Chapter 8
'Making Learning Valuable': Transforming My Practice Through a Service-Learning Partnership in Central Gippsland

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Abstract The transformation of teacher educator practice and the implications for practitioner research for a Federation University Gippsland Education (FUGuE) academic are explored in this chapter. It centres on a 'service-learning' partnership that endeavours to reduce inequality by engaging local pre-service teachers and promoting quality education at the primary and tertiary level, which is a United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to which I respond. This study explores my transformational journey from being involved in such partnership opportunities. Prompted by the particulars of place—in this case, some community needs in central Gippsland—and a school-based service-learning partnership with a philanthropic organisation, I consider how my pedagogy, practice and opportunities for research have been enriched. Using a self-study methodology, I analyse how the project aligned with the six elements of Fink's Significant Learning Framework to provide a detailed description of the learning, the critical nature of academic reflection and the impact on personal growth in relation to my involvement. In addition, my practice is examined by collecting anecdotal data from Pre-service Teachers (PSTs) indicating how they connected theory with practical application. To gain nuanced insights around the impact on the learning of PSTs and the author, the self-study utilised research methods such as recording conversations, critical reflection and anecdotal observations. This collection of data was analysed for emerging themes structured around the theoretical framework. The chapter shares my insights as indicated by the transformation of practice as a reflective practitioner and researcher.

Keywords Service-learning · Pre-service teacher education · Transformation · Self-study · Critical reflection

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Reciprocal Partnerships

This study utilises practitioner research to explore the impact of the developing nature of a partnership upon my practice as an early career teacher educator and researcher. The partnership incorporates the Gippsland Campus of Federation University Australia, a philanthropic organisation, and several local primary schools. The partnership was prompted by the particulars of place—in this case, school and community needs in central Gippsland. Many of the schools involved are in the heart of landlocked Latrobe Valley, one of six local government areas in Gippsland that has an industrial overlay and an Indigenous and non-Indigenous farming heritage. Over the years, the area has experienced a range of environmental impacts including the construction of coal-powered stations and open-cut mines. More recently, this particular Local Government Area (LGA) is experiencing economic restructure post power station closure. The other participating schools are located in an adjoining town originally created as a service centre for local power stations. The privatisation and rationalisation of the power industry, however, has had a negative economic impact on the town, which is now more recognisable as a university town. Although both communities face significant socio-economic and geographical inequalities (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016), this partnership endeavours to reduce inequality by engaging local Pre-service Teachers (PSTs) and promoting quality education at the primary and tertiary level (United Nations, 2015).

The philanthropic organisation initially approached the university seeking a partnership in response to the community need to increase volunteer participation in their funded after-school learning programme. The *programme* is designed to support local primary school students from low socio-economic backgrounds and utilises local volunteer tutors who have appropriate skills and knowledge to support the programme's activities; to work with the students to support their literacy, numeracy and social skills. The intention of formalising the partnership was to encourage local PSTs to volunteer in the after-school programme to support both the philanthropic organisation's objectives and local primary school-aged students in need. As the Campus Programme Coordinator for undergraduate teacher education and a relatively new academic when the partnership was being negotiated, I was concerned with how best to ensure the success of the partnership opportunity for all involved.

In 2015, the formal partnership was formed, and in Semester 1, 2016, the initial implementation of the programme commenced with five local primary schools, approximately 100 primary school students and 47 PSTs as tutors. As Campus Coordinator, I was invested in exploring the best way to implement the programme, all the while ensuring that the needs of all parties were met and valued, and that the PSTs gained relevant skills and knowledge from interacting regularly with primary school-aged students.

Although the performance skills of the PSTs closely link to my own understandings and own learning, this self-study predominantly examines my own learning journey to elicit personal transformation points resulting from being involved in and exploring the partnership opportunity. Like Anna's reflections on the impact of being

a critical friend on her researcher identity (see Chap. 7), I was also grappling with my own identity from being involved in this partnership opportunity. Being a part of the FUGuE research team, as an early career researcher and a PhD candidate, provided the opportunity for me to explore both my own as well as our collective contribution to regional research in a supportive environment, and as a result, research my practice.

Formalising the Opportunity: Embedding Service-Learning

The first concern for the partnership was to consider the best way to encourage PSTs to volunteer in the programme. Student volunteering has been defined as 'time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain' (Volunteering Australia, 2015, as cited in Paull et al., 2015, p. 2). A major finding from a recent report (see Paull et al., 2015) found that for student volunteering and learning to be successful, the activity students engage in should be organised, allow student choice, have clear expectations, involve self-reflection and include feedback from the organisation involved. However, previous university efforts to recruit volunteers for career-based opportunities with local schools, such as involvement in reading programmes, had resulted in limited take-up. The findings of the report indicated a more formal approach was required for the programme partnership to engage PSTs and improve their learning outcomes, as well as meet the volunteer numbers required of the programme and the number of students in the local area.

Ensuing discussions occurred between myself and other teacher educators identified that the programme experience could be embedded in and aligned to assessments within compulsory undergraduate teacher education courses. It was hoped that by embedding the programme into a university course, PSTs would see the benefits of volunteering in it, both for meeting learning outcomes, as well as working collaboratively with other PSTs in a supported environment outside formal professional experience placements.

Two courses were identified as appropriate for linking course learning outcomes with the practical application of working with primary students. They were also both designed to evidence Graduate Teacher Standards (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014). The first was a primary English curriculum second-year course, which focuses on knowing the content and how to teach it. The second course was a first-year course which explores knowing students and how they learn. The programme was seen as a way of providing PSTs with hands-on opportunities to apply the theoretical content of their respective courses. Hands-on learning opportunities are often embedded in educational contexts to strengthen student-centred learning (Beatty, 2010) and promote active citizenship (Howard, 2001). For this study, however, the term *service-learning* is used to signify the intended relationship between the service component, the programme and the course learning outcomes expected from embedding the experience in a university course (Beatty, 2010). Service-learning can be viewed as a pedagogical strategy which directly relates

to 'intentional learning goals … with conscious reflection and critical analysis' (Kendall, 1990, p. 20). In my view, the programme had the potential of providing PSTs with real-life experiences and an opportunity to apply, reflect and connect academic theoretical perspectives.

Rationalising Service-Learning

This self-study occurred during a time of major teacher education renewal that included changes in the preparation of high-quality beginning teachers. The *Action Now: Classroom-Ready Teachers* report (Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group [TEMAG], 2014) states that PSTs continue to graduate from teacher education programmes without being 'fully prepared' for the classroom. Furthermore, the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (2012) contends that PSTs are not ready to meet the 'demands of today's schools,… communicate with parents, manage classroom activities well and provide effective support and feedback to students' (p. 11). The TEMAG (2014) report urges higher education providers to assist PSTs to make more explicit connections between theory and practice stating that 'theory and practice in initial teacher education must be inseparable and mutually reinforced' (p.18) in order to make a difference to student outcomes. Key among the recommendations is the call for stronger partnerships that enable PSTs to integrate theory and practice.

The problem of learning transfer between the theory undertaken in teacher education programmes and the practice in the classroom setting is well known. Korthagen and Kessels (1999), for example, posited that it may be a result of the use of traditional models of knowledge application which assume that what is taught at university will be applied by PSTs when in a classroom environment. What is evident is the continued (mis)belief that a gap between theory and practice exists and that it needs to be bridged. As a researcher, I was interested in whether or not the programme partnership would assist to narrow this gap and how the partnership might assist with my practice and pedagogy as a teacher educator.

The various competence stages that PSTs and beginning teachers progress through have been well documented in the literature (e.g. Caldermead, 1989; Fuller & Brown, 1975; Furlong & Maynard, 1995). Studies such as these provide a continuum conceptualising the variations in beginning teachers' experiences, knowledge and skills. In the current political environment which focuses on student learning and achievement, the TEMAG (2014) report stipulated PSTs should develop through this continuum more quickly so that the focus on student learning emerges earlier. Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2005) suggest that this can be achieved through expanding PSTs teaching repertoire, helping them understand which strategies are likely to be useful. It is further argued by Swinkels, Koopman, and Beijaard (2013), that by prioritising what and how students learn, PSTs are more able to effectively adjust curriculum, pedagogy and learning sequencing to cater for individual needs.

The challenge, therefore, is for teacher education to expedite and facilitate PST conceptions of teaching and learning towards a more learning-focused approach (Swinkels et al., 2013). PSTs need to be provided with opportunities to consider what is important to learn and adopt and direct their concerns to the learning needs of the child (Dewey, 1904, as cited in Darling-Hammond & Baratz-Snowden, 2005). According to Darling-Hammond and Baratz-Snowden (2005), teacher educators need to instil reflexive practices that encourage PSTs to diagnose problematic situations, seek solutions and make a change in their own practice as a result.
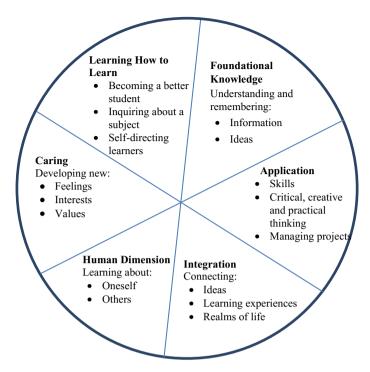
Significant Academic and Personal Learning

This study uses Fink's (2013) *Taxonomy of Significant Learning* (as shown in Fig. 8.1) as a lens to provide a detailed description of the learning, the critical nature of academic reflection and the impact on personal growth in relation to involvement in the partnership experience. As an early career researcher, I apply Fink's Taxonomy to explore both academic (*foundational knowledge*, *application* and *integration*) and personal (*human dimension, caring* and *learning how to learn*) objectives for designing partnership experiences to enhance PST engagement and academic learning. It is used to guide my critical reflection and to reflect upon my own growth as a teacher educator and researcher from being involved in the service-learning experience.

In-line with TEMAG's (2014) recommendations to prepare classroom-ready teachers, Fink's (2013) taxonomy focuses on significant learning that encourages social interactions, enhances individual lives and develops more informed and active citizens. The six categories, summarised in Fig. 8.1, are described as relational and interactive with multiple categories often occurring concurrently throughout learning experiences. Learning is seen as a change in meaning brought about by critical reflection, which provides opportunities to reconsider previous understandings and ideas and create new meanings or life-long learning (Fink, 2013). This taxonomy provides an analysis of the multiple ways in which significant learning can occur as a result of my involvement in this service-learning project as a '*lasting* change that is *important* in terms of the learner's [my] life' (p. 30).

Reflexive Self-study

As a teacher educator and researcher, I have become increasingly interested in utilising experiential learning opportunities for PSTs to provide unfamiliar, diverse and complex teaching and learning experiences as a way to challenge personal beliefs and support new insights (Anderson, 2000; Scott, 2011). Dewey (1964) urged teachers to be both consumers and producers of knowledge by being reflective and acting upon their reflections. Therefore, throughout the development of the programme partner-

Fig. 8.1 Taxonomy of Significant Learning (Fink, 2013, p. 35)

ship I have reflected upon its impact on the transformation of my practice, research and the resulting impact on the PSTs and the community.

This chapter shares this reflective journey and employs the use of self-study to explore the emerging themes obtained through methods including collecting anecdotal data from PSTs involved in the programme. To gain nuanced insights around the impact on the learning of PSTs and themselves, other methods in-line with self-study methodology such as recording conversations, critical reflection and anecdotal observations are used (LaBoskey, 2004; Schulte, 2009). In-line with practitioner research methodology, my reflective enquiry enables me to better understand my own practice, and as a result, improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning for our PSTs (Shaw & Lunt, 2011). Fox, Martin, and Green (2007) suggest that practitioners who engage in research of their own practice become researchers that are more successful as a result. As noted by Northmore and Hart (2011), the complexities and challenges of being involved in a partnership 'leave little opportunity for critical reflection' (p. 5). As a reflective practitioner, therefore, it is important to take the time to reflect, after all, as Phipps and Zanotti (2011) advocate, the 'journey' is just as important as the 'destination'. Or as London, Zagofsky, Huang, and Saklar (2011) ascertain, 'The sustainability of community-university partnerships is not based on a lack of

mistakes in the relationships, but instead on the ability to build resilience over time and draw strength from responses to the challenges to be overcome' (p. 13).

With this in mind, my journey into becoming a critically reflective teacher educator and researcher explores the following question: What significant learning has resulted for me as a teacher educator and early career researcher?

My Transformational Journey

The Beginning: Reciprocal Partnerships

I vividly recall the feelings of trepidation preparing for the first partnership meeting. As I had only been the Campus Coordinator for a short time, I was still determining the direction I wanted to take for the courses and opportunities that the Gippsland campus could offer our PSTs and how best to respond to the recent TEMAG (2014) report.

The meeting identified a real need within the local community to support the organisation's after-school programme, so PST volunteers were identified as potential tutors in it. The partnership arrangement needed to adhere to the organisation's intended outcome, which was to expand learning opportunities outside of school time for local primary school students. Although there was some flexibility in the way the programme might operate, it was expected the activities run by PST tutors would be underpinned with a literacy and numeracy focus and would include other enrichment activities. Fink (2013) categorises this approach as an understanding of *foundational knowledge* and perspectives, which I realised was important for future partnership decisions and achievements.

School involvement was seen as a crucial component to the success of the partnership. In-line with Brady's (2002) investigation into a school–university partnership, several local primary schools had also expressed their support in being involved, demonstrating their willingness to 'embrace a broad range of partnership activities' (p. 6). Therefore, to ensure the full participation of students, the programme was planned to occur directly after school, utilise school buildings and involve teachers from the school in a supervisory role.

After the meeting, I reviewed the two courses we hoped to embed within the partnership. The main challenge, however, was how best to implement the project in such a way that as many PSTs as possible could participate. As stated by Bringle and Hatcher (1996), these crucial initial implementation decisions required a group of people 'with the appropriate interest, motivation, and skills needed to execute the critical first steps' (p. 225). I was fortunate to have the support from FUGuE course coordinators or lecturers who had expressed an interest in exploring ways to meet TEMAG recommendations and provided me with a research community to be a part of. Fink (2013) sees the managing of complex projects as significant learning,

which includes the application and exploration of how to use knowledge, organise and coordinate the project.

Holland et al. (2003) suggest that best partnership practice requires clear communication, goals and expectations, effective collaboration with all parties and shared planning and power. As this partnership involved diverse stakeholders—multiple schools, a philanthropic organisation, academic staff and PSTs, I soon became aware of its complexity. Searching for a model to guide my approach, I realised a model for best practice in university–community partnerships did not yet exist due to varying local contextual factors (Ostrander & Portney, 2007). Committing to this partnership meant creating a model that worked for all involved, including creating a learning community that enabled the *integration* (Fink, 2013) of different perspectives, connecting diverse people and disciplines through a reciprocal process.

Administrative Challenges

A partnership was agreed to 'in principle' in November 2015, which enabled me to review university administrative and system processes that may affect the success of its inaugural implementation in 2016. It also provided an opportunity for the Organisation to approach schools and advertise the opportunity to the primary students and their families.

There were several key challenges evident in relation to managing the university's role in the partnership. First, in terms of scheduling, there was the issue of how to ensure that as many PSTs were available to participate in the programme without negatively impacting their study, extracurricular and work commitments. Second, how would we promote the programme and raise its profile as a worthwhile opportunity? Third, what ways could this opportunity be linked to course assessments and content to ensure PSTs saw the relevance of being involved? Finally, how might the programme partnership be implemented to accommodate all the different parties?

Although I knew that by looking at each of these challenges as separate entities, I could draw on my own initiative, experience and be decisive, I soon realised that impending decisions would have a greater impact on the academic nature of learning for this campus as well as on myself as an educator. Several elements of Fink's (2013) taxonomy became pivotal at this point in my journey; that of the *human dimension*, *caring* and *application*. Upon reflection, each of these played a role in the decisions that were made for the first implementation of the programme, which I now discuss.

Human Dimension: In my practice as an educator, I was considering what was important to me, made more poignant as a new understanding of myself was forming as the Campus Coordinator and what I had hoped to become. The more I delved into the initial administration required to set up the programme, the more confident I became in my abilities to do something that was important to me. In essence, I was discovering the 'human significance of what [I was] learning' (Fink, 2013, p. 36). I was learning how to become an effective leader and how to contribute to the work of a team as well as part of my local community.

Caring: Significant learning involves a change in the way in which someone cares about something (Fink, 2013). I had always cared about the learning outcomes of students I have taught, both as a primary school teacher and more recently as a teacher educator. However, I found that this partnership opportunity changed the way I cared about how PSTs were learning. Previously, I had predominantly focused on the individual course learning outcomes for PSTs, and now I was looking at a far bigger picture. I was caring about the kind of teachers they would become and as a result, I was investing a lot of energy into ensuring that the partnership would impact positively on the PST's journey of becoming teachers.

Application: During the planning stage, I engaged in different kinds of thinking: critical, creative and practical thinking (Fink, 2013). I had to analyse previous unsuccessful opportunities for volunteering and evaluate what I could take from this to inform this partnership. As a result, new ideas had to be created and imagined in order to fit with the new context. For example, creating a 'prac' class within the student timetabling system to ensure that other courses did not clash and carving out time for the PSTs, in their often busy lives, to participate and ensure they could commit to the weekly time requirement. Practical thinking occurred too when I considered what decisions would be effective in practice as well as align with the programme's intentions. This was a chance to benchmark PST expectations and to scaffold their learning through the provision of training sessions and school induction visits. In recognising that PSTs could be absent due to a range of reasons, such as ill health or work commitments, we implemented a ratio of two PST tutors to four primary students to ensure any absence that occurred still meant the programme session could continue and the primary students had consistency in their tutors.

Jumping In: The First Semester of Implementation

Prior to the beginning of the first semester of implementation, all students enrolled in the aligned course were provided with an overview of the programme and were encouraged to sign up to one of the four schools involved. The initial feedback from the PSTs was that they were 'excited about participating in this aspect of the course' (PST email, 19/2/16). Following their first preparatory session, they also demonstrated that they were keen to be involved and work closely with primary students on a regular basis.

Despite everyone's best efforts to prepare for our first semester of the programme, however, it did not start as smoothly as hoped. A week before the programme was to commence the organisation notified us that the PST's Working with Children's Check, which all Victorian PSTs were required to have for their professional placement, would no longer be adequate. Instead, the organisation's commitment to their Child Protection Framework meant that a national police check was now required. Although this delayed the commencement of the programme, the identification of this extra requirement enabled me and the PSTs to learn more about the children involved in the programme. In-line with Fink's (2013) *Human Dimension,* we were

able to gain a greater appreciation of the need for confidentiality, student safety concerns as well as a new understanding of how to interact with others.

During the semester, the lecturers and myself teaching in the course, supported the PSTs by visiting the schools frequently and checking on PST progress during tutorials. At the conclusion of the semester, a survey of PSTs involved in the programme was conducted to explore aspects of how their involvement contributed to their own learning in the course and the development of other key employability skills such as planning and teamwork. The results indicated that whilst the majority of the PSTs (57%) found the experience helpful, many were unable to identify how their volunteering helped them develop particular skills or how it supported their learning in the course. PST comments demonstrated a concern over the lack of alignment with the course assessment and learning outcomes, with some PSTs asking for further clarification on how they connected.

Upon reflection, Fink's (2013) Taxonomy provided me with the identification of two crucial elements that were impacting on the PST's learning and my practice as a teacher educator: the lack of *integration* of academic work and aspects of *learning how to learn*. It had been assumed that the PSTs would easily be able to make the link between the course learning outcomes with working regularly with a student. The aim was that they could obtain a writing sample early on the piece and use this to plan a sequence of activities to support that student and analyse it for their assessment. However, as one PST commented, 'I wasn't really aware that it related to the second assignment until later on' (Anonymous PST Survey Response, 25/5/16). It was clear that we were not being explicit enough in our instructions and the connections we had expected the PSTs would make. Another PST commented, 'I think it was a good experience but did not completely engage with the learning outcomes' (Anonymous PST Survey Response, 25/5/16). PSTs needed to be supported to become self-directed learners and understand how to apply new knowledge gained from the theoretical aspects of the course to the practical nature of the programme. For future programme opportunities, I realised the importance of making clear and explicit connections between the service-learning experience and both the course learning outcomes as well as the assessments.

Taking this new knowledge into Semester 2, 2016 was particularly crucial as the PSTs involved would be first-year students with less foundation knowledge and experience working with primary school-aged students. This time the programme was embedded into the assessment outline and rubric from the beginning of the semester. Reflection opportunities in tutorials were increased and informal links between weekly course themes and the students in the programme were discussed. PST survey responses indicated an increase in the contribution of the programme to their learning in the course (65%). Whilst some PSTs still 'disagreed' that the programme complemented the course, unlike the previous semester no PSTs 'strongly disagreed' with this statement. For this group of PSTs, their concerns were more focused on the time and effort associated with planning and working as a group to ensure the success of the programme. Comments such as 'Whilst [the Programme] was great it takes a great deal of time' and 'I wish my group was more focused on prep time and communication' provided further information about the struggles they

were facing. It was clear there were still areas for improvement required to support our PSTs with both the cognitive and workload involved.

Grounding Practice in Research: Learning How to Learn

In early 2017, it became apparent just how much I had become involved in the partnership, and how much I cared for the impact it was making on the PSTs and the learning culture of the Gippsland Campus. A collegial discussion between FUGuE researchers and myself highlighted my desire to investigate this partnership further and explore the learning our PSTs were gaining from being involved in the programme.

Interested in finding ways to improve the PST's connections between course learning outcomes and their experience with the programme, I commenced a literature review surrounding community service and university partnerships. In essence, I was exploring Fink's (2013) sixth kind of significant learning: *Learning How to Learn*. A major shift was occurring for me during this time. I had recognised the importance for myself to become a better research student and academic by engaging in more self-regulated learning on a topic that I cared about. New knowledge needed to be explored to develop my understanding through a deep analysis of the existing literature. I was setting a learning agenda for myself and 'becoming an intentional learner' (Fink, 2013, p. 41) whilst, in hindsight, unintentionally beginning my journey of becoming a researcher.

This research had an immense impact on my foundational knowledge around partnerships and how to improve theory–practice connections for students in the higher education context. Within the Australian higher education context, university partnerships opportunities have largely been generalised as Work-Integrated Learning (WIL) (Harvey, Coulson, & McMaugh, 2016). WIL is an encompassing term used to describe a pedagogy that aims to prepare work-ready graduates through the integration of theory and practice and carefully designed curriculum (Patrick et al., 2009). For me, one category of WIL stood out from the others. 'Service-learning', was I realised, what I had been trying to achieve with the partnership. As a model, service-learning seeks to streamline community service, research, learning and student outcome priorities (Butin, 2003; Langworthy, 2007) and immerses students in real-life experiences by providing them with the opportunity to apply, reflect and connect academic concepts and perspectives learnt in their university studies (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001).

As there is an emphasis on reflection and extending content knowledge, the model compliments current implementation of reflection, which has been increasingly incorporated into teacher education programmes (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001; Ash & Clayton, 2004). Indeed, McLeod (2002) suggests that a formal approach to community service in the form of service-learning has the opportunity to provide PSTs with a better understanding of their students, their communities and develop the wide skills required for the profession. By grounding my practice in service-

learning I found myself with a renewed agenda as an emerging researcher, eager to consider how viewing the partnership through a service lens would further build the capacity and learning outcomes of our PSTs.

Reflecting on Practice

During the first half of 2017, whilst engaging in service-learning literature I worked closely another FUGuE researcher and the course coordinator, Dr Anna Fletcher, to modify the course learning materials and assessments based on the recommendations from the service-learning literature. This was a period where many of Fink's (2013) significant learning occurred and indeed interplayed throughout the further development of the first year embedded course.

In April, Anna and I met to reflect on the impact the service-learning partnership had had on our PSTs as well as ourselves as teacher educators. We used Fink's (2013) taxonomy to guide our discussion. Initially, our discussion focused on the purpose of embedding a service-learning opportunity and considered which elements of Fink's Taxonomy we were hoping to achieve by embedding service-learning in a course. Our discussion highlighted that whilst PSTs learning outcomes were a crucial focus for us, we were also 'hoping to become better teachers by doing this experience' (Anna). We recognised the need to link 'what we are doing theoretically in the classroom with … what they are doing in the future by making sure that what we are teaching at Uni can be related to real-world experience … therefore making learning valuable' (Linda). This revealed a desire to not only improve our PST's practice, but also our own. In effect, our discussion had identified aspects of *Integration* (Fink, 2013) through the realisation that we have developed a learning community aimed at connecting university life with the lived experience and helping PSTs to make connections.

Our conversation highlighted the importance of service-learning as a way to ground our practice as reflective practitioners in 'real-world experience' as given below:

> *Anna*: We're integrating through people, through our different knowledge and our experiences. I think we are actually integrating this within this process and using the course that we are teaching, and using [the Organisation] and the whole set up and the planning and working around that. We're integrating our own intentions and our experiences. I mean, I am learning from you, when I hear you speak so…. there's a richness there.

The opportunity to engage in professional conversations around service-learning enabled me to recognise my developing skill at autodidaxy and the intentionality of becoming an intentional learner, which Fink (2013) categories as *Learning How to Learn* (Fink, 2013).

The following excerpt demonstrates how we encourage our PSTs to engage in both critical and practical thinking, which according to Fink (2013) is an important aspect of significant learning through the *Application* dimension.

Anna: So, it does become an understanding of ideas and information for us as well. We get a richer understanding of what they pick up or what they don't pick up as pre-service teachers through this partnership.

Linda: [Tutorial conversations] brought up opportunities for us to link back to the theories about ecological learning and being able to … understand where they are coming from and how it is situated inside a big ecosystem.

As highlighted, here, the opportunities for reflective discussions in tutorials were providing the students with opportunities to analyse and critique situations (*Application*) as well as connect to the *foundational knowledge* the University course was covering.

For us as teacher educators, these tutorial discussions also provided opportunities for identifying the needs of our pre-service teachers:

Anna: So, for us as teacher educators this prompts point of need teaching. And for the pre-service teachers the experience kind of prompts them—'I hadn't thought of that'. Although they probably don't think of that until we question them.

Which emphasised that teaching at the point of need enabled us as educators to explore the *human dimension* (Fink, 2013) of the service-learning experience with our PSTs. Our class discussions encouraged the PSTs to become culturally sensitive and unpack their responses critically utilising the theoretical lenses explored in the course. The service-learning literature (Eyler, Giles, & Schmiede, 1996) highlights reflection as a critical element for learning in a higher education context as it enables them to 'recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over, and evaluate it' (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985, p. 19). In our discussion, we reflected on the important role that providing PSTs with scaffolded reflection opportunities had:

Linda: And with the way it is set up now when they are doing reflections in their tutorials—by us hearing them reflecting and making connections—it gives us a chance to engage with them and make those connections at a timely basis.

In essence, what we realised is that we were engaging in formative assessment to inform our teaching and learning by scaffolding and prompting *foundational knowledge*. Jacoby (1996) suggests these reflection opportunities enable PSTs to extract knowledge from their experience and connect their experience with learning. In effect, it builds on PSTs *Foundational Knowledge* (Fink, 2013) through development of a full understanding of the concepts involved. My conversation with Anna identified that through reflection PST 'thinking becomes more complex' (Linda) and they are 'developing a more nuanced understanding' (Anna).

For us as teacher educators, our reflective discussion highlighted the importance of authentic assessment practices, which encourage PSTs to inquire and construct knowledge (*Learning How to Learn*), whilst also considering the self-authorship (*Human Dimension)* required to take responsibility for their learning of the concepts associated with the course (*Foundational Knowledge).* When creating the assessment for the embedded course, we focused heavily on making sure that the application part—the actual assignments—they do are authentic. Our discussion revealed why this was so important for us as teacher educators:

Anna: And from my point of view, the application that's manifested or demonstrated in this assignment is where I see whether or not they have actually got their heads around the theories.

Linda: So, this is why the reflection works really well, and this is where we get to see their big assignments to see how well their formative knowledge has been applied.

The realisation that the assessments that were developed to align with the service-learning experience were not only designed for the PSTs to learn from the experience but also as a tool to understand (Harvey et al., 2016).

Transformational Revelations

For me, the most revealing aspect of my conversation with Anna was the transformational impact that the service-learning experience was having. For our PSTs, we realised that they were developing performance skills [a component of Fink's (2013) *Application*], a desire to become a better student or educator [an element of *Caring*] (Fink, 2013), and knowing how to contribute to the work of a team [*Human Dimension*] (Fink, 2013). We noted that the PSTs were 'beginning to understand themselves as teachers, not just students' (Linda), thereby transforming themselves and learning about themselves as students and educators.

Recalling anecdotal conversations with PSTs about their role, a cooperative group member also revealed elements of learning how to be an effective leader and character-building considerations:

Linda: But they are also learning in a social environment with team work. They are also learning about themselves and the variety of other people that they are going to be encountering as future teachers. So, learning about themselves and learning about others happen as a result of being involved in this social environment.

This finding is consistent with service-learning literature which indicates that these experiences develop a student's ability to work collaboratively and improves leadership skills (Eyler, Giles, Stenson, & Gray, 2001; Gonsier-Gerdin & Royce-Davis, 2005). However, for me, it was not until we took the time to reflect on what our PSTs were discussing in tutorials that we were able to see the additional benefits that we had not initially expected.

Our conversation revealed to me what drove the decisions we make as teacher educators: the significant learning aspect of *Caring* (Fink, 2013) about the 'what' and 'why' of our decision-making.

Linda: Well to me I think 'caring' underpins all that…. But isn't it the reason why we do this, because as teacher educators we care about their learning? About the knowledge they are getting? And about making sure it is authentic? And about making sure that that they are out there in the community? To me that has quite a big bearing on everything else. The whole reason we are moving forward in this direction with service-learning is because we care about our pre-service teachers.

Up until now, I had been creating learning experiences without having a solid understanding of what was driving my planning, without fully realising what it was that drove me. As noted by Walker and Gleaves (2016), this discussion highlighted to me that I wanted to 'impart change touching students personally, socially and academically, affecting students' learning in both cognitive and affective domains' (p. 75). Furthermore, as their research suggests, this has implications for my identity as a caring teacher in the higher education environment as it has the potential to actively impact on my academic performance and my ability to act as an agent to help create the necessary caring environment for student success.

> Anna, however also pointed out the transformational impact service-learning had on my identity and my skills as a developing researcher.
>
> *Anna*: But there is also another element of this. If we are thinking about what we are doing right now. We are talking about this as part of your research. So, you're actually transforming yourself from *just* being a teacher educator. I mean you are the one who said, 'why don't we record this conversation?' So, you're actually transforming yourself into someone who is collecting evidence and someone who is researching this. And you are saying that we can't skip that bit in the abstract because it was a theoretical framework. That is not something you would have said if we had not started on your [research].

This was a pivotal moment in my journey: the impact that the partnership and reflective opportunities were having on my identity as both a teacher educator and a researcher.

Making Learning Valuable: The Transformative Impact

My service-learning journey has provided many insights into my transformation into becoming a reflective teacher educator and researcher. Through the process of setting up the partnership and the modifications made for each semester of offering, many significant learning opportunities arose which impacted on both my identity and educational goals.

I have learnt that the best way to implement a service-learning experience is to care about all the stakeholders involved and be enthusiastic about the opportunities it presents. It is important to ensure that there is a reciprocal nature of learning from and with the service component, and that it aligns closely with the course learning outcomes in which it is embedded. Assessment practices need to be authentic, and provide opportunities for reflection so that myself, as a teacher educator, can support and learn with the PSTs, as well as enable them to make critical connections between the service-learning programme and the theoretical perspectives of the courses.

The most significant learning for me, however, has been the impact that being involved in this service-learning partnership has had on my transformation into becoming an early career researcher. Working alongside other FUGuE researchers has enabled me to understand the importance of learning how to learn and be able to research and assess different knowledge claims to support best teaching practice. Learning in the higher education context cannot happen alone; integrating the

theoretical aspects of university study with communities and different perspectives enhances the learning experiences and PSTs' ability to apply their learning.

As Schulte (2009) stated, 'Transformation *is* a study of self; the benefits of the process can be applied to the method' (p. 55). I no longer see myself as a teacher, but a reflective practitioner and researcher inspired by the opportunities and improvements that can result from researching and reflecting on my practice.

I hope that this chapter highlights for early career researchers and new academics the importance of not only taking the time to critically reflect on their practice, but also exploring the valuable research prospects that are presented from reciprocal partnership within local communities. This opportunity to reflect on my transformational journey emphasises the crucial importance of being part of a supportive research community, such as the FUGuE, with similar hopes and visions, to encourage early career researchers to find their voice and identity.

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