Chapter 19
Creating a Compulsory Subject Requiring Authentic Community Service Learning: A Framework for Change

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Abstract This chapter will explore the key themes that underpin university-designed subjects reflective of key service learning and community-based stakeholder engagement. These themes can be used to form a core element in any teacher-education degree that incorporates design, feedback, and implementation. The chapter will be supported through a case study of a compulsory subject that has been implemented at the University of Wollongong to provide a working example that other initial teacher education providers can use in their own course and subject design.

Keywords Teacher education · Work-integrated learning · Service learning · Community · Subject design

19.1 Introduction

Cultivating partnerships with communities through service learning is a vital aspect for preparing profession-ready graduates (Salam et al., 2019). Fostering students in the knowledge of how to give back to their community benefits not only society, but also the students themselves. These partnerships provide opportunities for students to learn more about critical issues in society that they may not have realised were important, and highlight issues arising that may be detrimental to the community (Bandy, 2016).

This chapter reports on an example of a service-learning subject designed and implemented in the School of Education at the University of Wollongong. This subject immerses pre-service teachers in a community/service-learning placement in an effort to enhance their sense of social equity and justice within society (UOW, 2019). This six-credit-point, final-year subject has the power to instil a sense of community engagement, providing students with an authentic opportunity to experience giving back to their community. The pre-service teachers who participate in this subject are given the opportunity to use this experience in their own classrooms. In

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this way, pre-service teachers can pass this knowledge on to their own future students, embedding lessons learned through their experience into key learning areas in their classroom. In addition, the learning outcomes of this subject include the opportunity for pre-service teachers to recognise, be more discerning of, and address the equity issues and points of disadvantage in their future school communities.

19.2   Literature Review

The teaching profession is a career that makes a difference in the lives of children (Deringöl, 2020). According to Yenilmez et al. (2018), teaching is known to be one of the most preferred professions, and teaching children, specifically, is perceived to be one of the more motivating professions. However, many scholars have questioned whether the aspects of traditional teaching methods based on didactic lectures and studying textbooks are particularly effective in motivating pre-service teachers to learn their craft (Lai & Hui, 2021). As a result, many higher-education institutions endeavour to enhance their teacher-education programs to incorporate real-world learning opportunities and equip their students for the world of work. In doing so, higher-education institutions are ensuring that their graduates are global citizens who are prepared for work in a pluralistic world (Clifford & Montgomery, 2017; Lai & Hui, 2021). In an attempt to reach this goal, higher-education institutions embed work-integrated learning (WIL) practices, which include service learning, internships and placements, and forms of experiential learning.

Service learning, in which students participate in community-service activities as a path toward achieving learning outcomes, allows opportunities for students to learn skills and transfer theory to practice (Salam et al., 2019). Dewey (1938), who discussed service learning by explaining the importance of learning by doing, first raised its importance as a collective idea **[what's a collective idea?]**. Service learning provides many benefits for students, including enhanced academic performance, commitment, leadership, and workplace skills (Astin et al., 2000). It helps students to think more deeply about how they would face real-world problems, and to learn more about the industry in which they will work (Hart, 2015; Salam et al., 2019). The benefits for industry partners include students providing the workplace with new perspectives, and potentially providing avenues to innovative research outcomes from the partnering institution that can benefit local-economy partners (Simola, 2009). Salam et al. (2019) also assert that not only industry partners, but the entire community benefits from service-learning projects. In this way, the university, too, may benefit by creating partnerships for students and providing pathways for institutions to participate in higher-education-driven research that allows the university partner to collect data that influences the industry in question (Farooq, 2018). Service learning as an element of pre-service teacher training provides a connection to valuable knowledge and skills that future teachers can use to inform, recognise, and address real-world problems in their own classrooms (UOW, 2019).

The literature highlights the benefits of volunteering as a significant element in both strengthening university education and providing a foundation for graduates' future work (González et al., 2019). Volunteering programs have been shown to improve the education of schoolchildren, and in some cases their mental health has seen significant gains (Bochner, 2003). Bochner (2003) found that some service-learning experiences allowed these pre-service teachers to work with different cultural backgrounds, creating a relationship where both parties can strengthen their knowledge and create a sense of belonging for that child. Similarly, Soong (2013) saw a direct correlation between volunteer pre-service teachers immersing themselves in multi-cultural schools, thus enhancing their cross-cultural skills, and increasing their own employability. Ultimately, the literature, as discussed by Villardón-Gallego et al. (2018), points to a consensus that these opportunities lead to improvement for schoolchildren, through the enhanced skills and attitudes of pre-service teachers who have participated in service learning. However, service learning takes time and money; in some cases, the amount of travel time can extend the hours in the working day, leaving little time for paid work or university assessments (Hoskyn et al., 2020).

Recently, students have not been able to complete their service-learning opportunities due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Hoskyn et al., 2020). While service-learning opportunities have been negatively affected during this time, it is important to note that allowing students a service-learning placement both during and after a crisis presents a valuable learning experience. Service learning at such times provides an opportunity for students to experience perspectives other than their own, and allows them to better understand the issues within a community that may not have arisen during a standard service learning placement block. During times of crisis, service learning can become critical to the community, with many different volunteering opportunities for students that can expand their skills and provide invaluable experience in preparation for their world of work. These experiences can be in the form of students applying their knowledge and skills in a real work setting, ultimately improving future workplace performance (Aprile & Knight, 2020).

19.3 Context

The University of Wollongong (UOW) is a higher-education institution located on the south coast of New South Wales. This regional university is home to over 35,000 students on 13 campuses globally, and offers 332 degrees (UOW, 2021). In 2020, UOW was ranked 31st in the world for social and economic impact, and second in Australia for graduate employer satisfaction (Times Higher Education, 2021; Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching, 2021). Service learning and other work-integrated learning opportunities for students is one of the defining factors that has resulted in this impact.

The School of Education, housed within the Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (ASSH), introduced the implementation of service learning, as seen in this case study, over a decade ago. The purpose of this design was built on

the foundation of a substantial body of research suggesting that future teachers who engage in voluntary and community-based service learning as part of their teacher preparation develop skills that help them as teachers, citizens, and people (UOW, 2019). For the duration of this subject, students were able to undertake a community-service placement that alerted them to the moral imperative of working with community partners in areas of disadvantage, and assisted them in gaining a sense of social equity and justice. The subject facilitates students undertaking a placement in a community-based organisation such as a homework centre, disability service, Aboriginal mentoring service, youth and children's facility, aged-care home, soup kitchen, drug and homeless program, or refugee tutoring program, to name a few. The students are also required to participate in a series of campus-based workshops introducing social equity and justice issues in Australian society and the purpose and benefits of service learning for educators.

During the course of the subject, students are required to find placement opportunities in organisations that clearly work in areas of social equity and justice and provide ongoing support to the community. These self-sourced placements require students to spend a minimum of 30 h of service learning, which provides the basis for assessments in the subject. The model that underpins this subject is the Duncan and Kopperud (2008) learning cycle of Contemplation, Action, Reflection, and Commitment (CARC) (Fig. 19.1). Using the CARC model in this service-learning subject shows students the types of thinking that they can implement during service-learning experiences. Each phase can overlap the others as the placement progresses (Duncan & Kopperud, 2008).

While the placements are self-sourced, the subject coordinator provides students with a list of partner organisations that has been created based on past participation and new interest. The students can then choose their proposed service-learning placement. Students are also encouraged to reach out and form relationships with organisations beyond those on the suggested list that may be of particular interest to them. Templates of letters of introduction are provided for the students, which they can amend and personalise to help facilitate the process.

At the onset of the subject, the students are presented with a subject outline, which identifies for the students the subject learning outcomes from the School of Education, as well as a list of the aligning Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (APSTs) (Table 19.1).

19.4 Assessment

Students are expected to research inequity and disadvantage in their first assessment task, which allows them to contemplate the existing challenges within Australian society. Through this process students choose a specific area and organisation, in which to engage in action (Fig. 19.1); specifically, to complete their 30 h of service learning.
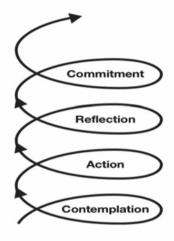
The CARC Learning Cycle:
Contemplation, Action, Reflection, Commitment

Contemplation is to deliberate consciously about the challenges, needs and expectations of the service experience.

Action is the on-site work that you undertake when matched with a community partner.

Reflection is the lens through which you think critically about the experience, deeply considering how the action intentionally links to specific learning goals.

Commitment is a disciplined effort to act upon your belief in the communal necessity of service and in the benefits it affords all involved.

Duncan, D. & Kopperud, J. (2008). Service-Learning Companion. New York: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Fig. 19.1 The CARC model introduced to students in this subject. *Source* authors

The students then complete and present a service-learning portfolio as both a 10-min presentation for (Part A) and written report for (Part B). In Part A, students share their experiences with their cohort as an opportunity for teaching their peers about a variety of social-equity issues in a person-centred way. This task has particular impact on the listeners due to its emotive and personal nature. The students are also required to design a one-page flyer or brochure about the service-learning partner organisation, including details such as organisation websites, upcoming dates and

Table 19.1 Learning outcomes met

Subject learning outcomes	Australian professional standards for teachers
1. Demonstrate a sensitivity to diversity and an understanding of social justice issues	1.4, 1.5, 2.4, 6.4, 7.3, 7.4
2. Demonstrate an ethic of service	1.4, 1.5, 2.4
3. Demonstrate caring and advocacy skills	3.1, 3.3, 3.5, 3.7, 4.1, 7.1, 7.4
4. Demonstrate improved communication skills with colleagues, clients and service personnel	3.5
5. Reflect on experiences from a community perspective	1.2, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.4, 3.1, 4.3, 6.3, 7.3
6. Identify, gather, and critically evaluate data through personal and academic research, applying this knowledge to pedagogy and becoming informed, responsible citizens	1.2, 1.3,1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 2.4, 3.1, 4.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 7.2

events, and other pertinent information, and to share this electronically with their tutorial group at the University.

In Part B of the assessment, students are scaffolded through the process of writing a report, and encouraged to reflect on questions that have arisen during this subject. Topics include justice, power, exclusion/inclusion, and Australian society, and the act of reflection highlights the role of educators committed to teaching about social-equity issues. It also requires students to discuss the importance of volunteer work and service learning in a class setting within the school environment and community as a whole. Students are encouraged to use their skills of analysis and reflection to identify and articulate some of the key learnings from their service-learning experience. The students are encouraged to use the CARC model headings as part of their reflection portfolio, and to respond to specific questions using the CARC model for guidance.

At the onset of the service-learning placement, both the students and collaborating organisations are provided with an information handbook in preparation for the service-learning experience. Students are also provided with a list of the potential opportunities that their service-learning experience placement could provide. **[these dot points aren't suggestions or tips; they're just outcomes]** The students are told that their placement can provide opportunities to:

- Learn to act autonomously, responsibly and appropriately
- Learn to work with others and understand working relationships
- Gain confidence in thinking critically and communicating with members of communities beyond education
- Broaden your horizons through exposure to new ideas, cultures and career paths
- Enhance your knowledge of the social justice and/ or equity awareness
- (UOW, 2019, p. 6).

They are also urged to ensure good communication with their tutor and supervisor, and wit the Professional Experience Unit (which coordinates their placement) (UOW,

2019, p. 6). The students are encouraged to add what they learn from their placement to their resumes, curriculum vitae, or personal professional development plans.

Some of the feedback and lessons learned in the development of this subject are summarised in the next section.

19.5   Feedback and Benefits

The benefits of this subject are demonstrated by unsolicited comments from both students and community partners. For example, one student said, "I loved how we got the freedom to go out and choose what organisation we wanted to work with and what we are passionate about working with." This statement in particular shows how giving students an opportunity to take initiative sparked a sense of self-direction that fuelled a spirit of engagement with the community partner. Linking back to previous research conducted by Hart (2015) and Salam et al. (2019), giving students – in this case, pre-service teachers—the control to make their own decisions in regards to their placement allows them to engage in community partnerships where they feel they can gain the most skills in simultaneously helping to solve real-world problems and learning about school systems. This also facilitates confidence in self-identified areas in which they feel they need to upskill (Brewer et al., 2021).

Another comment came from a student who chose the area of mental health in schools for their service-learning placement. The student reported that the students in the service-learning context began to open up and have conversations with them, which showed that mutual trust was blossoming within the building relationship. The student explained:

> Not only did I start to see these young, shy students come out of their shell, but they were also so much more able to trust us and tell us about their family life, whereas before they felt they would just burden us with that. It was great to be able to show them we are here to listen and support them, because sometimes just talking to someone really helps…. We also discussed many celebrities who have mental illnesses and how it doesn't stop them from being successful or being who they want to be…. It was really rewarding.

These pre-service teachers were able to clarify the rewarding factors of service learning with regard to the experience gained in this subject and the partnerships that evolved during their placement. This supports the notion that the opportunities for engagement in these types of volunteering experiences greatly expand the skills graduates need to be more employable (Gonzalez et al., 2019). One student agreed: "This experience has made us be more confident about our duty of care in our future classrooms and taking on the role of being the adult in the room."

The students were not the only ones who benefited from service-learning opportunities. Community partners that have been involved in the service-learning subject over the years have also commented and sent emails to thank the university, and explained benefits to the community industries involved; for example, one principal from a local primary school commented in an email:

> The opportunity to mentor pre-service teachers in the work that we do is highly valuable
> for us. Not only does it allow for more hands on deck, it also gives us a chance to share the
> purpose and importance of our organisation and cause, and hopefully this not only educates
> the student but, through their role in schools, teaches the next generation about this important
> issue in our society.

While no formal research was undertaken as part of writing this chapter, the ongoing positive comments and feedback from both community-based organisations and university students leads us to believe that there is room—and need—for such research. One of the issues concerning academics who are involved in organising authentic partnerships between students and communities is that most often these academics are allocated neither the time nor the resources for conducting formal research. It is our hope that the importance and relevance of this type of learning will be acknowledged by a wider administrative audience, and that time will be allotted for this important research to take place.

19.6   Discussion

The importance of designing and offering subjects that provide opportunities for university students to engage actively in society and give back to community not only benefits students but creates empowering partnerships between the community and the university. In a pluralistic society, this is a skill that is in constant demand, and ensuring that universities are equipping their students in preparation for graduation with these opportunities has been shown to be invaluable for their future careers (Clifford & Montgomery, 2017; Lai & Hui, 2021). In the case of our example, the subject was designed to help develop pre-service teachers and engage them in areas in which they may not be confident, that they need to learn, or in which they can upskill (Howlett & Cohan, 2016; González et al., 2019). Universities are preparing global citizens and leaders of our society. Post pandemos, universities are revisiting the concept of humanistic education and the student as a whole, rather than operating as mere degree factories (Eady et al., 2021). There is an emphasis placed on students to engage with the community and learn by doing, as it prepares them for a productive career and experience in collaborating and engaging with societal issues. This, in turn, ultimately empowers students to make a change (Barron & Darling-Hammond, 2008).

Creating quality partnerships through service learning within communities includes industry partners, university students, community members, and even young people, including school-aged children. A study found that 96% of higher-education students agreed or strongly agreed that the service-learning opportunities provided to them strengthened their skills, classroom practices, and studies (Hidenbrand & Schultz, 2015). These findings were echoed as a factor in this subject, as one of the students expressed that their future classroom applications have grown from the skills that they gained in this rich, meaningful, and relevant service-learning opportunity.

The CARC model, scaffolded by the subject coordinator, assisted students in this subject to critically think and expand their knowledge, and develop strategies for future analysis in the classroom. These authors suggest that this model be used in other service-learning applications across a diverse range of disciplines. Using this framework promoted discussion in the classroom about how these future teachers could use a model such as this as part of action research in their own classroom settings (Duncan & Kopperud, 2008). The creation and use of theoretical frameworks in service learning is an important way that students can make meaningful connections to society.

19.7   Conclusion

This chapter has provided an insight into a subject offered by the School of Education in the Faculty of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities at the University of Wollongong. This subject fosters students' confidence in strengthening their future work skills and promote community partnerships and initiatives through participating in service learning. Encouraging partnerships between universities through service learning has been shown to be a beneficial aspect in preparing quality, career-ready graduates. While there was no formal research conducted in this case study, this exploratory service-learning approach is worth further investigation using the theories and methods discussed. Perhaps, as a result, universities can look forward to producing work-ready individuals who feel confident, enthusiastic, and equipped to pursue the daily challenges, obstacles, and successes that all communities face (Salam et al., 2019).

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