

Engaging preservice teachers' notions of agency and citizenship through service learning

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Teacher education programs often include an experiential learning component in order for preservice teachers to learn about diverse students. This case study showcases a subject in which preservice teachers integrate meaningful community service (minimum 50 hours) with learning experiences and reflection to enrich understanding of their own teaching role and enact sustainability goals. The service learning projects aim to strengthen communities and intercultural understanding with a focus on activities that promote social and environmental responsibility in local, national and international contexts. The subject uses a service learning pedagogical framework, informed by the example of Delve, Mintz and Stewart (in Bringle & Hatcher 1996). The subject focusses on the service experience as a 'wider professional experience' to extend beyond narrow notions of 'classroom competence', endeavouring to "develop[ing] future teachers who are cognisant of and engaged with the complexities of the communities in which they teach" (Salter, Hill, Navin & Knight, 2013). Engaging with these complexities often requires, and prompts, critical reflection on key issues of citizenship and agency for students. Such reflection prompts students to improve classroom practice and, in turn, the wider community of tomorrow, by thinking in an informed way about service learning experiences today. This study foregrounds student perceptions and experiences to identify, analyse and evaluate how service learning curriculum frameworks can foster notions of citizenship and agency, particularly in regards to global citizenship. It uses mixed methods- incorporating surveys, document analysis and focus group interviews involving students and staff. The survey ascertains student dispositions to cultural exchange and their intellectual agency as local/global citizens by identifying inhibitors and enablers (Leask, 2012) and demographic and cultural profile of students (Gothard, Gray & Downey, 2012). Document analysis of curriculum documents and focus group interviews with teaching and student teams builds on Billet's (2011) framing of curriculum and student agency to facilitate rich reflection and description to elicit enablers and inhibitors of cultural exchange and the development of global perspectives. Evidence suggests that the service experience acts as a catalyst for development of student agency. In this way it is very effective in developing various capacities of agency beneficial to students' future professional practice. Key to this development is relationships that are initiated through the experience. Tensions however are evident around the influence of intent for these experiences promoted by curriculum structure, as well as the effect varying experiences themselves, and the 'unknown' elements they bring, have on catalytic possibilities.

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