**

Three distinct categories emerged from the data regarding motivation for utilizing SL in special education courses. These categories include: (a) student-related motivators, (b) faculty-related motivators, and (c) community-related motivators. Perceived benefits to faculty, students, and community partners appear to be the driving force behind the adoption and continued use of SL pedagogy among special education faculty.

## **Student-Related Motivators**

The most commonly referenced and discussed motivator among participants was that SL impacted their students in positive ways. As faculty members, they viewed student learning as the primary purpose for implementing SL in their courses. The following statement highlights this view:

For me it starts by knowing that my students are getting the best experience possible. I know that just teaching them out of a textbook wouldn't touch the type of learning experience that I want them to have, or the skills that I want them to develop, or more importantly the attitudes that I want them to develop.

Additionally, participants suggested that SL has the potential to "humanize course topics" and "make course topics come alive" by providing hands-on experience for students. Participants were continually motivated and reinforced by the learning and growth that occurred among students in their SL courses. Moreover, SL provided structured learning experiences that were not otherwise possible in their programs. For example, faculty developed SL courses that allowed students to take on non-teaching roles as well as interact with individuals with disabilities, families, and community agencies.

In addition to hands-on learning, SL enabled participants to give their students ownership of their learning, take on leadership roles, problem-solve, and work on projects that had an immediate impact in the field. SL created a sense of "accountability" among students that impacted their own motivation and engagement in class. Participants reported that as a result of SL, students were able to see the relevance between their courses and their future professions. A participant that developed a SL course related to reading instruction stated that: "I tell students that they are going to feel a bit scared because they are going to know some things, but they are going to realize that they don't know a whole universe of new things." Multiple participants noted that students are drawn to the field of special education because they want to make an

impact in people's lives; however, most students do not get the opportunity to get involved or connected to the community until student teaching or later in their program. As one participant stated, “rarely, as a faculty member, do you get a chance to see the immediate impact your students have, and their pride in doing it- that has been the best part.”

### **Faculty-Related Motivators**

SL allowed participants to pursue their interests and passions through an instructional framework that in-turn provided positive outcomes for their students and the community members with whom they have a strong connection. Participants viewed SL as being "multidimensional" in that it provided much needed resources to community partners on a larger-scale than faculty partnerships alone, provided opportunities for learning for all stakeholders including faculty members, and provided increased awareness about issues related to disability in their communities. Additionally, SL acted as a conduit for participants to "remain grounded" and "stay connected and current" to the world outside of academia. Staying connected and current was viewed as an essential element to being effective in their various roles by having direct connections to teachers, individuals with disabilities, and community agencies that focus on disability related issues.

Compared to non-SL courses, SL courses take additional time and energy to do well; however, positive student and community outcomes appeared to outweigh the added work. SL gave participants new challenges and pushed them and their students to think more broadly about the field of special education. Participants expressed a desire to "give back" to their communities. SL allowed them to meet this need, but also model it for their students. Participants were reinforced by the efforts of their students and also the work that needs to be done in the field to provide equal access for individuals with disabilities in schools and

communities. As one participant noted, "SL constantly reinforces that what we are doing in this field involves real people and that helps me keep going and feeling renewed." As a result, there was a collective push toward developing SL projects that promoted individuals with disabilities as contributing members of their communities.

### **Community-Related Motivators**

Participants viewed SL as a means to work with community partners to meet shared goals and address authentic needs in the community and curriculum. Overall, participants believed that partnerships and collaboration between IHEs and their surrounding communities were important for all stakeholders and should be reciprocal in nature. Several participants had developed partnerships with community members prior to their involvement in SL pedagogy; however, SL provided increased awareness and a framework to engage students in structured and meaningful ways. One participant stressed that opportunities to introduce students to community agencies and outside resources for individuals with disabilities is limited in special education programs resulting in a disconnect between schools and community resources.

The potential direct and indirect benefits to individuals with disabilities served as a strong motivator across participants for developing SL courses. SL was viewed as a means to provide individuals with disabilities access to resources as well as enhance school and community participation. Participants noted that individuals with disabilities increased community involvement, self-efficacy, academic and functional skills, social interaction, self-advocacy, interdependence, and self-determination. Although not all participants implemented SL projects within K-12 schools, projects in these settings were often referenced for their potential to positively impact students with disabilities.

### **What are the Potential Challenges to SL Implementation?**

Although there are challenges associated with developing, implementing, and sustaining SL courses, participants believed that the benefits to SL far outweigh the challenges. As one participant stated:

You have to know that you are going to hit barriers that you are going to have to overcome. It's going to be harder than just having a lecture-based class. There is no question about it. You just have to be willing, knowing that the payoff and the benefits to everyone are much greater than the hurdles.

Participants noted several challenges to implementing SL; however, multiple factors appear to influence challenges. First, the type of SL project (e.g., teacher-directed, student-directed) implemented may present its own unique challenges such as differences in time demands, number of projects to evaluate, and levels of student ownership. Second, the amount of SL experience one has may impact perceived challenges as faculty learn to "recognize the trouble spots" with experience. Third, how long a SL course has been taught plays a factor as much of the initial coordination and planning occurs in the early stages of course development, and SL courses become fixtures in programs over time. Lastly, one's level of understanding of SL pedagogy might impact perceived challenges due to the refinement of SL elements with experience. It is important to mention that some faculty reported very few challenges to SL implementation. The challenges represented in this study can be classified into four distinct areas including: (a) faculty, (b) university structures, (c) students, and (d) community.

### **Faculty**

Overwhelmingly, participants reported that the time and energy it takes to develop and maintain a SL course is greater than a traditional lecture-based course. Numerous participants cited challenges such as time for increased planning and coordination of activities, increased communication between stakeholders, and responsibilities that go beyond typical courses. Depending on the type of SL project, participants had to complete additional logistical tasks



including communicating (e.g., e-mail, telephone conversations, meetings) with community partners and students, managing schedules, and monitoring students. For example, one participant noted that a school closure due to weather could impact many individuals involved in a SL project creating additional planning and coordination duties for faculty whereas a traditional lecture-based course would require no additional effort. While time was a concern, several participants stated that there is a great deal of "front-loading" that is associated with initial SL development and implementation as a proactive measure to ensure quality experiences for all stakeholders. Moreover, participants stated that the time commitment diminished with experience as participants established community partners, developed assignment guidelines and evaluation techniques, developed systems for managing logistical tasks, and had a greater understanding of, and ability to recognize, potential trouble spots. Lastly, there appeared to be differences in the time demands associated with teacher-directed versus student-directed SL projects, as student-directed projects place the onus of recruiting and sustaining community partners on the student rather than the faculty member.

Regardless of the type of SL project one employs, a key aspect of all SL projects is providing opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning. In doing so, faculty members must be willing to give up some "control" or "ownership" of their course. Participants suggested that students must have ownership of their projects and learning for it to be a meaningful and relevant experience for them. For some participants, this concept took time and evolved with experience, as there were initial feelings of uneasiness about giving up control. As one participant stated, "SL has challenged me to be more flexible, and to lose my need to have all the answers." Participants strongly emphasized that giving up control and providing student ownership did not mean a lack of course structure or rigor. One can give students ownership of

their learning but still maintain support and structure for students as they overcome problems and reflect on their own learning. The challenge, as noted by participants, is finding the balance between providing structure and allowing students to take control of their learning.

Several factors may play a part in the uneasiness of giving up control or using SL, such as SL may not be viewed favorably by an IHE, or other faculty members, and it has the potential to "back-fire" in the public eye. Although participants from this study reported mostly supportive feedback from fellow faculty members as well as positive experiences implementing SL, there appeared to be a drive to legitimize one's use of SL. The participants in this study are advocates for the use of SL in the field of special education; however, many appeared to make a conscious effort to remain objective and critical of their work. One participant noted, "it can be difficult to remain critical and objective when there are so many benefits and you receive positive feedback from students and community members." Additionally, multiple participants suggested that SL faculty should acknowledge the potential pitfalls and limitations of the SL literature in an effort to improve its use and acceptance as SL is often misrepresented, misused, or glorified. SL was viewed as one instructional option that must be used with purpose and rigor. Several participants stated that they did "SL-like" activities in other courses, but that they did not consider those to be "true SL courses" as they did not align with all the elements of a SL course.

### **University Structures**

Challenges caused by university structures were commonly reported. One of the most frequently referenced was course scheduling. Some universities had strict guidelines on when a course could be offered and how students participate in activities outside of designated class time. The lack of flexibility within some university systems impacted participants' ability to facilitate collaboration between the community and the university. A few participants reported

increased measures taken to address issues related to liability, which have resulted in faculty being required to take additional steps (e.g., student waivers). Additionally, some universities had policies to limit the number of vehicles on campus, thus making transportation difficult for select students (e.g., first-year students) because they did not have access to vehicles or public transportation. Challenges to transportation appear to be compounded if there is not a strong public transit system within proximity of the university.

The aforementioned challenges may be intensified or diminished depending on the extent to which community engagement is emphasized within an IHE. One area where there were differences across participants was in how universities supported the implementation and development of SL courses. Several of the participants noted that their university provided supports for SL such as training, staff, funding, and resources dedicated to enhancing the use of SL; however, others implemented SL without formal university supports. Some faculty, with long-term SL teaching experience, reported shifts in supports over time. For example, two participants mentioned SL supports were recently developed due to increased interest and one participant reported changes in support based on shifts in university leadership. Differences in departmental supports were also evident as multiple participants reported that SL would not be sustained or exist in their department without their efforts. Lastly, only a few participants noted that SL "counted" in their promotion and tenure process. Others felt that "it did not matter if they provided students with an in-depth experience or taught from the textbook as teaching was weighted the same" in the promotion and tenure process. One participant was apprehensive as an assistant professor about implementing SL until the university revised the tenure and promotion guidelines to include SL and other forms of community engagement. This action was viewed as a "green-light" to develop SL courses and develop a research agenda on the topic,

which the participant credited as a key piece to attainment of tenure and overall professional identity.

Changes in university structures, particularly in the field of teacher education, have posed challenges to the development and sustainability of SL courses. Some participants reported a shift in the overall courses offered at their university. For example, two participants stated that their department was moving toward dual certification and a general special education endorsement rather than specializing in particular populations (e.g., individuals with emotional behavior disorders, individuals with moderate to severe disabilities). This change left little room for maintaining existing SL courses that provided access to specific populations or prepared preservice teachers to use SL. Participants stressed their desire to develop preservice/in-service teachers' ability to use SL in their own classrooms as they viewed SL as a valuable teaching strategy in K-12 settings. However, they struggled to identify opportunities within their programs that would adequately prepare students to meet this goal. Oftentimes participants felt they were relegated to focusing on exposure to SL pedagogy rather than proficiency of its use.

### **Students**

A variety of potential challenges were reported related to students including schedules, follow-through, apprehension, and using SL as an instructional strategy. Working around student schedules was reported as a frequent challenge. Students may work during the day, be involved in athletics, have children, and/or commute long distances. These factors may prohibit students from having access to schools or working with community partners that have restrictive schedules or limited availability.

Student follow-through (i.e., completion of duties) can be a concern as a student's actions can positively or negatively impact themselves, their university and instructor, and community

partners. Concerns with student follow-through were considered to be of great importance in the field of special education as SL projects often involved individuals that have been historically marginalized. Participants that mentioned student follow-through as a potential challenge were quick to point out that only a very small percentage of students have done less than expected, lacked initiative, or failed to follow-through with their duties in the field. Typically, participants reported a high-level of student engagement and positive feedback from all stakeholders; therefore, students that did not follow-through stood out and puzzled their instructors. One participant captured this sentiment in the following quote: "These are the students that keep you up at night, because they are going to be teachers, and these are the duties that they will be engaged in as a teacher." Participants reported possible reasons for lack of follow-through such as students perceived SL as "extra work" or they believed a past experience should count toward the completion of their SL project.

Aside from site-based practica, students are typically not engaged in learning outside the classroom; however, implementing SL changed this dynamic, which caused students to feel nervous and unprepared. Participants reported a stage of "messiness" that occurs when implementing a SL project in that students may question their abilities, struggle with problem-solving, or become frustrated or uneasy at some point in the process. Although it was considered an added challenge working with students to resolve these issues, this stage was deemed a necessary step in the learning process. SL required students to self-reflect, apply their skills, and think critically about their roles in authentic contexts.

Developing the skills necessary for teachers to be able to use SL in their own classrooms presented its own challenges. As mentioned in the university structures section, participants have been confronted with an ever-expanding curriculum and various changes in certification

standards resulting in limited opportunities to introduce SL pedagogy. All participants believed that SL should be included in their teacher preparation program, but the majority of participants were not sure how SL would "fit" in their program. Student-initiated SL projects allowed some participants to have conversations with their students about how they could use SL in their future classrooms; however, they believed that this method provided a cursory introduction to the pedagogy rather than structured hands-on experience developing and implementing SL in K-12 settings. Of the two participants that developed SL courses focused specifically on using SL as an instructional strategy, both suggested that students often required additional support to ensure their projects met the definition of SL. When learning how to develop and implement SL, students often proposed community-service projects rather than SL projects. Some students struggled with evaluating the learning component of their projects because they were too focused on the benefits to the community rather than employing sound data collection procedures. Moreover, one participant reported that once teachers were introduced to SL and saw the benefits first-hand, teachers had a tendency to want to overuse the pedagogy requiring additional instruction on how to identify potential "high impact" SL projects. Lastly, inservice teachers were reported as being isolated and not used to initiating partnerships with community members outside the school setting, thus SL forced students out of their comfort zones.

### **Community**

Participants were motivated to use SL because it created positive outcomes for students and a wide-range of community partners; however, extending learning opportunities beyond the classroom created unique challenges. Navigating busy schedules and limited resources (e.g., space, materials, time) with community agencies, schools, and families were conveyed as potential barriers to developing and maintaining SL courses. Challenges related to recruitment

and sustainability of community partners were noted across participants that developed instructor-directed SL projects. For example, a participant that developed a SL project that included parents of students with disabilities had to annually identify parents. Others noted that the availability of potential community partners varied depending on course topic and location. As one participant suggested, there are fewer community agencies and resources for individuals with disabilities in smaller communities.

Teacher-directed SL projects can pose unique challenges. Of the participants that developed instructor-directed SL projects, some managed to sustain a relationship with the same community agency or school for several years. While a long-term partnership would diminish the need for recruiting new partnerships, other barriers may arise. For example, some participants reported that their community partners had a high-rate of turnover in personnel. Constant changes in personnel required participants to reestablish rapport and buy-in. Two participants noted challenges associated with working with school districts such as high rates of absenteeism and attrition. Participants were forced to make adjustments to student groups, schedules, and be somewhat flexible with requirements due to the potential for differences in direct contact with community partners. Additionally, not all instructor-directed projects easily lend themselves to repeated implementation. For example, a project requiring students to work with adults with disabilities to develop a presentation on self-advocacy would not likely be replicated with the same group of adults each semester where as providing supplemental reading instruction to teacher-selected students would likely be repeated because the students would change annually.

Although not as prevalent, challenges were reported for student-directed SL projects. For example, two instructors noted that their universities were located near areas that required

students to take additional precautions to ensure their safety when traveling off campus. Therefore, participants provided instruction on safety, paired students, and occasionally organized alternative meeting locations for students and community partners. Some participants reported that their students had difficulty recruiting community partners because they were not familiar with the community and had no previous connections. Due to the increasing demands placed on administrators and teachers, participants that worked with preservice/in-service teachers to develop SL projects reported challenges related to access. For example, some administrators were unwilling to approve SL projects because they perceived them to detract from their goals regardless if it was well designed and closely aligned with standards. As one participant noted, "teachers have less autonomy, less chance for creativity, and less chance to bring in their own ideas and passions."

### **What Do SL Experts Recommend?**

One of the main purposes of this study was to develop a set of recommendations for special education faculty interested in developing or enhancing their own SL courses. SL experts interviewed for this study provided a wealth of information related to their experiences implementing SL and how they have successfully navigated challenges and sustained SL courses over time. As with challenges, some recommendations are specific to the type of SL course, community partnership, and course topic. Recommendations have been organized in the following categories: (a) faculty, (b) student, (c) community, and (d) SL elements.

#### **Faculty**

The recommendations outlined in this section focus on suggestions for faculty to better facilitate their own experience implementing SL. Participants identified multiple supports and facilitators that aided in their development, implementation, and sustainability of SL courses.



Recommendations revolved around pre-SL implementation, beginning stages of SL implementation, and refining SL. Table 4 provides an overview of participant recommendations that pertain to all SL courses in special education.

Participants offered several recommendations for faculty interested in developing their own SL courses. First, participants recommended that faculty interested in developing their own SL courses start by familiarizing themselves with the literature on SL as a guide to develop an understanding of what constitutes SL pedagogy. Second, participants collectively

Table 4

*General Recommendations From Participants*

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Recommendations

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Familiarize yourself with the SL literature in and out of the field of special education.

Start off small.

Develop supports for SL implementation including peer supports and campus-wide SL supports.

Decide how a SL project will align with course objectives and then decide what SL option might best align with those objectives.

Plan for all scenarios, but keep in mind that the best plan must be flexible and not all hurdles are preventable.

Develop open communication and a positive learning community.

Gain student buy-in.

Model reciprocity and showcase community members as resources.

Stress the importance and relevance of SL to student and community outcomes throughout the semester.

Facilitate authentic experiences.

Strive for balance in all phases.

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

Recommendations

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Provide quality, varied, and ongoing opportunities for reflection.

Implement quality, varied, and ongoing methods of evaluation.

Include opportunities for acknowledgement of accomplishments.

Gather feedback from all stakeholders.

Self-reflect on the process and revise as needed.

Revisit student products and feedback for continued reinforcement.

Give it a try, do not worry, and do not give up.

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suggested developing a peer network or joining a "SL community" of SL faculty on campus.

Developing a collaborative network to share ideas, resources, and feedback was viewed as being invaluable across all stages and levels of experiences. SL communities provided reinforcement, confirmation, and a "sounding board" for participants. Additionally, some participants mentioned "SL mentors" that provided assistance to individual faculty members who were interested in developing SL courses. Third, participants recommended seeking out SL support personnel (when available) at their IHE as they were viewed as tremendous resources for faculty members interested in developing or enhancing their SL courses. SL offices provided a variety of services such as identifying community partners, training for faculty and students, literature, networking, and funding.

When developing SL courses, participants strongly encouraged faculty to "start off small." Starting with unrealistic expectations or complex projects could cause added stress, impact sustainability, and the ability to meet the needs of all stakeholders. As noted by participants, SL naturally "snowballs" into multi-layered and more in-depth projects with

experience. Moreover, participants warned that students and community members may become frustrated if there is not a clear plan and if the projects are not "doable" in a "realistic" time-frame. To avoid unrealistic expectations, participants stressed the importance of pre-planning and collaboration.

Once participants had established their SL courses they strived for "balance." With experience, participants were able to achieve balance between service and learning, student ownership and instructor support, and class structure and student creativity. SL courses that lean too heavily to one side were viewed as limiting. This balance is illustrated by the following passage:

I encourage my colleagues to try not to rubric SL to death because I believe that learning, especially SL, is internal to the learner and we as faculty, I feel, stifle our best students by making things too prescriptive. As an observation having done this for years, I always get a few students who do less than I wish they would, but I get many students who do far more than I ever could have expected, and I would rather err on the side of greatness.

As with all instructional strategies, participants noted that time and experience are required to develop balance and SL will improve with time and experience. Over time, SL implementation evolves. For example, some participants reported that in the beginning, their SL courses were too structured and formulaic. Other participants reported initially providing insufficient structure and support for students. Participants were continually "tinkering" with their SL courses in an effort to better the experience for all stakeholders. Due to changing needs of community partners and shifts in the field of special education, SL courses were viewed as a "work in progress" in that they should be responsive to stakeholders, context, and curriculum. Lastly, several participants echoed these three simple phrases as words of advice for interested faculty: "do not worry", "give it a try", and "do not give up."

## **Student**

Recommendations for working with students clustered around the areas of faculty-student communication, student buy-in, and developing a learning community. Students may feel nervous or frustrated during SL projects due to the change in student roles, teaching dynamics, and requirements to complete tasks outside of the classroom or "comfort zone." Therefore, participants discussed the need to develop a "learning community" that was conducive to sharing experiences and frustrations with students and faculty. Faculty-student communication was considered to be key to developing and sustaining a positive learning environment throughout the duration of the SL project. Participants recommended being "up-front" with students by telling them that they will likely be nervous, face challenges, and need to be problem-solvers, while reinforcing that they will have the support of their instructor and peers throughout the process. Participants used a variety of strategies to develop their learning communities including team building exercises, ice-breakers, interest forms, class discussion, and case scenarios.

Prior to the implementation of a SL project, participants recommended gaining student buy-in by providing an overview of SL pedagogy, exploring and discussing the SL literature, and explicitly stating how participation in SL projects has the potential to impact their overall growth and development as professionals. Some participants used former student projects and student testimonials as well as guest speakers to increase student buy-in. One participant recommended, when possible, inviting the SL coordinator on campus to introduce or reinforce SL as it can be powerful to hear about SL pedagogy from someone other than the instructor. Additional recommendations for improving student buy-in and follow-through included explicitly stating SL requirements on course syllabi, clearly stating expectations in the field, and making SL a substantial component of the course rather than an "add-on." Participants noted that with time,

SL courses became a fixture of their program and thus students began to not only expect, but look forward to, opportunities to get involved in the community.

When developing and enhancing SL courses, participants used a variety of strategies to overcome or avoid challenges that were specific to different types of SL courses. First, some used a variety of grouping strategies to meet specific needs such as grouping students with similar schedules, transportation needs, geographical proximity, and interests. When possible, participants mixed students from various majors to provide differing perspectives and roles. Second, some SL projects required instructors to provide additional training to ensure students were prepared to complete service requirements. For example, SL projects that focused on building specific skills (e.g., reading instruction, supported employment) required pre-training before students began the SL project. Conversely, two participants that developed SL projects that sought to enhance interactions between students and adults with disabilities recommended providing minimal pre-training in an effort to minimize students taking on typical teaching roles. Third, student-directed projects were reported to have greater flexibility as students could work with their community partners individually to develop a schedule and SL project that met the needs of both parties. Fourth, participants working with students to develop their own SL projects recommended that students start off small and develop proposals to allow instructors to walk them through the process and ensure quality. Fifth, participants suggested that online courses allow students to develop projects in their "home communities" where they are more likely to have an established network. Lastly, some participants recommended developing SL projects that were implemented at their IHE or inviting community partners to campus. These projects allowed participants to more easily navigate and negotiate space, materials, schedules, and transportation.

## **Community**

Reciprocal community partnerships are the backbone of a quality SL course. Participants provided several recommendations related to initiating, cultivating, and sustaining partnerships with community members. When initiating partnerships, participants recommend completing needs assessments to determine authentic needs that align with course objectives. Moreover, some participants warned against developing a SL project and then "shopping it around" to potential community partners because this method does not lend itself to reciprocity and sustainability. The key to long-term implementation and reciprocity, as one participant expressed, is "finding a community partner that wants the project and needs the project as bad as you do." To accomplish this, participants recommended finding community partners with a "shared vision." Some participants recommended, as a starting point, investigating websites of community agencies for individuals with disabilities to determine their goals and mission.

Developing open communication with community partners was highly recommended. Participants were able to develop projects that were reciprocal, iron out details related to resources and schedules, and overcome barriers as each side felt comfortable sharing their experiences (both positive and negative) once open communication was established. To ensure open communication, participants recommended using multiple forms of communication such as face-to-face planning meetings and site visits, telephone calls, and email. Two participants suggested that an "overreliance on email" could limit collaborative efforts because it does not lend itself to the depth or sincerity of a face-to-face meeting.

Participants strongly suggested that faculty provide opportunities for their students to view community partners as resources, contributors, and collaborators by placing partners in a position to share their expertise. Unfortunately, participants reported that community partners

such as parents and individuals with disabilities had not typically been placed in an "expert" or "equal contributor" role; therefore, developing SL projects that eliminated negative stereotypes and maximized the contributions of individuals with disabilities, families, community agencies, and local schools was considered a top priority. When appropriate, participants worked with students to rethink and revise their proposals toward equal participation projects that situated community partners as equal participants rather than recipients of service. To ensure SL projects met the needs of the community partners and that students were following through with their tasks, participants suggested collecting feedback from community partners regarding their satisfaction with the project. Strategies such as brief surveys or questionnaires, signatures of completion, and faculty communication were used to gather feedback without creating additional work for community partners. Several participants recommended including an "exit plan" to provide natural closure to projects for community partners. In some cases, students developed a step-by-step manual that provided community partners with directions on how they completed their project, as well as additional resources and "next steps" for future planning.

### **SL Elements**

The elements of SL distinguish it from other forms of community engagement; therefore, participants heavily emphasized the importance of understanding SL elements (e.g., planning, authentic need, alignment with course content, evaluation, celebration, reflection, student ownership) and provided insight regarding how the incorporation and implementation of SL elements improves with time and experience. SL must meet an authentic need while being closely aligned with the course content. Participants strongly encouraged faculty to preplan SL projects, explicitly state how SL is tied to the curriculum on syllabi, and revisit the connections between the SL project and course throughout the semester. Regardless of the SL course,

participants were in strong agreement that SL elements such as reflection and evaluation should be ongoing throughout the duration of the SL project rather than "one-shot" events.

Reflection was the most widely discussed element. Participants emphasized the important role that reflection plays in student learning by facilitating connections between course content and experiences in the field. Recommendations for improving the use of reflection included using a variety of reflection techniques (e.g., written, class discussion, online reflections), providing students with specific and immediate feedback, using themes across reflections to facilitate class discussions, and monitoring reflections to determine specific students that may require additional support. Some participants stressed the importance of written reflections over other forms of reflection because they felt that written reflections produced higher-level thinking as well as insight into individual student experiences, which can be overpowered during group discussions. Suggestions for improving the quality of student reflections included providing students with feedback related to quality and depth, providing exemplars, using rubrics and guidelines, using guiding questions, and making reflections a graded course requirement.

Evaluation was considered to be one of the key factors to quality SL implementation. Participants recommended using action research projects, portfolios, reflections, final presentations and papers, and observations as evaluation methods. Evaluating student-directed projects can be difficult as it is challenging to observe all students; therefore, participants recommended having students document progress through pictures, data, video, feedback from partners, and reflections. One participant recommended that instructors conduct a mid-term and final evaluation of professional dispositions in an effort to provide students with valuable feedback regarding their growth in non-academic areas.



Celebration, or acknowledgement of accomplishments, was considered to be a critical component of SL courses. Celebrations included poster sessions, dinners, end of the semester gatherings, and presentations. Participants suggested that celebrations provided opportunities for students to reflect on the entire process, debrief, and share their experiences with fellow students and community participants. Additionally, a strong emphasis was placed on acknowledging community partners for their involvement and commitment. Lastly, participants stated that they would review celebration related artifacts such as videos or reflections to reenergize their commitment to SL after the completion of the semester.

Participants recommended that faculty utilizing student-directed SL projects require proposals to guide students through SL development and implementation. Proposals ensured all elements were properly incorporated into SL projects. Moreover, proposals provided a concrete means to discuss recommendations for improving quality with students. In K-12 settings, administrator approval for projects was easier to obtain when proposals included alignment with state standards, were cross-curricular, and contained procedures for ongoing data collection and progress monitoring.

### **Discussion**

As Driscoll (2000) noted, faculty are ultimately responsible for developing, implementing, and sustaining quality SL courses, yet very little is known about their motivation to do so, possible challenges they face, and supports that they need to be successful. In an effort to gain insight into SL pedagogy within specific disciplines, Abes et al., (2002) suggested that researchers identify experienced SL faculty and give them opportunities to share their SL knowledge so that others may learn from their expertise. Therefore, the goal of this investigation was to identify and capitalize on the know-how of SL experts in the field of special education.

Participants in this study became involved in SL at different points in their career. Regardless of their path to SL, the pedagogy provides an outlet for participants to follow their passions and stay connected, create learning opportunities for their students that would not otherwise be possible, and benefit the community in ways that positively impact the lives of individuals with disabilities. However, developing these authentic learning experiences has a cost. Participants spend a great deal of time developing, implementing, and sustaining SL courses due to the coordination required between students and community. They were able to successfully navigate the challenges of SL implementation because they are well versed in SL pedagogy, developed projects that are manageable, aligned projects with authentic needs in the community, and developed projects that are closely aligned with course content. With time and experience, participants were able to find balance between service and learning, student ownership and instructor support, class structure and student creativity, as well as control and flexibility of SL courses.

### **Why Are Special Education Faculty Using SL in Their Courses?**

Participants were motivated to use SL because they believed that it provided benefits to their students and community that could not be accomplished to the same degree without the use of SL. They were on a continued quest to provide the best possible learning experiences for their students. As a result of SL implementation, participants reported being continually reinforced and reenergized by their students and community partners, and by the positive feedback they received from all stakeholders. While student learning and community involvement are often cited in the literature, SL has also been reported to provide benefits to instructors (Bowen & Kiser, 2009; O'Meara, 2008; Pribbenow, 2005). Participants in this study suggested that SL

keeps them current, grounded, involved, and focused on what is most important in the field of special education--positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

From the experiences noted throughout this study, it is easy to see why participants became "hooked" once they began to develop SL projects. Participants were able to see the impact of their students' work, involve students in the community in meaningful ways, develop accountability in their students, and provide opportunities for students to see the relevance in their course work. As a result, participants received positive feedback from their students. Muwana and Gaffney (2011) and Santos et al. (2011) likewise obtained positive feedback from students enrolled in their special education SL courses. Although a positive learning experience is important, it does not guarantee student learning. A survey conducted by Anderson and Erickson (2003) revealed that the three most common rationales for including SL in teacher education courses were student related including exposure to communities, opportunities for exploring diversity issues, and enhancing personal and social growth. While student learning was the most cited in the current investigation, the qualitative methods used in this study provide evidence that motivational factors are more diverse than student learning alone.

SL provided a means for participants to make a greater impact in the community and develop further awareness among their students regarding the people and issues to which they have dedicated their life's work. In many cases, there was a deep connection between participants and community partners. The implementation of SL "humanized" course topics, which increased the accountability of students and faculty because there were direct implications of their work. Therefore, participants strived to create opportunities for community members to be viewed as resources as well as for individuals with disabilities to have exposure to a wider-range of experiences, people, and resources. Some SL projects required participants to change

the roles to which students were accustomed in an effort to break down preconceived notions and establish a truly reciprocal relationship.

### **What are the Potential Challenges to SL Implementation?**

Although participants reported various challenges to SL implementation and sustainability, they were in agreement that the benefits to SL overshadow the challenges. Moreover, participants were able to successfully navigate the barriers to implementation and sustainability over the course of their careers. In a survey conducted by Neeper and Dymond (in press), special education faculty as a whole reported minimal challenges to implementing SL pedagogy in higher education courses; however, individual faculty reported differing perceptions of barriers. One of the most notable findings in the present study is that challenges related to SL implementation appear to differ in frequency and intensity depending on the stage of course development, faculty experience implementing SL, availability of SL supports within an IHE, faculty understanding of SL pedagogy, and the type of SL project selected for a course. Therefore, it is plausible that faculty interested in developing their own SL courses could limit challenges to implementation by developing a SL project that aligns with their unique environmental factors and core course objectives.

Of the identified challenges in this study, the most commonly referenced related to time. This challenge is well documented in the teacher education literature on SL (Anderson & Erickson, 2003; Anderson & Pickeral, 2000; Furco & Ammon, 2000; Neeper & Dymond, in press). Additional time was needed for planning, ongoing communication, and infusing common elements of SL into courses. These demands (although greater than lecture-based courses) appear to diminish with experience and repeated practice implementing SL courses. In general, developing authentic learning opportunities for students takes additional time; therefore,

participants found the additional time to develop and implement SL to be a natural consequence of providing the best possible learning experiences for their students.

SL challenged participants to reevaluate their teaching practices in different ways as they strived for balance between service and learning, student ownership and instructor support, class structure and student creativity, as well as control and flexibility. This aligns with Butin (2005) as he suggested that SL involvement causes shifts in what it means to be a faculty member because it forces faculty to re-think the foundational beliefs that student learning comes solely from them, takes place in a lecture hall, and follows a prescribed formula. Faculty were not the only ones that experienced shifts in their perceptions of higher education as a result of SL involvement. Students enrolled in SL courses were reported to be uneasy and nervous during the initial stages of SL courses. These feelings could be a result of the shifts that students were confronted with because they were not accustomed to working outside of their classroom, collaborating with professionals, and solving problems within real-life situations. If this is true, SL could be a gateway for students to make the transition from student to teacher because it requires the application of knowledge in authentic contexts with guidance from an instructor.

While participants discussed challenges related to students, little to no discussion focused on challenges to infusing SL in special education courses or aligning SL with authentic community needs. Both of these issues have been documented in the teacher education SL literature as potential challenges to SL implementation (Anderson & Erickson, 2003; Anderson & Pickeral, 2000; Furco & Ammon, 2000). Therefore, SL appears to be a natural fit within the context of special education related courses. One could hypothesize that the emphasis placed on collaboration with multiple stakeholders, community involvement and resources, and advocacy

in the field of special education could play a factor in the lack of barriers associated with SL implementation.

### **What do Special Education Faculty Recommend?**

General advice for special education faculty interested in developing their own SL courses included: start off small, seek out supports and faculty networks, develop a thorough understanding of SL pedagogy, include elements that lead to quality outcomes for all stakeholders (e.g., reflection, evaluation), develop reciprocal SL projects with community partners, and gather feedback from community partners. Anderson and Pickeral (2000) gathered recommendations from SL experts in teacher education regarding their advice for teacher educators who were new to SL pedagogy. In many ways, Anderson and Pickeral's findings align with the abovementioned general recommendations found in this study; however, there appear to be slight differences between the two sets of experts. The most notable difference is that the teacher education SL experts recommendations related to community partners were entirely K-12 based and there were no recommendations related to reciprocity or community satisfaction.

Several researchers in the field of special education have outlined recommendations based on their own experiences implementing SL pedagogy (see Cepello et al., 2003; Jenkins & Sheehey, 2009; McHatton et al., 2006; Muwana & Gaffney, 2011). These recommendations are frequently identified as “lessons learned” or “implications.” The current study offers the first focused examination of recommendations from special education SL faculty. When viewed as whole, articles that include “lessons learned” provide the reader with very different (not contradictory) recommendations because of the differences in their SL projects. As with the challenges outlined in this study, there are recommendations that are "general" to all SL projects; however, this study confirms that the instructor is going to hit barriers that result in "project

specific" recommendations. Therefore, it is essential that authors provide a clear description of SL project(s) so that generalizations can be made regarding what worked and what needed to be revised.

Participants continually reinforced the importance of faculty fully understanding SL pedagogy in an effort to avoid misrepresentation, over-use, and glorification, as well as to increase rigor and improve outcomes for all stakeholders. Overall, there was general concern that SL could have potential negative impacts if best practices were not used. In general, it is not recommended that a preservice teacher implement a complex teaching strategy without having a solid foundational understanding of its use; however, this practice may be occurring with SL at the higher education level. Therefore, greater understanding of SL pedagogy is needed to ensure that time and emphasis are placed on incorporating SL elements such as reflection which have been directly tied to improved learning outcomes for preservice special educators (Welch & James, 2007). One could hypothesize that an increased focus on SL elements would diminish the likelihood that negative outcomes are experienced across stakeholders.

Faculty in this study reinforced the importance of student involvement and also provided greater insight into how to facilitate this concept such as building a positive learning community, providing student testimonials, increasing ownership by balancing an instructor's need for structure, and providing authentic learning experiences. Increasing student ownership, buy-in, and student satisfaction are considered to be essential to the spread of SL in teacher education programs (Anderson & Callahan, 2005; Furco & Ammon, 2000). Perhaps the best way to provide an authentic learning experience is to determine the most important objectives of a course and then decide whether they would be enhanced by the elements of a SL project. If so,

then an effort should be made (on the part of the instructor or student depending) to develop close alignment with the shared goals of potential community partners.

Participants also recommended that faculty interested in developing SL courses seek out supports from within their IHE. Faculty networks, SL support personnel, professional development, and resources have all been shown to increase the implementation and sustainability of quality SL across IHEs (Anderson & Callahan, 2005; Anderson & Erickson, 2003; Furco & Ammon, 2000). In the current study, faculty utilized these resources in different ways depending on their experience with SL and the availability of the resources. Regardless of how they are being utilized, this study provides strong evidence that campus-wide SL supports do have a positive impact on quality SL implementation.

### **Limitations**

While the present study provides a closer look at SL in the field of special education, there are several limitations that should be weighed when interpreting the results. The use of semi-structured interviews may have limited participants from freely sharing their SL experiences or discussing matters that they felt were more relative to SL pedagogy. Due to the nature of the research questions, interview questions related to challenges to implementation that may have caused participants to focus on the drawbacks of SL implementation that may not be true barriers to implementation. Conversely, participants may not have fully disclosed the challenges to SL implementation in an effort to increase its use or limit the potential for negative views toward themselves or their IHE. The majority of the data were collected during one interview session, which might have impacted responses due to setting events (e.g., lack of time, health) that were not disclosed. Although there were several measures taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data, the results were interpreted with pre-disclosed investigator biases.



## **Implications for Future Research**

This study provided a closer look at faculty perceptions related to SL implementation in the field of special education. However, as noted by participants, there are numerous gaps in the literature that need to be filled in an effort to improve the use of SL in the field of special education. Implications for research can be clustered in the areas of faculty, students, community partners, and teacher education.

Additional investigations are needed to further explore faculty motivators, recommendations, and challenges to SL implementation in higher education courses related to the field of special education. More in-depth investigations need to be conducted across faculty from multiple institutions to better understand the complexities of SL implementation at different stages of SL course development and with faculty with varying levels of SL experience. Moreover, data that investigates why faculty do and do not use SL in their special education courses would provide greater understanding of the perceived challenges to implementation and motivators for its use. Additional investigations that identify the challenges faculty face implementing varying SL projects and their recommendations for overcoming them will assist the field in understanding how to enhance the use of SL in special education courses. These investigations should take into consideration differences in SL projects, courses, communities, and level of faculty experience.

Research that focuses on student outcomes (e.g., academic, social) across multiple IHEs will provide greater insight into student growth and perceptions of SL courses. Although student learning was a major motivator for SL implementation, additional data need to be collected using a variety of methods to further explore the efficacy of SL in the field of special education. Variables such as the level of ownership, training, and direct contact with community partners

need to be further explored to develop a better understanding of the impact on academic and social outcomes for students.

Community partners play a vital role in SL projects, but there is little exploration in the literature related to their input, feedback, and satisfaction with SL projects. Therefore, investigations that focus on best practices for developing reciprocal relationships is crucial. Investigations that further explore roles (e.g., recipient, participant) are needed to determine what impact these scenarios play on community and student outcomes. Research on what factors lead to positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities is central to understanding how to avoid SL projects that may have unintended negative outcomes.

As a result of this investigation, several implications for future research that pertain specifically to teacher education and special education have emerged. Several benefits to SL implementation in K-12 settings for students with disabilities were noted; however, there is little evidence to suggest that preservice/in-service teachers have the ability to develop SL projects on their own. Therefore, research is needed to further identify and explore successful methods for including SL pedagogy within teacher education programs. Understanding the use of SL in teacher education would shed further light on how to best prepare current and future special educators to develop and sustain quality SL projects in their schools and communities that lead to positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities. Moreover, K-12 special education teachers that have successfully implemented quality SL projects should be identified to determine their path to SL, the supports they needed to be successful, as well as their recommendations and challenges to implementation.

### **Implications for Practice in the Field of Special Education**

From the current investigation, several implications for practice have emerged for the use of SL in the field of special education. Implications for practice revolve around pre-planning, implementation, and ongoing evaluation and revision of SL projects. Faculty interested in SL pedagogy should seek out literature on SL within and outside the field of special education, inquire about SL on their campus, and get involved in SL related professional organizations such as the International Center for Service-Learning in Teacher Education (ICSLTE). Once an understanding of SL pedagogy has been developed, faculty should determine which course they teach would most closely align with SL pedagogy and what type of SL project would best fit the course goals and objectives. If a teacher-directed SL project is determined to be the best fit, it may be beneficial to complete a needs assessment with a variety of potential community partners that share a similar vision to determine an authentic need. If a student-directed SL project is selected, student proposals that outline projects and alignment with the SL elements should be used. Project proposals are extremely important in the field of special education because they will provide a platform for guiding students through the process and ensuring that projects align with course objectives and promote positive outcomes for individuals with disabilities.

Regardless of the type of SL project, it is important to start off small and share experiences with faculty with an interest in SL throughout the process so others may learn or impart their knowledge. Take time to carefully plan, develop, and schedule opportunities for SL elements to be included in the course. SL activities should count toward a student's grade and be explicitly stated in course syllabi. Keep in mind that students may not be used to completing SL related activities or engaging in learning outside of the classroom. SL courses in the field of special education may be the first introduction to persons with disabilities for students.

Therefore, developing an open learning community will allow students to share their concerns prior to implementation.

Once the SL project begins, keep open communication with students and, if applicable, community partners. Due to the populations involved in special education SL courses, clear communication is needed to determine if additional instructor support is needed. Additionally, increased faculty support may be needed depending on the stage (i.e., beginning, middle, end) of implementation. Reflection opportunities should be ongoing and include a variety of techniques. To ensure learning, provide guidelines, feedback, and make reflection activities meaningful for students to complete. Carefully planned and well-developed reflection activities need to be in place, especially if one of the goals of the project is to change student perceptions/attitudes toward individuals with disabilities. It is important to acknowledge accomplishments by having students share artifacts (e.g., data, pictures, video, journal entries) that they have developed throughout the project. Gather feedback along the way from the community partners regarding their satisfaction that does not provide additional stressors for community partners. Feedback should be collected from all stakeholders including individuals with disabilities--especially if they are the recipients of service. Keep in mind that problems will arise; however, planning and experience will make these more manageable. Continue to refine and reevaluate SL projects over time to ensure they are continually meeting the needs of all parties involved.

### **Implications for Institutions of Higher Education**

Participants from this study provided several recommendations that may assist IHEs in their development and sustainability of SL. First, develop a means to identify faculty members that are using SL on campus so that others may learn from their experiences. Second, provide opportunities for these individuals to freely share their experiences via listservs, forums, and

informal meetings. Third, provide training for interested faculty regarding best practices in SL implementation. Fourth, compile resources for faculty use that pertain to SL implementation across a variety of disciplines. Fifth, create awareness of SL on campus and showcase faculty accomplishments so that others may see the potential for implementation in their own courses. Lastly, special education faculty with SL expertise should inform interested faculty in and outside the field of special education regarding practices that will result in positive outcomes for persons with disabilities in an effort to promote equal participation and reduce the potential reinforcing negative stereotypes.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Final Summary**

The purpose of this investigation was to build a foundational understanding of how service-learning (SL) is used by special education faculty with SL teaching experience and to provide recommendations for faculty members who are interested in developing or enhancing their own SL courses. More specifically, findings revolved around how SL is used in special education courses, faculty motivators and challenges to implementing SL, recommendations for SL involvement, and alignment with the field of special education. This summary will synthesize the major ideas that emerged from this study across all research questions.

#### **SL Pedagogy in Special Education Courses**

Prior to this investigation, there were no studies that gathered perspectives related to SL implementation across multiple faculty in the field of special education. Participants used SL to address a wide-range of topics and curricular needs. The development of SL projects was unique to the participant because projects were developed that were aligned with their personal beliefs and mission. As was echoed by several participants, it is important to find a community partner that shares your vision and wants the SL project as bad as you do. Prior to this investigation, this would seem like an excellent recommendation for all SL projects. However, making a broad statement such as this limits the scope of SL pedagogy because not all SL projects include a long-term partnership with one community member.

This study reveals that SL is extremely versatile and complex in the hands of experienced faculty. One of the most interesting findings of this study is that instructors have a series of choices to make when developing a SL project. For example, what type of SL project should I use? This question leads to another series of questions that must be answered. As the instructor,

do I want more control or less control over the project, do the skills being developed need direct supervision, is the goal of the project to provide exposure or in-depth practice of a specific skill, etc. Although it is typically stated that SL is a "flexible" pedagogy, it may be more accurate to suggest that SL is a "responsive" pedagogy.

SL projects enabled participants to be responsive to the needs of the learner and community. Participants developed projects that met the unique needs of their courses, students, and community. Participants were able to scale back projects if students were not ready or provide additional support if students were not progressing in a particular area of the project. Developing needs assessments and project proposals ensured that SL projects were responsive to the needs of the community. However, it is clear that SL cannot be responsive without the incorporation of certain core SL elements. For example, the use of ongoing reflection and evaluation allow instructors and students to make decisions based on information and experiences throughout the duration of the SL project.

Given the inconsistencies reported in the literature on SL regarding the use of elements (e.g., reflection, evaluation, celebration), it is surprising that there was heavy emphasis placed on their use. Participants not only used the SL elements, but they were constantly working to improve their effectiveness. Participant evaluation and self-reflection of SL implementation was evident given the number of participants that advocated or recommended for the use of multiple strategies (e.g., written and verbal discussion) based on trial and error to effectively incorporate the SL elements. Depending on the SL course and SL project (e.g., stand-alone SL course, student-directed SL), participants had to provide support for students to implement elements of SL on their own. This additional layer created challenges and faculty recommendations.

This investigation provided evidence that there are general recommendations and challenges associated with SL implementation. What is most interesting is that varying types of SL projects or SL courses present their own unique challenges and thus have subsequent recommendations to facilitate the implementation of SL. Table 5 attempts to organize some of the recommendations and challenges that appear to be closely related to specific SL projects or courses.

### **SL Faculty in Special Education**

Participants from this study were introduced to SL in different ways, taught assorted types of courses, used the pedagogy in diverse ways, and worked at institutions of higher education (IHE) and within communities that varied considerably. Regardless of these major differences, there are strong themes that cut across these individuals and their approach to teaching. The following section will explore the perceptions and attitudes of participants in an effort to generate a profile of a SL faculty member in the field of special education.

SL appears to align with the teaching philosophies of those that use it. Participants in this study appeared to embrace hands-on learning, high expectations of their students for dealing with complex issues outside the comfort of their classroom, and opportunities for students to think critically about their actions and the communities around them. Participants were on a constant quest for developing the best learning opportunities for their students. They believed that some of the common practices used in teacher education were not responsive enough to develop the skills necessary for students to be successful. To achieve these goals, faculty had to learn to give up some control of their courses and had to balance their need to have all of the answers. In many ways, participants modeled best teaching practices for their students. The challenges



Table 5

*Service-Learning Project Overview*

Course Goal	SL Project	Benefits	Possible Challenges	Recommendations	Community Recruitment
Teach students to develop and implement their own SL as a teacher	Student-Directed SL	Provides opportunities to develop the skills necessary to implement SL as in instructional strategy in K-12 settings	Administrator approval, unbalanced toward service, overuse	Use proposals to monitor student understanding, gain/increase administrator buy-in and ensure alignment with best practices, require students to submit a variety of artifacts to ensure completion	Student Facilitated
Teach students to use or improve a specific skill set with the guidance of an instructor	Instructor-Directed SL	Direct application of specific skill sets with ongoing support, students see a correlation between their skills and their ability to complete their tasks, discipline specific, shared experience	Limited flexibility in schedule, must infuse opportunities for ownership, possible attrition or limited access to experience, lends itself to helper roles	Provide adequate training for students to meet the needs of the community partners	Instructor Facilitated

(continued)

Table 5 (continued)

Course Goal	SL Project	Benefits	Possible Challenges	Recommendations	Community Recruitment
Provide structured interactions with a specific population	Instructor-Directed SL	Shared experience in a structured format, lends itself well to group work allowing multiple projects to be selected, offers differing roles for students	Limited flexibility in schedule, must infuse opportunities for ownership, possible attrition or limited access to experience, possible overreliance on students	Develop an environment that facilitates the desired student role. For example, less training about the methods used to work with adults with intellectual disabilities may facilitate more natural interactions, develop transition plans for ending the projects, stress the importance of follow-through	Instructor Facilitated
Provide exploration of a topic of interest	Student-Directed SL	Allows students to explore a topic of interest, capitalizes on pre-existing skills, flexible schedule, student creativity and ownership are highlighted, wide range of experiences	Variance in project quality, lack of experience may lead toward non-reciprocal roles, evaluation across multiple projects and settings	Set clear guidelines, use proposals to monitor the alignment of projects with course objectives and facilitate inclusive opportunities, require students to submit a variety of artifacts to ensure completion	Student Facilitated

(continued)

Table 5 (continued)

Course Goal	SL Project	Benefits	Possible Challenges	Recommendations	Community Recruitment
Target a specific population or experience but allow students to take a leadership role in developing a project with their partners	Co-directed	Flexibility in schedules, provides some student ownership, allows students to experience differences and similarities across a specific population	Requires additional recruitment efforts to ensure the same experience, evaluation across multiple projects and settings	Facilitate introductions and beginning interactions	Instructor Facilitated

associated with SL implementation such as the additional time and effort needed to develop and sustain SL courses were viewed as part of the process or a side-effect of providing the best learning experience for their students.

Participants stated that they "got hooked" once they began implementing SL in their courses. They enjoyed using SL pedagogy, talking about it, researching its use, and assisting others in developing their own SL projects. All of the participants would be considered advocates of SL. However, even though they were hooked on it, they remained grounded and realistic. They viewed SL as a beneficial teaching strategy that should be used, but they did not view it as a cure-all. Participants pointed out gaps in the literature, glorification of its use, and misrepresentations of SL in the field. They strongly emphasized that faculty interested in using SL should become well versed in the SL literature in and outside the field of special education before developing their own projects. Participants noted that it took them time and experience to find balance between service and learning in their courses as well as implementing various elements of SL to a high degree. Although participants received positive feedback from students and community members, they were continuously looking for areas to improve.

Participants had a strong commitment to their IHE, community, and students. SL was often used to address an area of interest and passion; therefore, participants were heavily invested in the outcomes of their SL projects. As a result, participants were troubled by students who did not follow-through, did less than was expected, or did not care about the SL projects. Although these cases were extremely rare, they resonated with participants because there were people involved in the projects. If a student does not turn in a written assignment they miss an opportunity to learn; however, if a student does not follow-through on a SL project there are

potential negative ramifications for others. Participants worried that these student attitudes and behaviors would carry over to their future roles as educators.

Regardless if one teaches in K-12 settings or higher education, there are certain aspects of teaching that are universal. Participants wanted to see the relevance of their work. They wanted evidence that students were able to apply the skills taught in the classroom to real-life situations. SL reinforced and reenergized their passion for the field of special education. Their end goal was to improve the outcomes for individuals with disabilities. SL allowed them to be connected to the community and see the impact of their students. It also aligned with participants' views about teaching and community collaboration; therefore, it provided an outlet for faculty to meet their own goals.

### **Alignment With the Field of Special Education**

This investigation provides clear evidence that there is a strong alignment between SL pedagogy and the field of special education. An analysis of Council for Exceptional Children's (CEC) principles suggests that SL can address issues related to inclusivity of individuals with disabilities in schools and communities, provide opportunities for students to develop collaboration and advocacy skills, opportunities to improve professional dispositions, and structured opportunities to develop instructional skills and make decisions based on data and professional knowledge.

Although there are some principles that can be addressed across all SL projects (e.g., collaboration, professional dispositions), others require the development of specific SL projects (e.g., advocacy, instructional skill development). Two of CEC's principles (i.e., special education law, active participation in professional organizations) were not addressed in this study. However, it is clear that an instructor with expertise in SL could easily develop a SL

project (e.g., working with parents to understand their rights in the IEP process, involvement with local chapters of CEC) that would address these two principles. As previously noted, perhaps instead of "alignment with the field of special education" it would be more accurate to say "responsive to the field of special education." For example, if a department evaluates their program and realizes that there are specific gaps in student development, a structured SL experience may provide additional instruction in that particular area.

That being said, it is evident that SL as a pedagogy aligns with the field in several ways. First, SL involves collaborating with a team of individuals to determine critical needs. Second, SL is individualized to the context and the people involved. Third, SL focuses on skills that have a direct application to real-world settings. Lastly, SL requires ongoing reflection and evaluation to determine if goals are being accomplished.

Perhaps the only contradiction in the data was in relation to the use of SL in K-12 settings. Participants regardless if they developed projects in K-12 settings or not, suggested that SL has the potential to benefit students with disabilities in our schools. However, very few participants reported teaching preservice teachers how to use the instructional strategy that participants were advocating for in K-12 and higher education settings. If SL has the potential to make positive impacts in K-12 schools, why are teachers not being trained to use it as a viable teaching strategy? Moreover, are the teachers that are currently implementing it, doing so in ways that have been proven to result in positive outcomes for all stakeholders?

From this investigation, it is evident that SL has the potential to generate increased awareness of issues related to disability, change perceptions and attitudes toward individuals with disabilities, and provide opportunities for advocacy for and with persons with disabilities. However, if these outcomes are to become the norm, strides must be taken to ensure that SL is

being implemented with rigor and fidelity. SL experts need to continue to provide the field with examples that highlight best practice, quality research, and recommendations for improving the use of SL in special education related courses.

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**Appendix A**  
**Initial Contact Email Sent to Participants Identified by Neeper & Dymond (in press)**

Dear (insert name),

My name is Lance Neeper and I am a doctoral candidate from the Department of Special Education at the University of Illinois with an interest in service-learning.

I contacted you previously regarding a survey that my advisor, Dr. Stacy Dymond, and I conducted related to your experiences with service-learning in higher education. I would like to thank you again for your participation and let you know that the findings from the survey have been accepted for publication in *Teacher Education and Special Education*. A citation and abstract for the article can be found at the conclusion of this email.

The reason I am contacting you today is to see if you would be interested in participating in a follow-up study. We are interested in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences of special education faculty members with service-learning teaching experience in higher education. In particular, we want to understand how you use service-learning in your courses, factors that motivate or deter you from using service-learning, and recommendations you may have for special education faculty that are interested in developing or enhancing their own service-learning courses.

Currently, there are no in-depth studies that focus specifically on special education faculty with SL teaching across multiple IHEs. You are one of a select few special education faculty members that exist nationally who have service learning teaching experience and have published related to its use in K-16 settings. We are particularly interested in the experiences of faculty such as yourself because we believe that your contribution to the literature on service-learning sets you apart from other faculty with service-learning experience.

Individuals who agree to participate in this study will be asked to complete the following activities:

- 5 minute survey to gather demographic information
- 60 minute interview
- Review a brief summary of the interview transcript to ensure its accuracy.
- Submit course documents such as syllabi, assignment guidelines, grading rubrics, service-learning project descriptions, and lecture notes for analysis (Optional). Course documents will not be used to make judgments of quality but rather to provide further information about how faculty use service-learning in special education courses.

As a small token of appreciation, participants will receive a \$25 gift voucher at the conclusion of the study that can be used anywhere a credit card can be used.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or learning more about it, I would welcome the opportunity to talk with you. Please reply to this email with your phone number and three dates and times that you would be available for a brief phone conversation. If you would prefer not to participate in this study please let us know.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,

Lance Neeper, Doctoral Candidate  
217-355-2774  
lneeper2@illinois.edu

Stacy Dymond, Associate Professor  
217-244-9763  
sdymond@illinois.edu

Neeper, L. S., & Dymond, S. K. (in press). The use of service-learning among special education faculty. *Teacher Education and Special Education*.

#### Abstract

The purpose of this study was to describe the use of service learning (SL) by special education faculty at 4-year colleges and universities across the United States, and to determine faculty attitudes and beliefs about the application of SL in special education. Participants included faculty with experience in SL teaching and/or research in special education (N=48). Data were gathered using a survey. Results show that faculty represented a wide range of institutions and had varying levels of SL experience. There was great variability in beliefs about and implementation of SL across faculty. Barriers to incorporating SL in courses and research were minimal. Significant differences in attitudes and beliefs were found based on type of institution, size of institution, and size of community.

**Appendix B**  
**Initial Contact Email Sent to New Participants**  
**Not Identified by Neeper & Dymond (in press)**

Dear (insert name),

My name is Lance Neeper and I am a doctoral candidate from the Department of Special Education at the University of Illinois with an interest in service-learning. My advisor, Dr. Stacy Dymond, and I would like to include you in a study related to your experiences with teaching higher education courses related to special education that include a service-learning component. We are interested in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences of special education faculty members with service-learning teaching experience in higher education. In particular, we want to understand how you use service-learning in your courses, factors that motivate or deter you from using service-learning, and recommendations you may have for special education faculty that are interested in developing or enhancing their own service-learning courses.

Currently, there are no in-depth studies that focus specifically on special education faculty with SL teaching across multiple IHEs. You are one of a select few special education faculty members that exist nationally who have service-learning teaching experience and have published related to its use in K-16 settings. We are particularly interested in the experiences of faculty such as yourself because we believe that your contribution to the literature on service-learning sets you apart from other faculty with service-learning experience.

Individuals who agree to participate in this study will be asked to complete the following activities:

- 5 minute survey to gather demographic information
- 60 minute interview
- Review a brief summary of the interview transcript to ensure its accuracy.
- Submit course documents such as syllabi, assignment guidelines, grading rubrics, service-learning project descriptions, and lecture notes for analysis (Optional). Course documents will not be used to make judgments of quality but rather to provide further information about how faculty use service-learning in special education courses.

As a small token of appreciation, participants will receive a \$25 gift voucher at the conclusion of the study that can be used anywhere a credit card can be used.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or learning more about it, I would welcome the opportunity to talk with you. Please reply to this email with your phone number and three dates and times that you would be available for a brief phone conversation. If you would prefer not to participate in this study please let us know.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,  
Lance Neeper, Doctoral Candidate  
217-355-2774  
lneeper2@illinois.edu

Stacy Dymond, Associate Professor  
217-244-9763  
sdymond@illinois.edu

## **Appendix C Email Reminder**

Dear (insert name),

My name is Lance Neeper and I am a doctoral candidate from the Department of Special Education at the University of Illinois with an interest in service-learning. My advisor, Dr. Stacy Dymond, and I would like to include you in a study related to your experiences with teaching higher education courses related to special education that include a service-learning component. We are interested in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the experiences of special education faculty members with service-learning teaching experience in higher education. In particular, we want to understand how you use service-learning in your courses, factors that motivate or deter you from using service-learning, and recommendations you may have for special education faculty that are interested in developing or enhancing their own service-learning courses.

Currently, there are no in-depth studies that focus specifically on special education faculty with SL teaching across multiple IHEs. You are one of a select few special education faculty members that exist nationally who have service-learning teaching experience and have published related to its use in K-16 settings. We are particularly interested in the experiences of faculty such as yourself because we believe that your contribution to the literature on service-learning sets you apart from other faculty with service-learning experience.

Individuals who agree to participate in this study will be asked to complete the following activities:

- 5 minute survey to gather demographic information
- 60 minute interview
- Review a brief summary of the interview transcript to ensure its accuracy.
- Submit course documents such as syllabi, assignment guidelines, grading rubrics, service-learning project descriptions, and lecture notes for analysis (Optional). Course documents will not be used to make judgments of quality but rather to provide further information about how faculty use service-learning in special education courses.

As a small token of appreciation, participants will receive a \$25 gift voucher at the conclusion of the study that can be used anywhere a credit card can be used.

If you are interested in participating in this study, or learning more about it, I would welcome the opportunity to talk with you. Please reply to this email with your phone number and three dates and times that you would be available for a brief phone conversation. If you would prefer not to participate in this study please let us know.

Thank you for your consideration!

Sincerely,  
Lance Neeper, Doctoral Candidate  
217-355-2774  
lneeper2@illinois.edu

Stacy Dymond, Associate Professor  
217-244-9763  
sdymond@illinois.edu



## Appendix D IRB Documentation

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
AT URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

**Bureau of Educational Research**  
College of Education  
38 Education Building  
1310 South Sixth St.  
Champaign, IL 61820



March 21, 2011

Lance Neeper  
Special Education Department  
288 College of Education  
MC-708

Dear Lance,

On behalf of the College of Education Human Subjects Committee, I have reviewed and approved your research project entitled "Faculty Perspectives on the Use of Service-Learning in Special Education Courses". This project meets the exemption criteria for federal regulation 46.101(b)2 for research involving the use of normal interviews and surveys where the identity of the participant is protected.

No changes may be made to your procedures without prior Committee review and approval. You are also required to promptly notify the Committee of any problems that arise during the course of the research. Your project number is 4763. Exempt projects are normally approved for 3 years with annual reports requested. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions

Best regards,

Anne S. Robertson  
Coordinator, College of Education Human Subjects Review Committee

Cc: Dr. Stacy Dymond

*telephone 217-333-3023 • fax 217-244-0538*

## **Appendix E**

### **Phone Conversation Guide**

The following guide will be used to convey the same information to each potential participant.

1. How are you doing today? First, thank you for your interest. I would like to share with you some of the details related to our study. I'll share the purpose, research questions, and what would be required of you if you choose to participate. If at any time you have questions or need clarification please feel free to interrupt me.

2. Purpose: Currently, there are no in-depth studies that focus specifically on special education faculty with SL teaching across multiple IHEs. The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of special education university and college faculty who have developed SL courses to establish a foundational understanding of how SL is used and recommendations for faculty members who are interested in developing or enhancing their own SL courses. You are one of a select few special education faculty members that exist nationally who have service-learning teaching experience and have published related to its use in K-16 settings. We are particularly interested in the experiences of faculty such as yourself because we believe that your contribution to the literature on service-learning sets you apart from other faculty with service-learning experience.

In this study, the criteria for selection is that the individuals be employed by a four-year IHE in the United States, be a member of the special education faculty or teach courses related to individuals with disabilities at their IHE, have taught SL courses in higher education, and have published peer-reviewed literature on SL.

Do you feel that you meet these criteria?

The following research questions will be used to guide this study:

- How do special education faculty use SL in their courses?
- What factors motivate or deter special education faculty from implementing SL in their courses?
- What recommendations do special education faculty have for implementing SL in special education courses?
- How does the use of SL align with the field of special education?

3. Participant Roles:

A. Pre-interview survey (5 minutes): Prior to the interview, we would like to gather some demographic information about you and your institution in an effort to learn more about your background and for the purposes of reporting general characteristics of our sample. We have chosen to collect this information via a survey prior to the interview so that we can focus on your service-learning experiences during the interview.

B. 60 minute interview: Unfortunately, we are not able to conduct face-to-face interviews; therefore, we would prefer to conduct the interview via Skype™ so we could use video conferencing. Do you have experience using Skype™? If not, would like me to send you information on how to set up a Skype™ account? If you would prefer to be interviewed by phone that can be arranged as well. With your consent, interviews will be recorded for the purposes of transcribing the data. You may choose to participate in the interview without it being recorded. Interviews will be converted to audio files and stored on a password protected secure server. A back-up file will be made on a removable storage device and stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Both copies of the recordings will be deleted at the conclusion of the study.

C. Document Review: We would like to investigate the use of service-learning in greater depth. Therefore, we are inviting faculty members to share their course materials that pertain to service-learning with us. Documents such as syllabi, assignment guidelines, grading rubrics, service-learning project descriptions, and lecture notes. The course documents will not be used to make judgments of quality but rather to provide further information about how faculty used SL in special education courses. All materials will be shredded at the conclusion of the study and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. You may choose to participate in the interview without providing course documents. If you choose to share your materials they will be stored on a password protected secure server. A back file will be made on a removable storage device and stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Both copies of the documents will be deleted at the conclusion of the study. We may need to contact you to clarify information regarding your submitted documents.

D. Member checks: After the interview has been transcribed, we will summarize your responses to each interview question. You will receive an email containing the summary and be asked to review the summary to confirm its accuracy. If adjustments are needed, we may need to contact you to ensure the data is accurate.

4. For your participation you will be given a \$25 gift voucher.
5. Do you have any questions?
6. If you are interested in participating, I can email you a consent form and the pre-interview survey that will help us set up the interview.
7. Thank you for your time.

## **Appendix F Consent Form**

Dear Participant:

My name is Lance Neeper and I am a doctoral candidate from the Department of Special Education at the University of Illinois. My advisor, Dr. Stacy Dymond, and I would like to include you in a research project regarding your experience with service-learning. As a participant in this study you will be asked to complete the following activities:

- 5 minute survey to gather demographic information
- 60 minute interview
- Review a brief summary of the interview transcript to ensure its accuracy.
- Submit course documents such as syllabi, assignment guidelines, grading rubrics, service-learning project descriptions, and lecture notes for analysis (Optional). Course documents will not be used to make judgments of quality but rather to provide further information about how faculty use service-learning in special education courses.

In appreciation of your time, a \$25.00 gift voucher will be sent to you upon completion of the study.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. All the information that is obtained during this research project will be kept on a password protected secure server. A back-up copy of the data will be saved to a removable storage device that will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Data will be accessible only to project personnel and will be deleted at the completion of the study. Pseudonyms will be used to keep all data confidential.

We anticipate no risk to participating in this research other than what might be experienced in normal life and the research may be helpful for improving our understanding of service-learning engagement among special education faculty. The results of this study may be used for a student research project, a scholarly report, a journal article, and/or a conference presentation.

This study has been approved by the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see attached letter). If you have any questions regarding this research project or if your institution requires additional IRB approval, please contact us either by e-mail or telephone. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant please contact Anne Robertson, Bureau of Educational Research, 217-333-3023, or arobrtsn@illinois.edu or the Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or irb@illinois.edu

Thank you for your time and dedication to the field of special education and service-learning. Please take a moment to indicate your willingness or unwillingness to participate in this study by completing the information that follows our signatures.

Sincerely,  
Lance Neeper, Doctoral Candidate  
217-355-2774  
lneeper2@illinois.edu

Stacy Dymond, Associate Professor  
217-244-9763  
sdymond@illinois.edu

**PLEASE COMPLETE**

If you want to participate in this study please print a copy of this letter for your records, type an "X" beside "I accept", save the document, proceed to the pre-interview survey, and email both documents to Lance at lneeper2@illinois.edu as attachments.

If you do NOT want to participate in the project please type an "X" beside "I decline", save the document, and email it to Lance at lneeper2@illinois.edu as an attachment.

I agree to participate in the interview.

I accept

I decline

I agree to have my interview audio recorded for transcribing.

I accept

I decline

I agree to provide SL course documents for analysis.

I accept

I decline

## **Appendix G Consent Form Reminder**

Dear Participant:

My name is Lance Neeper and I am a doctoral candidate from the Department of Special Education at the University of Illinois. My advisor, Dr. Stacy Dymond, and I would like to include you in a research project regarding your experience with service-learning. As a participant in this study you will be asked to complete the following activities:

- 5 minute survey to gather demographic information
- 60 minute interview
- Review a brief summary of the interview transcript to ensure its accuracy.
- Submit course documents such as syllabi, assignment guidelines, grading rubrics, service-learning project descriptions, and lecture notes for analysis (Optional). Course documents will not be used to make judgments of quality but rather to provide further information about how faculty use service-learning in special education courses.

In appreciation of your time, a \$25.00 gift voucher will be sent to you upon completion of the study.

Your participation in this project is completely voluntary. All the information that is obtained during this research project will be kept on a password protected secure server. A back-up copy of the data will be saved to a removable storage device that will be stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Data will be accessible only to project personnel and will be deleted at the completion of the study. Pseudonyms will be used to keep all data confidential.

We anticipate no risk to participating in this research other than what might be experienced in normal life and the research may be helpful for improving our understanding of service-learning engagement among special education faculty. The results of this study may be used for a student research project, a scholarly report, a journal article, and/or a conference presentation.

This study has been approved by the University of Illinois Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see attached letter). If you have any questions regarding this research project or if your institution requires additional IRB approval, please contact us either by e-mail or telephone. If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant please contact Anne Robertson, Bureau of Educational Research, 217-333-3023, or aobrtn@illinois.edu or the Institutional Review Board at 217-333-2670 or irb@illinois.edu

Thank you for your time and dedication to the field of special education and service-learning. Please take a moment to indicate your willingness or unwillingness to participate in this study by completing the information that follows our signatures.

Sincerely,  
Lance Neeper, Doctoral Candidate  
217-355-2774  
lneeper2@illinois.edu

Stacy Dymond, Associate Professor  
217-244-9763  
sdymond@illinois.edu

**PLEASE COMPLETE**

If you want to participate in this study please print a copy of this letter for your records, type an "X" beside "I accept", save the document, proceed to the pre-interview survey, and email both documents to Lance at lneeper2@illinois.edu as attachments.

If you do NOT want to participate in the project please type an "X" beside "I decline", save the document, and email it to Lance at lneeper2@illinois.edu as an attachment.

I agree to participate in the interview.

I accept

I decline

I agree to have my interview audio recorded for transcribing.

I accept

I decline

I agree to provide SL course documents for analysis.

I accept

I decline

**Appendix H**  
**Pre-interview Survey**

**Pre-Interview Faculty Survey**  
Please fill in the blank or mark an X for your answer.

1. What is your current rank?  
 Instructor  
 Assistant Professor  
 Associate Professor  
 Full Professor  
 Emeritus  
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Your institution of learning would be best described as a:  
 Public Institution, with a primary focus on research  
 Public Institution, with a primary focus on teaching  
 Private Institution, with a primary focus on research  
 Private Institution, with a primary focus on teaching
  
3. Approximately how many students (undergraduate and graduate) attend your university?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
4. What is the estimated population of the town/city where your college/university is located?  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
5. How many years of experience do you have using SL in your university teaching? \_\_\_\_ years
  
6. How many faculty members (including yourself) are in your department? \_\_\_\_\_
  
7. How many of those faculty members (including yourself) engage in SL teaching? \_\_\_\_\_
  
8. Does your department prepare preservice special education teachers? Yes\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_
  
9. Does your department train preservice special educators to use SL? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_
  
10. Does your department train inservice special educators to use SL? Yes\_\_\_\_ No\_\_\_\_
  
11. How would you briefly describe SL to a colleague that is not familiar with it?



Unfortunately, we are not able to conduct face-to-face interviews; therefore, we would prefer to conduct the interview via Skype™ so we could use video conferencing.

12. Would you be comfortable participating via Skype™? Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

My Skype™ screen name is \_\_\_\_\_

My phone number is \_\_\_\_\_

13. Please list three dates and times (at your earliest convenience) that you would be willing to participate in a 60 minute interview.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

We greatly appreciate your time, and look forward to learning about your experiences!

**Appendix I**  
**Faculty Feedback on the Pre-Interview Survey**

Directions:

Once you've completed the pre-interview survey, please answer the following questions.  
Thank you for your time!

The pre-interview survey was developed to gather demographic information about each participant prior to the interview to direct interview questions, maximize time spent interviewing, and to gather information for the purposes of disseminating research results.

1. Approximately how long did it take you to complete the survey? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you believe the survey was too long, too short, or an appropriate length?
3. Are the survey directions clearly stated? If not, how could they be improved?
4. Are the survey questions clearly stated? If not, how could they be improved?
5. Are there questions that should be added or deleted? Please list suggestions.
6. Is the formatting of the survey clear and easy to read?
7. Do you have any concerns about the content of this survey?

## Appendix J Interview Guide

Hello Dr. (insert name)

How are you doing today?

Can you hear me? If at any time you need me to adjust my volume or pace please let me know.

[For participants that agree to be recorded]

I would like to start by saying thank you for your time and willingness to share your experiences with me. I am very excited about the opportunity to learn from your experiences implementing SL in your courses. Before we get started with the interview, I wanted to remind you that this interview will be recorded so that it can be transcribed at a later date. Also, feel free to skip questions if you would prefer not to answer them. Do you have any questions before we begin?

[For participants that do not agree to be recorded]

I would like to start by saying thank you for your time and willingness to share your experiences with me. I am very excited about the opportunity to learn from your experiences implementing SL in your courses. Before we get started with the interview, I wanted to inform you that this interview will not be recorded as per your request. I may take notes during the interview so that I can retain the information. Also, feel free to skip questions if you would prefer not to answer them. Do you have any questions before we begin?

I'm curious how you first got involved in SL. Could you please explain how that happened?

What about SL appeals to you as an instructor?

**In the literature on SL and special education courses it has been documented that SL is used in a variety of courses, to teach a variety of topics, to a variety of students. For the following questions I would like you to keep in mind the courses you have taught that included SL.**

Could you briefly describe one of your SL courses? For example, the type of course, service projects, students, etc.

Do you use SL in all courses you teach? If not, how do you decide which courses you teach will be SL courses?

- Have you found it easier to use SL with certain subject areas or topics? (If the answer is yes) What subject areas or topics have you found it easiest to use SL?
- What is it about these subject areas or topics that make it easier to use SL?

How are the SL projects in your classes selected?

What do you tell your students regarding the purpose of SL?

Does implementing SL allow you to meet needs in your courses that you would not be able to do otherwise? If so, how?

How do you link the service project to the learning objectives of your course?

When students participate in SL, how do you know they are learning the course content?

What, if any, training or preparation do you believe is needed before your students engage in SL?

Are there any strategies you have found effective for establishing and maintaining community partners? (If the response is yes) Could you tell me about the strategies you use?

Why use SL in special education courses?

[The following question will be asked if participants indicated that their department trains preservice/in-service teachers to use SL.]

**I noticed in your survey that your department prepares preservice/in-service teachers to use SL.**

Are you involved in preparing these teachers to use SL?

Could you please explain how this is done?

What do you believe are the possible benefits and challenges to preparing preservice/in-service teachers to use SL?

**The following questions were developed so that special education faculty interested in developing or enhancing a SL course may gain some insight from your experience.**

What do you consider to be the essential elements of a quality SL course?

What do you believe to be the three most important things to consider when developing a SL course?

Have there been any resources that you have found to be particularly helpful for implementing or developing a SL course, and if so, how have you used them?

What, if any, challenges have you faced implementing SL in your courses and how did you overcome them?

What, if any, impact has SL had on you as an instructor?

**The following questions pertain to building the literature base on SL course development in the field of special education.**

From your experiences with SL teaching, what do you consider to be critical needs in the research?

Do you have any suggestions for other faculty members on how to align SL teaching with their scholarship.

What relevance do you believe SL has to the field of special education?

**In closing, I was wondering...**

Is there anything else about SL teaching that you would like to add that we have not talked about?

**I greatly appreciate your time and have enjoyed hearing about your experiences. I will send you an email in the next few weeks that will include a 2-3 page summary of your interview and directions to confirm its accuracy. Thank you!**

## **Appendix K**

### **Skype™ Directions**

This email will be sent to participants that want more information on how to set-up a Skype™ account.

Dear (insert name),

Per your request, I am sending you information regarding Skype™ set-up. If you have additional questions or concerns that go beyond Skype™ set-up you may need to contact your technology support coordinator. Once you have set-up a Skype™ account please email me your Skype™ screen name at your earliest convenience.

Thank you,  
Lance

#### **Set-Up Instructions:**

Skype™ has many features. The basic Skype™ account will allow you to make calls using your computer to anyone who is a Skype™ user. This takes about 10 or 15 minutes of time to set-up.

1. Go to Skype™.com and select "download." This will take you to another page where you will be prompted to download Skype™.
2. Select "download now for windows." The latest version is Skype™ 5.1. After you have selected "download now" you will be prompted again.
3. Skype™setup.exe will pop up on your screen. You may need to adjust your cookie setting so the pop up can be located. You can set it to allow cookies under internet options (the privacy tab)
4. Select "save file" and choose where you would like to save the file.
5. Follow set up wizard prompts to finish the installation. You will need to select a screen name and a password. Your screen name is what you will use to log on and what you will share with others when they want to contact you.

After the installation has been completed. There will be an icon on your desktop. Click on the icon to open Skype™.

These directions were slightly modified from [http://www.ehow.com/how\\_2299346\\_Skype-account-set-up.html](http://www.ehow.com/how_2299346_Skype-account-set-up.html)

An informational video can be viewed by clicking on the following link:  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fz9S6KkpUMw&feature=related>

**Appendix L**  
**Faculty Feedback Interview**

Thank you for participating in a mock interview. Please answer the following questions and email them back to me at your earliest convenience. I appreciate your help and thank you for your time!

1. Do you believe the interview was too long, too short, or an appropriate length?
  
2. Did you have any difficulties with the technology?
  
3. Were the interview questions clearly stated? If not, how could they be improved?
  
4. Are there questions that should be added or deleted? Please list suggestions.
  
5. How could my interview technique (e.g., pace, volume, wait time) be improved?

**Appendix M**  
**Course Documents Email**

Dear (insert name)

In an earlier correspondence you stated your willingness to share some of your course documents with us. We thank you for your willingness to share your materials for the purposes of investigating the use of service-learning in special education courses.

We are interested in analyzing documents related to service-learning courses such as course syllabi, assignment guidelines, grading rubrics, service-learning project descriptions, and lecture notes. These documents will be used only for the purposes of adding to our understanding of how service-learning is used in special education courses. All materials will be shredded at the conclusion of the study and will not be shared with anyone outside the research team. Your materials will be stored on a password protected secure server. A back up file will be made on a removable storage device and stored in a locked file cabinet in a locked office. Both copies of the documents will be deleted at the conclusion of the study.

If you are willing to share your course documents please reply to this email with your course documents uploaded as attachments. If you prefer not to share your course documents, please email me (Lance) to let me know of your decision. If you have any questions or experience any difficulty please contact Lance at [lneeper2@illinois.edu](mailto:lneeper2@illinois.edu).

Sincerely,

Lance Neeper, Doctoral Candidate  
217-355-2774  
[lneeper2@illinois.edu](mailto:lneeper2@illinois.edu)

Stacy Dymond, Associate Professor  
217-244-9763  
[sdymond@illinois.edu](mailto:sdymond@illinois.edu)



## **Appendix N Transcription Guidelines**

These guidelines will be emailed to the transcriptionist each time an interview is transcribed to maintain consistency of the data and confidentiality.

### Confidentiality

This data is confidential. It should not be shared with anyone. Please delete all audio files once you have completed the transcriptions.

### Format:

Margins: 1 inch margins

Font: Arial 12 point

Page Number: Centered on bottom of the page

Style: Moderator's comments will be left justified in italics. The respondent's comments will be left justified in normal type. Moderator's comments will be typed single-spaced and respondent's comments will be double-spaced. There will be a double space between the moderator's comments and the respondent's comments. All interviews will be typed verbatim. Verbatim is defined as everything heard on the tape, including introductions, housekeeping rules, and any other incidental conversation. All expressions (e.g., sighs, laughs) caught on tape should be put in parenthesis. For example, if the respondent laughs after a comment it should be noted as (laugh) in the transcript. No grammatical errors spoken by the respondent should be corrected. The name of the respondent should be replaced by the pseudonym that is attached to the audio file.

### Unclear Audio:

After multiple attempts to decipher what is being said, insert the following notations for unclear audio:

[inaudible] - *when one or just a few words are unintelligible*

[long inaudible section] - *when a longer section is unintelligible*

[audio gap] - *when there is an actual break in the audio (i.e. dead air)*

[talk over] - *multiple speakers talking simultaneously*

[background noise] - *other noises or conversations in the room make it impossible to hear speaker's dialogue.*

[sp] - *could not confirm spelling of name or word - spell it phonetically or use the most common version of a name (i.e., Sally not Salli)*

[sic] - *inaccurate expression, misspelling, or the like, is intentionally reproduced*

Retrieved from: [www.zoomtranscription.com/.../Zoom\\_Transcription\\_Guidelines.doc](http://www.zoomtranscription.com/.../Zoom_Transcription_Guidelines.doc) and <http://www.executiveassistant.biz/TranscriptionGuidelines.pdf>

**Appendix O**  
**Member Check Email**

Dear Faculty Member,

Thank you for your willingness to share your service-learning experience with us. It was a pleasure talking with you. The following attachment includes a summary of your transcribed interview. Before we begin analyzing our data we want to be certain that our data accurately reflects your experiences. In the next week please review the summary and if there is a discrepancy in the data or something you would like to elaborate on or delete, please make a note using the “track changes” feature of your word processing program. If you do not wish to make any changes, please email me (Lance) to confirm that the data does not need to be changed.

We appreciate your help in ensuring our research methods are sound. We will send an email in one week as a friendly reminder.

Thank you again for your participation in our study. A gift voucher has been sent to your email account. If you have not received it please let us know.

Sincerely,

Lance Neeper, Doctoral Candidate  
217-355-2774  
lneeper2@illinois.edu

Stacy Dymond, Associate Professor  
217-244-9763  
sdymond@illinois.edu

**Appendix P**  
**Member Check Email Reminder**

Dear Faculty Member,

Thank you for your willingness to share your service-learning experience with us. The following attachment includes a summary of your transcribed interview. Please review the summary and if there is a discrepancy in the data or something you would like to elaborate or delete please make a note using the "track changes" feature of your word processing program. If you do not wish to make any changes, please email me (Lance) to confirm that the data does not need to be changed.

We appreciate your help in ensuring our research methods are sound. Thank you again for your participation in our study.

Sincerely,

Lance Neeper, Doctoral Candidate  
217-355-2774  
lneeper2@illinois.edu

Stacy Dymond, Associate Professor  
217-244-9763  
sdymond@illinois.edu

**Appendix Q**  
**Council for Exceptional Children**  
**Special Education Professional Ethical Principles**

Professional special educators are guided by the CEC professional ethical principles and practice standards in ways that respect the diverse characteristics and needs of individuals with exceptionalities and their families.

They are committed to upholding and advancing the following principles:

A. Maintaining challenging expectations for individuals with exceptionalities to develop the highest possible learning outcomes and quality of life potential in ways that respect their dignity, culture, language, and background.

B. Maintaining a high level of professional competence and integrity and exercising professional judgment to benefit individuals with exceptionalities and their families.

C. Promoting meaningful and inclusive participation of individuals with exceptionalities in their schools and communities.

D. Practicing collegially with others who are providing services to individuals with exceptionalities.

E. Developing relationships with families based on mutual respect and actively involving families and individuals with exceptionalities in educational decision making.

F. Using evidence, instructional data, research and professional knowledge to inform practice.

G. Protecting and supporting the physical and psychological safety of individuals with exceptionalities.

H. Neither engaging in nor tolerating any practice that harms individuals with exceptionalities.

I. Practicing within the professional ethics, standards, and policies of CEC; upholding laws, regulations, and policies that influence professional practice; and advocating improvements in laws, regulations, and policies.

J. Advocating for professional conditions and resources that will improve learning outcomes of individuals with exceptionalities.

K. Engaging in the improvement of the profession through active participation in professional organizations.

L. Participating in the growth and dissemination of professional knowledge and skills.