Chapter 13
Building Character and Citizenship Through Service Learning

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13.1 Introduction

Character and citizenship are key goals of a holistic education. The daunting task of building character and citizenship rests with teachers. As early in a teacher's career, programmes in teacher education can develop teachers to build character and citizenship. To be effective, building character and citizenship needs to start with the teacher. What better way to learn this than by immersing in the community. As the sole teacher education institute in Singapore, the National Institute of Education (NIE) has since 2005 required all student teachers to engage with and learn from the local community via service learning experiences, thus building character and citizenship along the way. Through mandatory local service learning experiences and voluntary international service learning experiences, student teachers learn more about themselves, their strengths and areas for improvement, about working as a team, and about community and community issues.

Singapore has taken the challenge of increasing the number of teachers prepared in service learning by introducing programmes that emphasise on developing quality experiences for all teachers. In 2009, the Ministry of Education (MOE) launched the 21st Century Competencies Framework emphasising the core

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values of Respect, Responsibility, Resilience, Care and Harmony. Concomitant to its goal to be more student-centric and values-driven, MOE laid out competencies in the framework to develop a holistic education centred on values and character development (Heng 2011b). The introduction of service learning to Singapore is corroborated by this initiative especially in the promotion of active citizenry and is upheld as a learning approach where participants "learn to identify the needs of the community, serve the community and reflect their experiences through working with the community to foster an understanding and appreciation of what it involves" (D'Rozario et al. 2012). As a response, NIE initiated a Teacher Education for 21st Century (TE[21]) Model in its endeavour to develop a strong teaching force for the twenty-first century (NIE 2009), where the essential constructs supporting teacher preparation are highlighted: values[3], skills and knowledge (V[3]SK). Service learning is viewed as one of the several approaches designed to fulfil this mission and to provide the kind of experiences necessary to ensure that new teachers understand the three components in the context of schools and communities.

One learning experience in Singapore's national curriculum is Character and Citizenship Education (CCE) that enhances students' development as socially responsible citizens through ownership of their contribution to the community. Values in Action (VIA), which is part of this CCE curriculum, takes students on a journey where they develop a deeper understanding of themselves and the impact they can make on the community. As they gain a greater awareness of their identity in the contexts of family, school, community, nation and the world, they invest time and energy to build meaningful relationships with the people around them. As they take ownership of their communities, their values guide them in making responsible choices and effecting positive change.

13.2 Values in Action

In 1997, the Community Involvement Programme (CIP) was introduced to all schools across all levels in Singapore. Its aim was to help build social cohesion and civic responsibility in schools through community engagement by undertaking small-scale projects that provided these opportunities. The goal to strengthen holistic education was re-emphasised by the inaugural Character and Citizenship Education Conference jointly organised by NIE and MOE in November 2010. The theme of the conference, Active and Concerned Citizens, Building Character for Community, summarises MOE's purpose to support schools in their efforts to nurture values, competencies and dispositions in pupils and enable them to become good persons and responsible citizens (Heng 2011a). It aimed to deepen the conversation on what constitutes character education and citizenship education.

Five years later, MOE announced the reframing of the CIP as VIA to give greater focus to students acquiring values. VIA builds on the strengths of CIP, and encourages students to identify and understand community issues, initiate action

among their peers to make a difference and improve the lives of others (MOE 2012).

A key feature of VIA is that it encourages student ownership over what and how students can contribute to the community. Students are given opportunities to choose how and what to make a difference to. Together with their team members, they make decisions through brainstorming, planning and implementing their VIA projects. Throughout the VIA project, students take ownership of their learning by constantly reflecting on their experiences, the values they have put into practice and how they can continue to contribute meaningfully.

13.2.1 Learning Outcomes of VIA

Students recognise their roles in their families, school, community, nation and the world. As they understand how they can make a positive impact on their daily lives, they exercise social responsibility in their spheres of influence. Students also discover the needs of their communities and the ways they can contribute. They consider how they may use their strengths and resources to make a difference through meaningful contribution to the community.

13.2.2 Ways that Students can Contribute

As students learn about the challenges faced by the community, they consider what kind of help would make the most impact. They may choose to meet the needs of the community in one or more of the following ways:

1. By taking *action*: to improve a situation they care about.
   Students engage the community directly to make positive change. Their efforts may include offering practical help, adding a personal touch through meaningful interactions or strengthening relationships through thoughtfully designed projects.
2. By promoting *awareness*: so that others may learn about an important issue or concern in the community. Students may draw attention to a current issue or concern so that the community is better equipped to respond. They may also help others to better understand specific groups in the community.
3. By being an *advocate*: to inspire and influence others to make a difference to something important that they care about. Students may motivate and persuade others to join them in promoting an area of concern in the community. Through speaking, writing or other creative means, they inspire others to join them in making a difference to the community.

Service learning is a teaching and learning approach that schools can adopt for VIA. To employ successful service learning initiatives in schools, it is important for teachers to have a good understanding of the underpinning philosophy of service learning, and experience this aspect of values education in order to help their students undertake meaningful service learning projects (D'Rozario et al. 2012). In this day and age, it is not sufficient for student teachers to just learn knowledge and pedagogical skills, an opportunity through an experiential approach allows them to connect with society, embrace diversity, and develop values and competencies needed to make a positive difference in the classroom.

This chapter highlights two initial teacher education programmes which build positive values, character and citizenship in our student teachers: the Group Endeavours in Service Learning (GESL), where student teachers work with the local community on a joint project; and the Youth Expedition Project (YEP), where student teachers choose to work with international communities on an area of need.

13.3 Literature Review

Character building, service learning and a sense of civic responsibility and citizenship are integral components of a meaningful educational experience for children and young people. Service learning does not produce singular outcomes, but rather tends to be associated with outcomes in multiple youth development areas, including academic, civic, social/emotional and career (Billig et al. 2005). Through voluntary projects and reflections, positive benefits accrue not only to the recipient but also to the giver; in this case, the students themselves. Students need that part of education that connects them with the community outside the confines of the school in order to appreciate what is taking place in society (Goh et al. 2009). Several studies have been conducted to prove this point (Billig and Root 2006; Berkowitz and Bier 2005; Laird and Black 2002). Other studies have shown that service learning can promote civic engagement, responsibility and formation of social capital (e.g., Ammon et al. 2002; Kahne et al. 2002; Yamauchi et al. 2006) and empathy (e.g., Meyer 2003).

Nearly all of these studies qualify their results, though, by stating that only students who engage in high-quality service learning reach the specified outcomes. Typically, high quality was defined as meeting the essential elements of service learning (National Youth Leadership Council 1998). These elements developed during meetings of expert practitioners include the following:

- clear educational goals that require the application of concepts, content and skills from the academic disciplines, and the construction of one's own knowledge;
- service tasks that have clear goals, are designed to meet genuine needs in the school or community and have significant consequences for themselves and others;

- student reflection that takes place before, during and after service, that uses multiple methods to encourage critical thinking, and that is central in the design and fulfilment of curricular objectives;
- multiple methods to acknowledge, celebrate and validate student service work;
- student participation in selecting, designing, implementing and evaluating the service project;
- student participation for all aspects of their service work, including a clear understanding of the task, the skills and information required to complete the task, awareness of safety precautions, and knowledge about and sensitivity to colleague;
- student engagement in tasks that challenge them cognitively and developmentally;
- use of assessment to enhance student learning and to document and evaluate how well students have met content and skills standards;
- formative evaluation of the service effort and its outcomes;
- activities that promote the value of diversity in participants, practice and outcomes; and
- activities that promote communication and interaction with the community and encourage partnerships and collaboration.

13.3.1 Promoting Character Development

At the core of positive selfhood is the inherent aspiration of becoming a mature individual of good character when reaching adulthood. Yet how does one define maturity? One way to conceptualise this process is by considering one's growth and development within the framework of life goals. What is the role of service learning in this area?

Service learning and character development seem to be the embodiment of good youth development based primarily on principles of experiential learning. According to Shumer (2009), many service learning programmes engage youth with adults and children in ways that provide real responsibility and real opportunity to make meaningful contributions to society. Students engaged in service learning develop both a strong sense of responsibility as well as a clear understanding of the value of integrity and trust. Evaluative studies of typical service learning programmes have shown that they nurture a sense of responsibility and personal integrity. A 1997 Brandeis study in the USA revealed that middle school and high school students who participated in service learning programmes described themselves as not only more aware of important issues in their home, school, community and state, but that they also felt encouraged to act more responsibly (Anderson 1998). Similarly, in a 1994 Vanderbilt study in Tennessee, students expressed to researchers that they had a better sense of belonging in the community because of their service learning programme. Further, the students felt that they

were more capable of taking the other person's viewpoint and perspective as a result of their service work (Anderson 1998).

Students have indicated how successful service learning programmes are in the development of character in young people. According to a study by Hodgkinson et al. (1992), over half of the top responses by the students were character benefits when asked what they felt were the most important benefits of their service learning programme. Students who participated in service learning character education programmes had significantly less diminution in value attainment, which suggests that service learning may help students retain their character assets as they mature (Furco and Root 2010). In essence, these studies suggest that service learning does in fact aid students in developing empathy and the ability to care for others. Educational researchers have also found that those students receive tremendous benefit from service learning programmes. As one researcher commented:

> Advocates of youth service also agree that, while involvement in community projects is beneficial to all, students with poor academic performance, discipline problems, and low self-esteem gain the most (from service learning). By taking responsibility for a social cause or caring for someone else, these students internalise a different self-image: they learn that they can produce change and can be problem solvers. (Schervish et al. 1995, p. 145)

Students will be challenged in terms of attitudes and habits through the service component. Compassion and empathy will naturally emerge as a result of the task at hand. Learning compassion for others in our society is certainly an area of challenge for many of the students who engage in service learning. For example, young men and women who do not recognise the value of what they have at home are often confronted personally when working with the less fortunate. Along with the attitudes and concepts, emotions and feelings are also being challenged.

Students have the opportunity to recognise the contributions that they can make to their community and so feel valuable as a result of their service. Self-esteem and self-efficacy are experienced in most service programmes. Contribution to the community is therefore another natural outcome of service learning. Having performed an act of service for the sake of one's community creates a bond or sense of belonging. For children and teens, a sense of belonging is a big plus because it is high on their needs. In addition, students have the chance to look at possible careers when they engage in various service projects. For example, secondary school students who might be considering a career in teaching would be able to assess that area more fully as they tutor children.

13.3.2 Nurturing a Sense of Civic Responsibility and Citizenship

According to Sax (2004), citizenship has three attitudinal and behavioural aspects: (1) commitment to social activism, (2) sense of empowerment and (3) community involvement. For the first aspect, citizenship means participating in community

action programmes, helping others who are in difficulty, influencing social values, and influencing the political structure. The second connotes the level of feeling about how much an individual can bring changes in society. The third implies engagement in voluntary work or community service. Similarly, McLaughlin (2000) shared the three elements of citizenship as "social and moral responsibility, community involvement, and political literacy". Both underscore the importance of feeling responsible, being active and taking part in serving the community voluntarily.

Civic responsibility through volunteerism is also fostered through service learning. Those students who engage in service learning will develop awareness that individuals working together in a society can make a difference in the community's life. Once youth and adolescents recognise this fact, the probability that they will continue in community service throughout their life is increased. Most students who participate in a service learning programme have usually chosen to continue performing some form of volunteer work after their initial programme (Bak 2012). In addition, students also become more active in the general life of their neighbourhood and city due to the awareness gained from their service learning programme. The outcomes sought for young people from civic learning are comprehensive, and service learning has been documented to improve the very same areas, including specific knowledge and skills, feelings of efficacy and belonging, the development of moral character, and the ability to effectively interact and problem-solve in increasingly diverse communities (Bak 2012).

Barber (1998) sees education for citizenship and service learning in schools and higher education as a key factor in maintaining civic virtue and civic participation. In a number of influential articles and books, Barber has advocated education for active citizenship through service learning. Service learning can also help develop the capacity building for democratic citizenship within civil society (Annette 1999). Boston (1997) argued that service learning provides an experiential way of understanding abstract moral thinking and provides learning opportunities to build character.

Hamilton and Zeldin (1987) assessed the effects of community-engaged experiences on students' attitudes towards government and students' overall civic knowledge and skills. Blozis et al. (2002) conducted a study of middle and high school students in several communities in Northern Illinois and reported that service learning, coupled with other approaches, can be an effective intervention strategy for increasing students' understanding of their roles and responsibilities as citizens and their sensitivity to diverse cultures.

The use of service learning explicitly to meet CCE outcomes appeared to have increased over time. In 2002, only three projects funded by the US Department of Education featured service learning (Billig et al. 2008). Five years later, that number has substantially increased, with more than half of the grantees using service learning as one of their primary character education approaches. By engaging in service learning, students had opportunities to think more deeply about social problems, thus possibly prompting them to see their place in the world.

Today, many educational institutions use service learning as a tool to enhance education programmes, community life and to foster civic responsibility among their students. Service learning in teacher education provides an opportunity for bonding among the community of learners, namely the teacher educators, the student teachers, and the youth and children that they are reaching out to (D'Rozario et al. 2012). According to Stanton (1990, p. 67), service learning is "an expression of values—which determines the purpose, nature and process of social and educational exchange between learners (students) and the people they serve, and between experiential education programs and the community organisations with which they work". In essence, service learning integrates learning, student voice, high-quality service, civic responsibility, collaboration, reflection and evaluation (Tan and D'Rozario 2009). The learners who participate in service learning projects become responsible citizens and agents of social change. These outcomes are also emphasised when conducting overseas expedition projects. According to Lee and Tay-Koay (2009a, b), a unique combination of intrinsic motivation and concentration are two components of experience hypothesised to occur during overseas community service. In response to environment challenges and opportunities, coping and adaptation potentialities are developed (Jew et al. 1999). Successful adaptation or coping may result in positive outcomes such as improved personal competence and civic attitudes (Bringle and Duffy 1998).

Two good examples of application of these theoretical principles are found in GESL and YEP at NIE. At the core of these two programmes is the learning outcome that student teachers learn and work in group environments. Here, they have a chance to model leadership, develop values of engagement, create curriculum through deep endeavour, develop activities that are meaningful to them and to the context of the experience, provide for social learning and personal learning simultaneously, and contribute to society (Shumer et al. 2010).

13.4 Group Endeavours in Service Learning (GESL)

The Group Endeavours in Service Learning is an experiential learning experience for all NIE student teachers done in collaboration with local schools and organisations, both government and non-government. GESL aims to help student teachers be ready to lead VIA service learning initiatives when they are full-fledged teachers in schools. GESL also aims to develop character, social–emotional competencies and positive values. The desired outcomes for student teachers have been articulated as care and concern for all, collaboration, sharing and team spirit, desire for continual learning, excellence and innovation, commitment and dedication to the teaching profession, and respect for diversity.

GESL's key objectives are to provide a medium for student teachers to (1) understand themselves, (2) understand others, (3) develop effective team skills, (4) develop and exercise situational leadership skills, (5) encourage innovation and creativity, (6) understand community needs better, (7) develop project management

skills, (8) experience service learning which they may apply in school and (9) link curriculum learning to service learning experiences, and vice versa.

Student teachers work in groups of 16–20 to plan, implement and review service learning with a community of their choosing. Each GESL group is structured with one academic staff mentor, two leaders, two facilitators, a secretary and two safety officers. Other members in the group are encouraged to pick up roles that align with their competencies and contribute to the group. Preparation is provided to staff mentors, group leaders and facilitators. The preparation provides them with the knowledge in service learning, understanding of the experiential learning cycle and basic facilitation skills to ensure that there is group and individual learning from the experience. A celebratory sharing with the NIE community called Service Learning Day will cap their experience at the end of 9 months.

GESL is a pedagogy in developing values, skills and knowledge of student teachers underpinned by NIE's V^3SK Model and MOE's 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes Framework (see Fig. 13.1). The experience provides an opportunity for them to understand themselves and reach out to the community. It is envisaged that attributes such as the ability to foster care for the community, a respect for diversity, a strong collaborative spirit and a deep commitment to the profession can be honed. Specific skills developed through service

Fig. 13.1 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes Framework (MOE 2010). *Source* Ministry of Education, Singapore (2016)

learning include reflective skills, pedagogical skills, communication skills, facilitative skills, and social and emotional intelligence. Areas of knowledge developed through service learning experiences include gains in knowledge of self, one's pupils, the community, subject content and multicultural literacy.

13.4.1   Essentials of Service Learning

Six essential components of service learning are recognised in GESL as follows:

  i. Reciprocity
 ii. Meaningful service
iii. Community voice
 iv. Student teacher voice
  v. Reflection
 vi. Academic connections

These essentials serve as guiding principles for designing high-quality service learning which benefits both student teachers and the community.

Reciprocity

Through GESL, student teachers learn from the community. The community becomes our teacher. Student teachers also serve the community and, hence, there is mutuality in our relationship with us learning from the community and us serving them. Reciprocity helps to ensure respectful partnerships between student teachers and the community creating mutual respect, improving relationships, and enhancing healthy communication.

Reflection

When student teachers design, plan and implement their project, reflecting on the process helps them learn. Regular reflection encourages an ongoing thinking process. When student teachers reflect, they are able to make sense of their service learning experience and link recent experiences with past experiences. The reflection process involves seeking commonalities, differences and interrelations among the important elements of mental schema. Student teachers use journaling or group discussions after their practical experiences to reflect upon their process.

Meaningful Service

When planning for their GESL project, student teachers are advised to plan for activities that they find useful and helpful. The activities can be something that they acquire from reading or observing. These activities should do good to benefit both the student teachers and the community, to not only achieving the minimum standard but also doing something they perceive as relevant and of value. These activities should not encourage dependency. It should promote self-reliance and

sustainability, which can help the student teachers make sense of what they experience.

Community Voice

Service learning is approached with the notion that the community knows best. Before the project is conceived, students have to find out from the community what their needs are, by carrying out a needs assessment. This is essential as there are often discrepancies between our perceptions and the actual needs of the community. Students should hear the community out, learn from them, be open to their opinions and gather as much information as possible from a wide variety of people with different perspectives.

Student Teacher Voice

When this essential is incorporated into the service learning process, student teachers are encouraged to explore, discuss and make informed choices, lending their voices to the cause they believe in. Planning follows student teacher discussions with free sharing of views, findings from their research and evaluative comments. This helps develop a sense of ownership for the project. It gives the students space to appreciate and time to comprehend and decide on how they would like to serve and learn, rather than being told what to do.

Academic Connections

The last essential of GESL is that it should facilitate links to the academic curriculum at NIE. Curriculum is defined broadly as what students learn in NIE classrooms. This type of connection normally focuses on the core courses such as math, science, the language subjects and social studies. How does service learning inform the teaching of these subjects, and vice versa? Is there something learnt from GESL which may be applied to the psychology of teaching and learning? Did one use IT skills learnt at NIE to facilitate service learning? However, service learning can also easily be linked with other non-core courses such as computer IT and psychology.

13.4.2 Developmental Assessment of GESL

Student teachers are assessed on their contribution to their group and service learning process. The group's staff mentor observes the group and its members and documents their progress. Evaluation procedures were adapted from MOE's (2001) Project Work for Secondary School Evaluation. The four areas of focus for evaluation are as follows: knowledge application (group—process and product), communication (group presentation), collaboration (group/teamwork) and independent learning (individual).

Each student teacher is also required to submit an individual project reflection paper, and the group will submit an end-of-project reflection which is used to assist

assessment on both the individual and group level. The specific areas of individual assessment include the following:

  i. Have a positive attitude towards learning.
 ii. Have a positive attitude towards servicing the community.
iii. Have leadership abilities.
 iv. Are able to do project management.
  v. Set high standards in your work.
 vi. Do your fair share of the work.
vii. Share your ideas and views with your group.
viii. Are willing to consider the opinions of others, even if you do not agree with them.
 ix. Are accepting of others in your group.
  x. Understand and accept your own strengths and weaknesses.

Upon the completion of the GESL project, the student teacher receives a GESL transcript. The GESL transcript documents the overall evaluation of the group and an individual assessment of the individual.

A formal evaluation of GESL was conducted by Professor Shumer of the University of Minnesota in March 2009. The purpose of this evaluation was to gain an understanding of how well GESL had been conceptualised and implemented, and how effective it had been in developing learner-centred values, a positive teacher identity and a better understanding of our community and its needs. Information was gathered from a variety of sources: documents outlining GESL objectives and procedures, student projects and focus group discussions with all stakeholders (student peer facilitators, teacher educators, community agencies, NIE staff facilitators and others involved in related programmes such as YEP, the international service learning initiative of Singapore's National Youth Council).

The evaluation process by Professor Shumer identified three key throughputs:

1. Impactful Group Experience
   The greatest impact of GESL was in the project itself—the power of the experience and how meaningful it was to the participants. The participants also felt they learnt how to function in a group and as a group—they learnt group skills—managing time, setting goals and working towards a common purpose.
2. Personal Growth
   Participants said they developed interpersonal skills as GESL increased their personal ability to work within a group structure. Developing patience, the ability to resolve conflict, and manage and execute plans had been cited as important outcomes. The ability to work collaboratively with community agencies was another important outcome cited.
3. Awareness of Community and Student Issues
   Student teachers became aware of community problems, such as environmental issues, and student characteristics of students with special needs.

Shumer (2009) recommended that NIE needs to explore the possibility of reducing the group size from 20 to 24 members to ten in order to maximise active group discussions. He further suggested that groups be arranged by thematic areas of common interest because it is a powerful factor in sustaining their interest and involvement.

As part of the evaluation of the GESL experience, student teachers are asked to report what they have gained from GESL. A compilation of twenty GESL stories into Journeys of the Heart in 2010 revealed many meaningful outcomes, supporting findings reported by Shumer (2009).

The student teachers reported that they had learnt how to work together as a team despite their diverse backgrounds and viewpoints. Challenges were surmounted through give and take, creativity and innovativeness, and working together towards a common goal. The need to band together in order to achieve success in their quest required the student teachers to set aside differences. In addition, they encouraged each other with affirmations and support. These are relationship management skills so necessary in developing lasting interpersonal relationships in the workplace and in personal life.

With a common goal, constraints became opportunities to learn new skills. This is seen in the following reflection from, "The Green Generation Concert: Youth in Conservation" in *Journeys of the Heart* (Bastion and D'Rozario 2010a, p. 71):

> Instead of being stumbling blocks, the occasional challenges, such as the limitations in time, resources and manpower, strengthened the team's creativity and flexibility in finding efficient solutions.

The following reflection from "Chek-Mates at Chek Jawa" from *Journeys of the Heart* also highlights life skills gained through GESL:

> I think GESL has been a fabulous, meaningful learning experience for all of us. I have learnt valuable organisational skills, to work with a variety of people. I have gained insight into how a project of such scale should be planned and carried out. (p. 9)

Student teachers reported that GESL helped them develop insight into community and social issues, and acknowledged that their role as teachers included that of being concerned citizens and active contributors. Reminded of their social responsibility in creating and maintaining harmony among all, this student teacher from Project Shine stated:

> A GESL project like this is a must for teachers to remind us we are part of society, to remember the importance of cooperation and harmony with all, and to realise we have a role as teachers in carving out the future, while influencing the present. (p. 23)

Summed up, GESL seemed to have paved the way for the development of a more socially responsible citizen:

> The GESL project created a meaningful platform for student teachers to be involved in the community. GESL takes a baby step in creating a less self-centred Singaporean community. (p. 9)

GESL seemed to have developed insight into a part of society student teachers did not have much knowledge about or experienced before as seen in the following student teacher reflections:

> I was previously biased about foreign workers but the project gave me a clearer picture of their life in a foreign country. (p. 52)

"Chek-Mates at Chek Jawa" was an eye-opener about out threatened native wild habitats and the wildlife that live in these fragile ecosystems:

> This experience has definitely made us appreciate the beauty of nature and in understanding our roles in protecting it despite all difficulties. Hopefully our project could count as among the efforts to save Chek Jawa from being swallowed up by economic progress. These may be once in a lifetime kind of experiences. We might never have touched a starfish or even seen a hermit crab. If we were so "deprived" what more our children and their children should these locations go extinct? I believe that all of us will look at nature differently now and appreciate the fragility of these wonderful creatures. (p. 9)

Student teachers expressed that GESL helped them grow into more confident persons. Appreciating this journey into self-discovery, one student teacher reflected:

> It is a special gift to be able to teach and communicate with children with special needs, and we don't claim to have it, but this GESL project has definitely shown us what we are capable of. We are now more versatile in reaching out to children with differing mental and intellectual abilities. (p. 23)

GESL has been described by a student teacher as a valuable journey into the self:

> This GESL project is the most important thing I've done in my life so far. To start with, I was extremely sceptical about this service learning project. But now I hate to think of myself as before, ignorant of community work, living in a vacuum of self-service, rather than service to others. (p. 31)

GESL had been a reward in itself, a learning journey which came with dedication, commitment and developing firm friendships.

> Seeing the project through has provided us with enriching learning experiences, an unshakable camaraderie, demanding from us commitment, teamwork, determination and dedicated leadership. (p. 71)

Student teachers gained insights into their role as a teacher and a good citizen through learning from their partner organisations experiences which developed new perspectives:

> I used to think our primary job scope is to cover the syllabus and ensure students are well equipped with correct values and beliefs. But now I've learnt we should always try to empower students with alternative classroom learning experiences. A teacher should not only look at academic development, but also character building. (p. 49)

Student teachers expressed learning gratefulness and an appreciation of their own lives:

> I have gained awareness of the dire situation which lower income families are in. This makes me more appreciative of what I have at home. I am now also more determined to help out with such families. I have definitely become more appreciative of I have after my experience in GESL. (p. 13)

> It was touching seeing how the elderly could be so absorbed by just simple games and handicrafts. There was a kind of peace about them that made us feel comforted, a strange thing, can't explain it. (p. 40)

Besides local service learning projects, student teachers have been given the opportunity to opt for taking service learning overseas since 2002. They may do this by participating in YEP administered by the National Youth Council and organised at an institute level at NIE by the students themselves through the NIE Service Learning Club.

YEP are service learning projects carried out in international settings. At NIE, these began in 2002. Since then, 41 groups with approximately 650 student teachers have embarked on YEP. Projects have many different foci including infrastructure upgrading, sharing pedagogies with teachers teaching lessons to kids, and environmental projects such as starting environmental education and waste management projects.

A collection of 34 stories of international service learning projects from 2002 to 2009 are captured in the 2010 publication called *Tracks, Treks and Trails: Ventures and Adventures Abroad in the Spirit of Service Learning* (Bastion and D'Rozario 2010b). A review of these stories provided interesting insights into what the student teachers gained from an international service learning experience.

Student teachers developed insights into humanity and expressed their experiences of gratefulness, humility and respect:

> Have you ever received a gift from a child? Given from the heart, their eyes are earnest and full of trust and love, because they appreciate you and think of you as someone wonderful. That's how they made us feel. (p. 27)

> The trip taught me to see that the human spirit has no colour, no status, no language. We could not speak each other's language, yet the chemistry and sincerity was amazing, we somehow could communicate with each other and become friends too. (p. 74)

> Many teams have found that money is undoubtedly important. We have to feed mouths before we feed hearts. But at Lepcha, with Ms Keepu as beacon, it is all about heart. The children were never grasping, greedy or demanding. They were scrupulously honest, respectful, and always appreciative. It seemed what was most important was care, interaction, people just showing them love. Ms Keepu accomplishes all this as a one-woman show. Service learning teams felt honoured to be by her side, even if just for a short stint, to help in her efforts. (p. 19)

Student teachers expressed that international service learning projects helped them to learn to be better people and to develop character. The students admitted that the service learning experience had changed some of their misconceptions about less privileged groups in society and dislodged some of the complacence that might result from a lifestyle deprived of adversity, thereby making them into better citizens:

We went there to make a difference to their lives, but they have opened our hearts and taken residence there, so now it's us who are different. We hope, too, we're better people for having been at Lepcha Cottage and with them. (p. 27)

We went to Sikkim thinking solely about what we could do for them, never thinking about what they would do for us. They've done more for us, because they've overhauled our ideas and beliefs about disadvantaged groups. Got rid of our complacent arrogance, made better people out of us, with characters, we hope they are proud to have had a part in our "upbringing" or "education". (p. 40)

The service learning experience has helped to instil a sense of hope among the students that they can make a positive difference in the community and that their efforts do matter. This in turn has brought about a change in attitude towards community service and altruistic behaviours:

…now I'm going to ensure I continue with community service and play a more active role in making this world a better place. (p. 31)

International service learning projects required a group to work together as a team within and with host organisations developing group skills, interpersonal relationship skills and project management skills, all necessary life skills for effective living. The students were exposed to the culture of the host country in a manner that is different from traditional tourism. Specifically, they found themselves immersed in both the strengths as well as the challenges of the host culture in a way that is not typical of "accidentally chancing upon it".

We learnt to look out for each other, and to take comfort in the safe and warm feeling of being looked after. We came to accept each other, all our idiosyncrasies, characteristics. We stuck together to overcome many obstacles, cementing even more our already strengthening ties. (p. 60)

We learnt the vital importance of planning for what we hope will happen, what we hope won't happen. Throughout it all, teamwork and solidarity keeps everything running, even when things look like they may be falling apart, its teamwork that heals and seals. (p. 74)

There were many occasions that student teachers found themselves in positions where they had to think on their feet, get out of their comfort zone, be flexible and adaptable in order to be successful in their endeavours overseas. The students grasped the art of being able to think spontaneously, depending on the needs of the situation, and often to come up with solutions, which could be very different from conventional approaches. In that sense, their ability for divergent thinking was enhanced. The students also learnt to proceed on a lesson with a plan in mind and also a readiness to be flexible to adapt appropriately if the need arose:

The challenges were there, and although surmountable, still needed handling, with whatever experience we had, which wasn't much. But this I guess is the whole point of service learning. You get pushed out of your confined comfort zone into situations you would not encounter back home, and then you find you can actually do amazing things. (p. 47)

The hands on nature of our project gave us experience of how to manage students, conduct a class, and get over language barriers. All these we learnt from NIE, and it was fulfilling seeing how realistic our courses have been. (p. 16)

YEP also helped student teachers develop insight into social and community issues:

> We got thinking about our own water situation, scarcity of resources. KCC showed us we do need to be more environmentally aware, and take concrete actions, so environmental education and awareness is not just a fad or trend. (p. 60)

Being out of their comfort zone in an unknown land and foreign culture helped the students develop close friendships among themselves. Several of the documents accounts revealed that these intimae interpersonal ties have been a pillar of support in their lives even after returning back home. By working in communities that lacked learning resources, the students learnt that education was not about being equipped with extravagant classroom facilities. Rather, the evidence of education lay in the concern that individuals show for each other, their knowledge and awareness of their cultural values and the genuineness with which they express themselves. For those who explored areas that had been previously excluded from community work, there was a feeling of optimism that the tracks which had been laid down would be followed up by other teams in the future.

13.5 Discussion and Conclusion

The reflections highlighted in this chapter indicate that GESL and YEP programmes are effective in inculcating the elements of character and citizenship among student teachers. The activities comprising environmental awareness, helping the less privileged, teaching kids, assisting foreign workers, among others, enabled student teachers to look into the "self" then to the community. This can be related to what Goh et al. (2009, p. 1) referred to as "connecting with the community outside of their immediate surroundings". Consistent with the goals of holistic education, service learning through GESL and YEP promoted character development and nurtured a sense of civic responsibility and citizenship among student teachers, who learnt and developed skills necessary as they embarked on their teaching career. Student teachers practised interpersonal skills in their group meetings. They learnt to plan and acquire reflective skills necessary to establish an impactful service learning project. The overseas service learning programme (YEP) provided an opportunity for the student teachers to think out-of-the-box and learn from experiencing unfamiliar environments. The challenge of service learning projects required groups and individuals to seek innovative approaches and created the need to think beyond traditional classroom learning.

13.5.1 New Initiatives and Future Directions

As schools play a nurturing role in the development of students, teachers have the responsibility to be aware of their professional commitments with regard to CCE:

What roles do teachers play in the character and citizenship development of students? What are the relevant attitudes, knowledge and skills that teachers should possess to enable them to contribute meaningfully to the character and citizenship development of their students in schools?

In addition to GESL and the Meranti Project,[1] a new CCE syllabus has been offered as part of NIE's pre-service programmes to better prepare beginning teachers in the teaching and learning of CCE implemented in both primary and secondary schools since 2014. The offering of CCE in pre-service programmes highlights the fact that teachers have a powerful impact on the hearts and minds of their students, who often see them, as well as other significant adults in their lives, as role models. CCE at NIE is a compulsory 1 Academic Unit (AU) course within the Education Studies core course structure. This course enables pre-service teachers to learn about current MOE policy on CCE curriculum, character development, the roles and responsibilities of citizenship and key approaches and pedagogies to teach the subject (MOE 2014). CCE at NIE now includes GESL which also carries 1 AU course credit for the first time since 2005.

The NIE programmes of GESL and YEP have helped student teachers develop insight into their strengths and areas for future growth, opened their eyes to social and community issues and needs, and given them the confidence that they can certainly make a difference in people's lives, and in the social and natural environment, both in local and international contexts. Through GESL and YEP, student teachers have developed insight into a part of society they had previously not had a glimpse of, and hence, now have a better appreciation of community, local and global. Service learning has built in student teachers a much better awareness of what their role as teacher and responsible citizen involves. Positive values of humility, gratefulness and respect were markedly developed during international service learning sojourns. Student teachers expressed that international service learning projects helped them become better people and that they had developed character via the experience. Service learning certainly built team skills and an ability to think on one's feet, an ability to be adaptable, life skills so needed to be an effective teacher. Many expressed developing toughness in spirit, a resilience they will need to be effective teachers of the future. All in all, GESL and YEP have developed good character and engendered civic responsibility in our student teachers, and are set to continue to do just that.

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[1]The Meranti Project is a personal and professional development programme specially customized for student teachers. Through informal dialogue sessions with veteran teachers, it gives student teachers the opportunity to listen first-hand experiences of teachers and the perspectives of student learners. The programme also makes use of open sharing sessions and ingenious games to help the student teachers experience the core competencies of social–emotional learning, to share their personal aspirations with their peers and to express their opinions in an open and creative environment.

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