

Editorial

Special Edition on service learning

The *Second International Conference on Service Learning in Teacher Education*, held in June 2009 in Galway, was the trigger for this themed issue of IIER. Service learning or community engagement is now widely incorporated in university programs and specifically makes a valued contribution to the preparation of teachers. Service learning or community engagement has the particular feature that learning benefit is experienced by the providers of the service within the community as well as by those for whom that service is provided. The eight papers represented in this issue contribute to a growing body of research and draw on programs in place in Australia, Ireland and the United States.

Boland aligns a civic engagement strategy with the emergent discourse of 'active citizenship' in Ireland. A recently established Teaching Council has developed a code of professional conduct that encourages active citizenship and emphasises commitment to democracy, social justice, equality and inclusion. Within teacher education, the service/community-based learning aims to develop civic responsibility by meeting an identified community need. In this way, it is at one with emancipatory education. Boland describes the nature of an elective course at the National University of Ireland in Galway. Further she considers the prospect of embedding initiatives such as this in Ireland's teacher education curriculum. Analysis of her doctoral data led to the creation of a set of orientations. The 'civic orientation' identifies with the espoused code but Boland draws attention to the contextual obstacles of academic time, workload and recognition. Countering this, she acknowledges the potential of the pre-service teachers' 'personal journey of discovery.'

Gannon's paper on service learning as a 'third space' positions community engagement as an alternative/other experience for pre-service teachers. At the University of Western Sydney, Australia, all pre-service teachers intending to work in high schools (with adolescents from 13-18 years of age) take a unit that involves service learning. It is an optional elective for pre-service teachers in primary education. Gannon argues that pre-service teachers, whom she describes as at a threshold, potentially experience moments of rupture in their chosen work of service learning, where a different mode of engagement with adolescent learners is present. Examples of pre-service teachers being changed by their community engagement are dotted through Gannon's account of collaborations with students at risk. This change causes those future teachers to critique their preconceptions of labels such as 'difficult' students, and to consider adopting a 'strategy of attention' to the individual needs of learners.

Knutson-Miller compares various outcomes including civic engagement and development of cultural competencies associated with service learning in domestic and international settings. Acknowledging that empirical study is needed to support the theoretical rationale for service learning in teacher education, she surveyed 122 students

from California State University and found that all students reported gains but greater gains were made in the diverse communities by the international service learning participants in understanding challenges and awareness of global needs. Murphy writes of the need to develop independent thinking skills among students. His paper explores a methodological approach, used in Limerick, Ireland, which connects meaningful community service with academic learning. He canvassed practitioners and found that it fostered a sense of agency among student participants towards making positive changes in society.

Naidoo takes up the challenge of Bankston's report on Vietnamese refugees to understand students in community contexts. The Refugee Action Support program at the University of Western Sydney, in partnership with the Australian Literacy and Numeracy Foundation, provides targeted support for humanitarian refugee students. Evaluations of the program, which includes tutoring and creating resources, have confirmed the value of the experience for both refugee students and pre-service teachers. This value arises from the close relationship established between student and tutor. With the skills learned in the program, the pre-service teachers can be more aware of cultural and communal resources that can avoid the alienation of refugee students.

Power's research focuses on community engagement as authentic pedagogy. Moreover, the reflection of the pre-service teachers engaged in community engagement activities is framed within the Professional Teacher Standards. Reflections of the pre-service teachers who engage with mentoring and coaching students demonstrate the ways in which they fulfill the relevant Standards in a selection of narratives of their experiences.

Wasserman, having reflected on her own teaching experiences in a Californian elementary school, considers the question of pre-service teachers using service learning in their classroom placements. Her approach is for future teachers to design and implement lessons that include service learning projects. She identified several constructs: preparedness to teach, integration (of service learning into content areas), citizenship and positive effects on students' learning. She reported that the pre-service teachers felt a strong sense of self-efficacy as a result of successful teaching experiences.

Welch proposes a rubric for developing, implementing and assessing service learning. As Welch argues, service learning provides opportunities for pre-service teachers to apply their pedagogical content knowledge. He also cautions that the goals of the community partner and the instructional objectives of the teacher education program need to be compatible. He uses the metaphor of the match-maker to describe the role of the Californian campus centre for service learning and emphasises the importance of reflection as a learning and teaching tool.

I hope that you find these papers provoke critical thinking about service learning and I am grateful to the members of the editorial board for this issue for their considered and scholarly reviews:

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