SERVICE-LEARNING: AN INTERPRETIVE CASE STUDY OF TEACHERS’ PERSPECTIVES AND PLANNING STRATEGIES

By

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ABSTRACT

This study is an interpretive case study that focuses on elementary teachers who are implementing a service-learning project in their classroom. Research suggests that SL is beneficial for students and is becoming more prevalent in high schools and universities. Current literature, however, does not provide much evidence at the elementary level. The purpose of this study is to explore and gain insight into how elementary school teachers use service learning and to examine underlying factors that shape and influence how teachers plan for and implement service learning projects. Teachers usually lesson plan using resources such as pacing guides or teacher manuals, but SL does not provide those resources. This study is aimed to provide insight into SL planning strategies to support teachers implementing future SL projects. Four third grade teachers at a southeastern suburban elementary school participated in the study. Data was collected through interviews, focus groups, and observations. Data showed that these teachers did not use the same planning strategies for SL that they used in planning for academic standards. Teachers had negative perceptions of SL as a strategy because they did not have time to plan, felt too much pressure to accomplish other obligations such as standards, or they did not have the pedagogical or content knowledge necessary to be
successful. This study suggests that teachers need to plan for an emergent curriculum when implementing a SL project, but further research and professional development are necessary to develop a planning model.