

Enabling teachers as change agents through service learning: Maximising professional capacities, community outcomes and local global citizenship.

OVERVIEW: SUMMARY OF CONTRIBUTION AND CONTEXT

Pre-service teachers (PSTs) need to be community minded, engaged global citizens who are responsive to the diverse contexts and communities they will teach.^{1,2,3} Responding to this need requires a readiness in the form of a relational understanding and skills about the lived experiences of learners and their wider school contexts, beyond notions of mastering an exclusively and bounded 'classroom' practice. A notion of wider professional experience that extends beyond classroom walls enriches PSTs' understandings of the contexts and communities in which they teach and builds teacher efficacy³. To this end being 'community-ready' is integral to being 'classroom-ready'.

Prior to 2010, PSTs completed mandatory community service hours outside of core subjects and on the periphery of the Bachelor of Education degree. The value of these 'add-on' hours was variable, and it became clear there was a need for innovative and flexible curriculum that maximised experiential learning. This design had to support the diverse needs of students and the communities in which they teach. PSTs at JCU vary in age from 20 to over 40 years of age. The Socio-Economic Indexes for Areas Index of Education and Occupation indicates the average socio-economic status of student enrolments sits in the medium range, and at least 30% students drawn from the low range each year. Furthermore, domestic enrolments consistently include students from rural and remote areas, with at least 30% drawn from regional areas, and on average 68% that are the first in family to attend university **To cater to the varied student cohorts that participate in this subject, the curriculum framework developed had to be rigorous, yet flexible to develop agency in diverse students.**

In 2010, Dr Salter was employed to develop and teach the first offering of the subject *Service Learning for Sustainable Futures*. This work was pivotal to Peta receiving a Sessional Teaching Award for Outstanding Contribution to Student Learning in 2011. Upon taking up a teaching position in 2011, Dr Halbert worked alongside Dr Salter to expand the delivery of the core subject and took on coordination. The subject enacts JCU's priorities⁴ by connecting locally and globally, enacting sustainable development education through service learning, and "being socially responsive and, in particular, meeting the needs of people in rural, remote, Indigenous and tropical Australia." Our innovative service learning capstone **fosters student agency and enacts that agency in positive impacts to community**. This approach to our teaching is informed by, and has contributed to, sustained scholarship and curriculum leadership at an institutional, national, and international level.

CRITERION FOUR: INNOVATION, LEADERSHIP OR SCHOLARSHIP THAT HAS INFLUENCED AND ENHANCED LEARNING AND TEACHING AND/OR THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Dr Salter and Dr Halbert engage students and promote agentic learning, through pedagogic strategies that emphasise critical reflection and dialogue

Professor Stephen Billett, Professor of Adult and Vocational Education, Griffith University, 2017

CURRICULUM INNOVATION AND LEADERSHIP TO EMPOWER TEACHERS AS CHANGE AGENTS

In developing the subject since 2010, our critical service learning framework has fostered and required high levels of agency from PSTs. In line with capstone principles such as integration and extension of prior learning and student independence and agency,⁵ students audit their learning over the course of the degree and negotiate a placement that extends their own personal and professional needs while meeting community needs. It requires students to engage with frameworks of service learning and sustainability to develop learning goals for their placement. This **instils confidence** in students who benefit from opportunities *"to apply the knowledge gained throughout my degree and the subject in to a real-life project"* (student evaluation, 2013) and to thrive from *"being in control of our own projects"*. Assessment is a key factor in framing these opportunities where *"the first assessment task was a good introduction to provide focus on the service learning placement"* (student evaluation, 2014) and *"related directly to placement"* (student evaluation, 2016). Furthermore, we use critical reflection and dialogue to **maximise student-directed learning and support student experiences**: *"there was a lot of scaffolding in the module guides and the module blogs were interesting and promoted interaction among peers"* (student evaluation, 2016). We have demonstrated through over 14 offerings of the subject that this approach enables PSTs to develop knowledge, skills, and dispositions for teaching in and for diverse communities guided by their own goals and

complemented by flexibility to accommodate circumstance. Students have noted that *“The placement itself was a great learning curve”* and that this flexibility provided *“the ability to allow service to suit my lifestyle”* (student evaluation, 2016).

This subject is a core subject that demands a self-directed 50-hour placement or four-week internship while undertaking other subjects and balancing the diverse commitments and localities of our cohort. Subject grades demonstrate consistently high success rates (Figure 1). Student satisfaction with the subject seen in table 1 has largely increased since 2014, demonstrating our supportive, flexible, and successful design:

**Figure 1:
Enrolments
by success**



Student Evaluation Items	2014 24% response rate (27/112)	2015 27% response rate (29/108)	2016 31% response rate (30/98)	2017 --28% response rate (25/88)
The learning outcomes were made clear to me	78%	72%	80%*	72%
The subject was well organised	81%*	86%*	87%*	68%
I received timely feedback	70%	86%*	93%*	80%*

Table 1. Student agreement % (Internal and External students, 2014-2016)

* 80+ = above JCU average

Importantly, student and peer feedback and evaluations have demonstrated overall satisfaction with a mean average of 74.5% over the 2014-2017 period (average 27% response rate) and have reinforced the contribution of the subject to fostering student capabilities, particularly agency:

I enjoyed the challenge that this subject created for me. It made me broaden my research skills and prompted lateral thinking. I gained a degree of confidence in myself during this process by being entrusted with the development of resources that supported the learning outcomes for the clients at my chosen establishment (student evaluation, 2016).

One of the best subjects of the degree so far in terms of personal learning and growth. It makes you realise that there is more to being a teacher than just thinking about what goes on within the school grounds. The other thing that was good was the responsiveness to emails and online discussion threads (student evaluation, 2015).

The value of the service learning experiences our subject facilitates is apparent in regular, unsolicited student emails reflecting on students' experiences: *“I must admit I have gained so much more than I thought I would from the subject and have really enjoyed the whole experience. Thank you for your support and guidance”* (unsolicited student email, 2015). These reflections demonstrate that JCU teacher graduates have the confidence to engage with complex contemporary teaching contexts and challenges:

I think this kind of curriculum could expand the concept of volunteering in the younger age groups and generate a much higher rate of support within the local community, with flow-on to the global sphere over time. There would be different ways of approaching this depending on the age of the students, but the possibilities are quite exciting. Thank you for a very enjoyable subject that has opened up many new possibilities (unsolicited student email, 2016).

The design and intent of the subject has also been endorsed by various external review parties. In 2016, External Reviewer for the IRU Academic Calibration Process, Coordinator/Lecturer of Service Learning at Griffith University Carole-Joy Patrick noted that the subject was *“a great subject, exposing students to real educational needs”* with a *“good balance of expecting an engagement with experience and discipline”*. In 2013, Professor Keith Skamp, a recognised leader in sustainability education, found that *“students' reflections in assessment demonstrated that they developed capacity-building attributes for developing sustainable futures that impacted their personal and professional lives”*. Additionally, JCU Associate Professor Michelle Lasen noted in a Peer Review of the subject design that such *“innovative subjects and quality teaching tailored to their learning needs as they transition into and out of the B.Ed. is therefore an important and timely achievement”* (2014). The excellence of our teaching quality is further shown with the awarding of a 2017 JCU Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning.

SUSTAINED ENGAGEMENT WITH COMMUNITY TO IMPROVE THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AND 'MAKE A DIFFERENCE' ACROSS DIVERSE CONTEXTS LOCALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY

We have worked to extend community impact and reciprocity by brokering relationships and placement options for PSTs. This includes community-based placements, internships in schools across Queensland, and overseas placements in Cambodian non-government schools to encourage global perspectives. In 2016, PSTs completed internships in 22 Queensland schools and participated in overseas placements in India, Cebu and Cambodia. Community-based placements in 2016 included local councils, services such as Kith & Kin (disability support services) and AEIOU (children's autism support services), hospitals and non-profits such as Ronald McDonald house, the Pyjama Foundation, and AFL Cape York House, and environmental hosts such as Billabong Sanctuary and Mungalla Station. While diverse contexts are important, it is our curriculum framework rather than the geography of the placement that serves to make meaningful connections.⁶ Feedback from an increasing network of community organisations that have become involved with service learning demonstrates the agency students bring to the community and how they take up our challenge of contributing their knowledge and skills in this capstone. Overall, service learning engagement enhances students' experiences with multiple pathways and supports learning with authentic and contextualised experiences⁵ through **real life problem solving to meet the needs of community**. While these learning outcomes and community outcomes are difficult to quantify, they are clearly demonstrable.

Grace House Community Centre, Siem Reap, Cambodia (2014): *"[PST] has helped the national teacher gain necessary skills in order to become an effective teacher to reach out to the students at Grace House. She has also provided new ideas for our teacher to use in her classroom."*

Endeavour Foundation, (2014): *"[PST] engaged well...the project developed a solid foundation for our sustainable living program and linked well with the community networking/participation which Endeavour is focusing on."*

Pyjama Foundation (2015): *"I was extremely impressed with (PST)'s passion and energy for this project...(PST) went above and beyond this project and our organisation would readily welcome the opportunity to be a part of this project again."*

Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (2015): *"CAFNEC has benefited from (PSTs) expertise in curriculum and teaching....we look forward to her perhaps continuing to be involved with us."*

NQ Community Services Inc. (2015): *"[PST] has introduced 2 programs which we hope to keep running within the Family Support Hub for the benefit of the community. Thanks."*

Cairns Hospital Class (Woree SHS) (2016): *"The program provided by this project...will provide individualised learning tasks for students in hospital."*

INNOVATION, LEADERSHIP AND SUSTAINED SCHOLARSHIP ON SERVICE-LEARNING TO DEVELOP CURRICULUM AND MAXIMISE LEARNING ACROSS THE SECTOR

Our innovative and engaged approach in our teaching has been informed by and contributed to sustained scholarship and curriculum leadership in service learning at an institutional, national and international level. From 2011-14, our engagement in the teaching-research nexus was sustained though research shared through local community with teachers and schools in Cairns and Townsville, presentations at JCU (Teaching and Learning Weeks, ShowCase), Australian Educational Research Association Conference presentations (2012, 2014), International Service Learning Network conferences in Hong Kong (SLAN, 2013) and Argentina (CLAYSS, 2014), and scholarly publications.^{7,3,9,10} In 2013, Kelsey received a JCU Teaching and Learning Academy Fellowship to strengthen engagement with community organisations to promote service learning, co-develop resources, and trial forums and technologies for sustaining dialogue between students, staff, and community members. Our work developing the subject and scholarship of service-learning draws on critical and transformative pedagogy derived from intersections of the work of Dewey,¹¹ Mezirow,¹² and Friere,¹³ to engage students with their local and global communities to make a difference.

In 2014 we were awarded a nationally competitive Office of Learning and Teaching Strategic Priority Grant which we co-led to successful completion in 2016. The project entitled *Local Global Learning*⁸ investigated students' dispositions towards global perspectives and identified factors that act as inhibitors and enablers of cultural exchange. This multidisciplinary project has involved working across institutions developing and

disseminating a Good Practice Guide (GPG)⁸ which outlines our **pedagogical framework based on the four domains of *Intentional design, Looking out, Navigating engagement, and Transitions and transformations, to provide a robust basis that facilitates the adoption of informed practice across the sector (see website⁸).*** Evaluations of this project and its impact and relevance more widely to the sector have highlighted the necessity and significance of our research, and our leadership:

“Drs Salter and Halbert engage effectively with relevant literature and a network of educators to research and produce teaching and learning frameworks and resources that aim to maximise student learning. Across the project, they established and augmented a network of educators from multiple disciplines across the sector and have provided leadership in advancing that network through developing a website, curriculum resources including a Good Practice Guide and interactive e-book.”

(Professor Stephen Billett, Professor of Adult and Vocational Education, Griffith University, 2017.)

“The guidance for people to start out, move forward, and engage in best practice will be invaluable in developing manageable, quality programs.”

(Professor Lindy McAllister, Professor of Work Integrated Learning & Associate Dean, Work Integrated Learning, University of Sydney, 2016.)

“A strength of this project was the intellectual rigour of the project leaders who incorporated their knowledge and expertise from the relevant fields of pedagogy throughout the stages of data analysis and development of resources.”

(Helen Mclean, Senior Advisor, Learning & Teaching, RMIT, OLT Evaluator, 2017.)

Furthermore, the project built capacity in and fostered connections between 160 academics and community partners. Capacity building events included engaging in symposiums and workshops to provide feedback and refine the GPG, and establishing a network of 48 members across 18 institutions that serves as a community of practice to raise awareness of the need for, and effective design of, curriculum that best supports and enhances student experiences. From 2014 to date this project has resulted in 2 international journal publications, 2 book chapters, 1 book, a Good Practice Guide, symposiums in Sydney and Singapore in 2016, and dissemination at HERDSA, ATEA and Queensland University Educators Showcase.

CONCLUSION

We have demonstrated our sustained curriculum innovation and leadership to: 1) empower pre-service teachers as change agents, 2) engage with community in reciprocal partnerships locally and internationally and 3) impact curriculum innovation and best practice in community-based learning across the higher education sector. We have responded to challenges in meeting the needs of a diverse cohort to implement a supportive, flexible and student-focused service learning approach that supports and maximises student experiences. This subject has led the sector as one of the most established service-learning subjects in Australia that is unique in its emphasis and application of research informed sustainability and citizenship education. This also meets the needs of the local and global community partners and the communities these PSTs teach in after graduation, who will benefit from receiving confident teachers that see themselves as agents of change. Our curriculum innovation, scholarship and leadership enriches professional capacities, community outcomes and local global citizenship of Australian graduates.

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