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Service learning using English language teaching in pre-service teacher education in Singapore

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In line with the Ministry of Education's vision of the delivery of 21st century competencies amongst all students in Singapore, the National Institute of Education in Singapore employs service learning as a pedagogical tool to develop community outreach and engagement. This paper begins with a review of related literature on service learning as a means of enhancing the quality of pre-service teacher education programmes internationally. It then looks at how the teaching of the English language may be used as a principal means by which students can make an impact on a local community of their choice in the Singaporean context. It draws attention to the nexus of theory and practice via highlighting three service learning projects where the vital relationship between the pedagogical methods area of study known as Curriculum Studies on English language teaching and the opportunity to practice English language teaching outside the traditional clinic field experience offered through practicum posting are presented. The paper concludes with the proposition that service learning promotes active citizenry and moral education of youth and allows student teachers an opportunity to build deep partnerships with the community even before they step into the teaching profession as full-fledged teachers.

Keywords: service learning; English language; pre-service teacher education; education; Singapore

Introduction and background

The success of an education system depends very much on the quality of its teachers. It is therefore widely acknowledged that teachers play an important role in the education of the young and are critical to the education system of any country. Today, the traditional role of teachers has very much been redefined and many educators and researchers have realised this does not begin nor end in the confines of the classroom. One way of teaching beyond the four walls of institutions of higher learning and schools is through service learning, a pedagogical strategy which is gaining popularity within the field of teacher education.

Singapore has initiated a programme that mandates service learning as an integral part of the pre-service preparation of teachers. Called Group Endeavours in Service Learning

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(GESL), pre-service teachers at the National Institute of Education (NIE) spend up to two semesters developing and implementing a service learning project with community partners of their choice. The experience of service learning is a key component that connects student teachers with the community as partners in the teaching and learning process.

Teacher education is not just about teachers and their education. More than the two put together, student teachers are called upon to tackle critical local and global issues that go far beyond the comfort of their boundaries. The hands-on initiative of service learning reaches an assortment of disciplines including the sciences, history, psychology and languages. The teaching of languages, both English as a second language and foreign languages for native speakers, has gradually been gaining momentum in connection with service learning (Hale, 2005). With the societal needs of today's culturally and linguistically diverse communities and workplaces, communicative competence has been widely recognized as a goal of language teaching (Brown, 1994; Boyle & Overfield, 1999).

Schools in Singapore through the Ministry of Education (MOE) have placed great emphasis on the building of socio-emotional competencies, and cultivating a sense of belonging and emotional rootedness to Singapore. Connecting with and contributing back to society through service learning is a means by which youth can build character and become socially responsible citizens.

Literature review
There are both tangible and intangible benefits of service learning (Ch'ng, D'Rozario, Goh, & Cheah, 2009). Within pre-service teacher education, the development of values, such as care, service and volunteerism are considered as crucial. Arguably one of the most challenging aspects of becoming a teacher involves that of learning to understand and then act appropriately upon the powerful influence that a teacher has on his/her pupils. Caring for others is an important part of a teachers' development and service learning helps develop this

attribute. Today, many educational institutions use service learning as a tool to enhance their teacher education programmes, community life and to foster civic responsibility among their students. Service learning is increasingly cited as a driver of the civic engagement of higher education, as more and more colleges and universities actively embrace the concept of "the engaged campus" and make civic education a priority (Hollander, Saltmarsh, & Zlotkowski, 2001; Bringle, 2001). As a matter of fact, then Tuft University president John DiBiaggio opened his keynote at the March 2001 American Association of Higher Education conference by saying "service learning has taken off". While it is fairly new to some disciplines, roots of service learning in the field of teacher education date back to the early 20th century through the work of John Dewey, who spearheaded the progressive education movement and emphasized learner-centred instruction (Dewey, 1938). David Kolb modified Dewey's model which had an inquiry process comprising six steps into a learning cycle with four components and customized for experiential learning. Since then, Kolb's model has been used widely for curricula development in service learning. His four components, namely, "concrete experiences, reflection on the experience, synthesis and abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation" test the concepts in new situations (Kolb, 1984). Also, Jacoby (1996) defines service learning as a form of experiential education where apart from the engagement in activities that address the community's needs, structured opportunities are designed in order to bring about student learning and development outcomes. Apart from applying experiential learning models, the use of theoretical models such as social construction (Bond & McKenzie 1999), civic responsibility (Wade 1995) and critical pedagogy (Ruiz & Fernandez-Balboa, 2005) have also been applied to the study of service learning.

Several advocates have described service learning as a pedagogy, programme and philosophy. As part of pedagogical engagement, service learning is defined by Daniels, Patterson and Dunston (2010) as a "teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful

community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility, and strengthen communities". As a pedagogical method, previous research notes that if well implemented, it has the potential to help students to develop active citizenry, promote active learning and critical thinking, analytical problem-solving skills and in the long run better retention prospects (Loesch-Griffin et al., 1995). Furthermore, the main grounding for service learning is that experience forms the basis for learning and that the quality of the reflection designed is crucial in enabling learning to take place. According to Jacoby (1996), good reflection has the potential to help the learner to make sense of their observations, to explore the implications of the experience, to think of questions needed to deepen the learner's conviction about the need for service learning in the first place. Viewed in this light, service learning as pedagogy relates to service learning as philosophy.

As a programme, service learning emphasises that the tasks undertaken have to be in tandem with "intentional learning goals and with conscious reflection and critical analysis" (Kendall, 1990, p. 20). Jacoby (1996) shares some tasks in which participants engage are often direct services, such as tutoring, work in soup kitchens and homeless shelters, assistance in hospitals, environmental clean-ups, and renovation and construction of homes and community facilities. Students involved in service learning also do advocacy and policy-level work on such issues as housing, poverty, the environment, education and human services. Service learning is different from other educational experiences because it often is not confined to one class, campus or even one discipline of study (Jacoby, 1996). By necessity, service learning involves a range of partnerships within and across the institution; with other institutions, schools, community service providers, and community members; also with governments on all levels, national and regional associations, foundations; and, in some cases, with governmental and non-governmental organizations around the world. The benefits for including service learning within teacher education programmes extend beyond what

clinical field experiences or practicum components can achieve. Erickson and Anderson

(1997) purport that clinical field experiences do not address a real community need.

In the field of linguistics situated in a multicultural environment, learning occurs

naturally as students develop relationships in a given community. The desire for deeper and

more effective communication with the community instinctively encourages students to ask

linguistic and cultural questions, seek answers and apply newly acquired knowledge in a

legitimate and tangible context (Hale, 2005). Service learning provides students with

opportunities to translate theoretical linguistic knowledge into practical language skills

(Zlotkowski, 1999). One commonly stated objective of service learning as a teaching method

applied to the liberal arts curriculum is to foster civic and social responsibility in students

(Battistoni, 2002). Beyond this democratic goal, Slimbach (1995) has identified several

academic and humanitarian objectives of service learning which specifically relate to the

learning of a language and of culture. These objectives seek to:

1) Expand students' awareness and understanding of social problems and their ability to address and personally respond to such problems;
2) Enable students to learn from a different segment of society than that what he/she would normally interact with;
3) Breakdown racial and cultural barriers through the process of students' reaching out and building bridges between demographic groups;
4) Introduce students to an experiential style of learning;
5) Teach students the meaning of service, patience, cross-cultural understanding, interdependence, humility and simplicity;
6) Teach students tools for self-evaluation and critical analysis of institutions, social systems, and their own contribution to and effect on a given community;
7) Further the acquisition of a foreign language, when working in or with another culture (Slimbach, 1995, p. 10).

Service learning in teacher education provides an opportunity for bonding among the

community of learners, namely the teacher educators, the student teachers and the youth that

they are reaching out to. Examples of mutual learning include projects where the interaction

between teachers and learners prompt growth in knowledge, insights and perspectives about

the community they are working with. Freedman (1993) highlights the potential of mentoring

to strengthen all participants. A key challenge for teacher educators and communities is to capitalize on the mutual learning and growth that can occur in service learning.

Research by Harwood, Fliss, and Goulding (2006); Root, Callahan, and Sepanski (2002); and Vickers (2007) noted that student teachers who have had service learning as part of their pre-service programmes are more sensitized to their future students' diversity of backgrounds, developmental needs, to understand aspects of students' socio-emotional learning and most importantly, to acquire a realistic view of the profession. The experiences are found to be more impactful when pedagogical concepts learned in classrooms are applied in service activities with reflections. Based on a 2003 study by Anderson and Erickson, about 59% of all teacher education programmes exposed teachers with opportunities to service learning approaches as an instructional strategy. Of these programmes, only 24% provided student teachers with opportunities for actual engagement in service learning, while 18% offered student teachers opportunities to use service learning as part of their lesson plans.

The aims of service learning are realized only when teachers are skilled and committed to its mission of strengthening every person in the community. Indeed, students who participate in service learning often comment that the experience brings them close to the community and helps them to understand how their future career impacts the wider community. They awaken to new realities and insights regarding what they might accomplish as educators. Some go on to take on personas as "community builders" and this would undoubtedly affect their stance towards teaching and learning and their endeavour to enhance learning for the entire community.

Skeptics, however, call for a stronger evidence-base that proves its value in a programme (Gelmon, Holland, Driscoll, Spring & Kerrigan, 2001). Teacher educators consider the service-learning portfolios to require too much manpower to produce, critique and monitor. Nonetheless, these portfolios tend to proliferate in pre-service programmes as

they are seen as a means where learning may be both promoted and assessed simultaneously (DeZure, 2002).

Service learning in Singapore

The previous section has reviewed the literature espousing the benefits of service learning to teacher education. This section highlights a Singapore case study where service learning is part of the pre-service teacher preparation programme.

In 2009, the Ministry of Education launched the 21st Century Competencies Framework emphasising the core values of *Respect*, *Responsibility*, *Resilience*, *Integrity*, *Care*, and *Harmony* anchored at the heart of the "Swiss Roll" framework (see Figure 1). Concomitant to its goal to be more student-centric, MOE laid out competencies in the framework to develop a holistic education centred on values and character development. The goal to strengthen holistic education was reemphasised by the inaugural Character and Citizenship Education Conference jointly held by NIE and MOE on 8 November 2011. The theme of the conference: *Active and Concerned Citizens, Building Character for Community* encapsulates MOE's purpose to support schools in their efforts to nurture values, competencies and dispositions in pupils and enable them to become good persons and responsible citizens.

The introduction of service learning to Singapore is substantiated by the above educational initiatives especially in the promotion of active citizenry and is upheld as a learning approach where participants learn to identify the needs of the community, serve the community, and reflect on their experiences through working with the community to foster an understanding and appreciation of what it involves.

Figure 1. 21st Century Competencies and Student Outcomes Framework by MOE.
Source: Ministry of Education, Singapore, 2010.

The Community Involvement Programme (CIP) was introduced to all schools across all levels in Singapore in 1997, with the objective of helping to build social cohesion and civic responsibility through becoming involved with the community by undertaking small-scale projects that provided these opportunities. Service learning is a teaching and learning approach that schools can adopt for CIP. For schools to implement service learning effectively, teachers supporting the programme need to have a good understanding of the underpinning philosophy of service learning, and experience this aspect of values education in order to help their students undertake meaningful service-learning projects. In preparing teachers for schools, equipping student teachers with the competencies in subject knowledge or pedagogical skills is not enough, an opportunity to connect with society through an experiential approach allows student teachers to connect with the community, embrace diversity, and develop values and competencies needed to make a positive difference in the classroom.

A values-driven approach to teacher education in Singapore

NIE aims to develop 21st century education professionals who embrace the philosophy of

being leaders in the service of learners. The teacher preparation programme is strongly

pivoted on three value paradigms: learner-centredness, teacher identity and service to the

profession and the community. These values will provide a solid foundation from which

skills and knowledge needed of a 21st century teacher professional can be developed.

- Learner-centredness places the learner at the heart of all that we do and encompasses values such as the belief that all children can learn and the valuing of diversity for example.
- Developing a strong sense of teacher identity means that the teacher is committed to aim for the highest standards, is passionate, adaptive and resilient and always bears the stance of an ethical professional
- Service to the profession and community refers to a teacher's commitment to contribute back to the fraternity through professional collaborations, mentorship, stewardship and offering opportunities for apprenticeship of beginning teachers
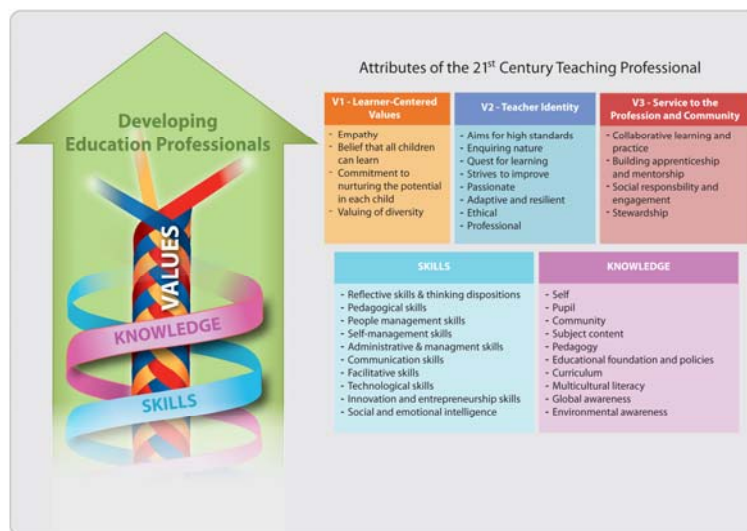

Figure 2. Values, Skills and Knowledge (V^{3}SK) Model.
Source: National Institute of Education, 2009.

The strength of NIE's programmes is based on its strong integration of content and

pedagogical preparation, backed by evidenced-based educational research. At the same time,

experiential learning is emphasised where student teachers are immersed into a holistic

educational experience so they can develop into 21st century teaching professionals who will bring out enhanced learning outcomes for pupils in schools. The attributes highlighted in the V³SK model and 21st Century Competencies Framework is eminently brought out through the service-learning programme as a holistic approach in developing values, skills and knowledge of teachers. Service learning creates the opportunity for student teachers to understand themselves and reach out to the community. It is envisaged that attributes such as the ability to foster care for the community, a respect for diversity, a strong collaborative spirit and a deep commitment to the profession can be honed. Specific skills developed through service learning include reflective skills, pedagogical skills, communication skills, facilitative skills, and social and emotional intelligence. Areas of knowledge developed through service-learning experiences include gains in knowledge of self, one's pupils, the community, subject content and multicultural literacy.

Group endeavours in service learning at NIE
In line with the Ministry of Education's Vision for Singapore Teachers, NIE seeks to develop teachers who will be able to lead, care and inspire our youth; to forge trusting partnerships with the community; and to be future role models for the growth and development of their pupils. The purpose of service learning is to inculcate values of service, expose future teachers to the process of service learning, and to help student teachers gain a healthy attitude towards volunteerism and community service. NIE has adopted service learning as a pedagogical tool to provide opportunities for student teachers to reach out to the community (e.g., schools, voluntary welfare organisations, and non-governmental non-profit organisations) and enhance their positive qualities as educators. The service learning programme at NIE, known as Group Endeavours in Service Learning (GESL), was made mandatory across all initial teacher preparation programmes from July 2005 onwards. To

date, more than 15,000 student teachers have participated in NIE's service-learning initiative with over 750 projects conducted since it was introduced.

Three key areas of impact were identified by Shumer et al. (2009) who studied the GESL programme at NIE. Through working in a group, student teachers felt that they developed better group skills such as managing time, setting goals and working toward a common purpose. Student teachers felt they learned how to better function in a group and as a group. Working within a group structure facilitated personal growth where student teachers expressed an improvement in their interpersonal skills, patience, conflict resolution skills, and an ability to manage and execute plans when collaborating with their group and community agencies. Student teachers became better aware of community issues and how students of different backgrounds responded to various teaching and interaction strategies.

GESL has become an indispensable part of the holistic learning journey at NIE for first year student teachers in the initial teacher preparation programmes. Each year, two cohorts approximately totalling 2200 student teachers are paired with 130 NIE academic staff as mentors to take on a service-learning project. Each group has a unique mix of 20 student teachers coming from different backgrounds, subject major, gender, race and age group. The two cohorts begin in January and July respectively, with 9 months to plan, organize and carry out a service-learning project with a partner organization of their choice. Student teachers meet with their assigned staff mentor 2 hours per week to discuss the challenges of group work, planning and implementation of service projects. The groups are encouraged to engage with their partner organization for at least 20 hours face to face to understand their needs and carry out a meaningful project. Staff mentors assess the group based on the process and product of their service learning, plus the group's ability to collaborate as a team, and communicate with the community. A special Service Learning Day is organised by NIE to

celebrate the completion of all service-learning projects and to demonstrate each group's process and product. An exhibition of all projects is held at NIE for this purpose.

Using reading, storytelling, and learning the English language in service learning
The previous section has outlined the objectives, implementation and assessment framework of the entire GESL project. Student teachers work with a diversity of local partner organizations on the service-learning project. The common focal areas include community building and development, environmental conservation, animal welfare, character-building, literacy and education, social welfare, as well as music and art. The beneficiaries include one or more groups, including children and youth, students, disabled, elderly, underprivileged, environment and animals. This section highlights projects where storytelling, reading and learning the English language is used as a primary means by which NIE student teachers made an impact on the local community of their choice. We have kept project names intact, according to how the student teachers named their projects.

Project Bridges
The influx of foreign workers in recent years has contributed to social differences in the social fabric of Singapore. Hoping to address this, a GESL group designed a service-learning project to help a community of foreign construction workers develop communication skills within their new community. The group did this whilst establishing strong academic linkage between their GESL project and teaching pedagogies learned from studies at NIE related to English teaching.

Project Bridges aimed to help foreign workers speak better English, in particular, to master the use of common English language phrases used to express emotions, health and work- related issues and requests. The initiative helped the workers become more independent and more importantly, facilitated better communication with both their superiors and the local community at large.

The group collaborated with Resorts World Sentosa (RWS) Brani Dormitory and non-governmental, non-profit organization, Transient Workers Count Too, to conduct a series of six lessons over 3 weeks. The objectives of the GESL team were:

1) To improve the employability and self-dependence of motivated foreign workers by improving their English language skills.
2) To equip motivated foreign workers with the vocabulary and phrases to express common health and work-related issues.
3) To help their GESL team members to learn more about the concerns of foreign workers living in Singapore.

The lesson content focused on day-to-day conversational English, health and illness, workplace safety and shopping. In every lesson, a Chinese and a Tamil translator were on standby to assist with translations especially when the group encountered new vocabulary and unfamiliar grammatical structures. The lesson planning and implementation provided the group much exposure to designing pedagogies in the teaching of English and in mentoring non-English-speaking learners.

In reconciling the cross-cultural differences in teaching English to the foreign workers, the group utilised verbal and nonverbal communication to demonstrate acceptance, encouragement, support and respect. While working with people who have a different culture and socioeconomic background, they were pushed into uncomfortable situations such as not being able to communicate effectively in the same language, and to empathise with people with a different life histories, values and perspectives. With these differences in mind, a set of lessons were designed to include pictures, gestures, role play and other linguistic cues.

The interaction with foreign workers during the carrying out of English lessons led to the student teachers changing their views about foreign construction workers for the better. Furthermore, the project helped the students explore their own abilities and competencies and in a way, strengthened their skills, thus preparing them better as they embark on a career in teaching.

The content of the lessons was developed based on consultation with the partner organization and pitched at the workers' various levels of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and interpersonal communication skills. Throughout the series of six lessons, team members actively reflected on how the lessons were received and how they could be refined to enhance understanding and effectiveness. The lessons were well received by the transient workers and they expressed confidence in being able to communicate in English during the course of their work.

The group learned that many foreign worker-related issues tended to be derived from a misunderstanding of a different culture, caused in part by the lack of understanding of the English language. This group of student teachers put into practice the pedagogical knowledge and skills they had learned at NIE from Curriculum Studies in English language courses. Curriculum Studies courses in NIE are designed to give student teachers the pedagogical skills in teaching specific subjects in Singapore schools (NIE, 2011). Employed by student teachers during this service-learning activity were techniques known to engage English language learners such as interspersing the lessons with games, role plays and props to arouse and sustain interest. The student teachers were able to practise teaching a subject they specialized in outside the traditional confines of the primary or secondary classroom. Furthermore, the interaction with foreign workers gave the student teachers a platform from which to contribute to better understanding between residents of different countries and cultures living in Singapore. Apart from implementing teaching methods, the student teachers expressed that they learned to be compassionate and exercise social responsibility, a benefit of service learning mentioned by Battistoni (2002).

Save the Pangolins
The goal of this project was to create awareness about endangered animals focusing on one native animal of Singapore—the scaly ant-eater or pangolin. In partnership with a voluntary

welfare organization, Hougang Students Care Service and a non-profit, non-governmental environmental education organization, Cicada Tree Eco-Place, the group designed and carried out lessons on pangolins, with an overarching theme of conservation and respect for the environment. Lessons involved educating children about endangered pangolins by employing storytelling in the English language as a pedagogy. The children from the Hougang Students Care Service were under 10 years of age and had limited ability and interest in English language.

The GESL group wrote and illustrated a delightful story book on a pangolin, called *Perry the Pangolin*. Each child received a copy of the book. In addition to the book, characters of the story were made into manipulatives using cardboard and velcro. Whilst the story was being read, the children were asked to stick the characters mentioned in the story on to a story board, helping them comprehend the story in a fun and meaningful way. In order to reinforce the message of conservation, all materials used together with the story book were made from recycled materials. The activity encouraged the children to take an active interest in the story and participate in the storytelling. By inviting children to interact, answer questions, and listen to diverse opinions from their peers, social learning was facilitated.

The student teachers gained a better understanding of the effect of a learner's background on the teaching and learning of the English Language. Also, the student teachers learned the importance of understanding children's perspectives. The creation of a story board and characters based on the story which could be manipulated by the children catered to both kinaesthetic and visual learners, helping all children to enjoy the story and comprehend it no matter how able they were with English (Gort et al., 2011).

The children thoroughly enjoyed themselves and the partner organization complimented the team on its effectiveness. Essential skills such as comprehension and effective communication were developed. Whilst the student teachers worked as a team, they

came to understand their strengths and weaknesses as individuals as well as a group and the spontaneous offering of a helping hand to any group member who needed assistance. More importantly, they had a chance to link what they had learnt in their English Language Curriculum Studies courses and use the pedagogical knowledge and skills gleaned to increase animal conservation awareness amongst children. The story book was given to the Students Care Service so that the organization may continue to reinforce learning from the story to increase the children's interest in reading and gradually build their self-confidence.

I Spark, You Read Reading Programme

This project team partnered with the Singapore Anglican Community Services - Family Care Centre to implement an activity called *I Spark, You Read*. The aim was to cultivate reading interest and develop mastery of reading during a child's formative years (between 5 to 10 years old). The instructional pedagogies learned by the team members at NIE were put into use to benefit the children of the centre. Students specializing in the English Language as a teaching subject were tasked to prepare a reading package to encourage the children to read. The reading package designed by the team was adapted from Singapore's Strategies for English Language Learning and Reading programme, also known as the STELLAR programme.[1] In addition, the logistics team aided in refurbishing the library of the centre and assisted in creating a shelving system to improve accessibility to books. The group also managed to procure children's story books from the National Library Board (NLB) and worked with the children to sort these into subject categories.

The revamping of the library and development of the reading package were done in preparation for the reading festival and drama competition. The group interviewed the centre's officers to have a better understanding of the children, specifically their literacy level, and background. Books procured from NLB and the centre's existing library were

sorted according to difficulty level (easy, medium and hard) to cater to different learners'

background. Twenty books were then selected for the development of a reading package.

The programme comprised six sessions of 2 hours each involving pre-reading, reading

and post-reading activities. Each session started off with a Shared Book Reading (SBR)

session where children enjoyed four new meaningful and entertaining stories. It was followed

by two sessions where children improvised scripts based on a story they read in the previous

sessions, made costumes and rehearsed the story. Shared reading allows for greater

interaction and helps leaners to deepen their understanding of themselves as users of multiple

texts. The children at the centre actively listened, and joined the reading as they became more

familiar with the words and concepts. The student teachers established rapport with the

children and provided support to help them enjoy reading. Through the close interaction with

the children, the team obtained insights into their family problems. As such, the group

learned to develop a better understanding of the children.

A drama competition was held for the children as a post-reading activity to

summarize what they had learned in the stories. The children had to compose their own story

and share this through role play. To ensure sustainability of the project, the GESL team

transferred the knowledge on how to deliver SBR to the centre staff.

The project provided an opportunity for the group to gain different perspectives on

children and develop a stronger sense of self. Interactions with the children gave the team a

glimpse of family problems that some of their future students may face and gave them good

practice on how to manage feelings and behaviours. Having had a chance to practise teaching

using the strategies gleaned from their Curriculum Studies course in English language

teaching, the group learned that children love storytelling and had great thirst for learning.

Discussion and conclusion

In the last 7 years since NIE was established 60 years ago, service learning has been added to serve as a framework within which to understand the linkage between teaching and learning in higher education classrooms and the local community. Linking back to the literature on the benefits of service learning in teacher education programmes, the projects highlighted hereshow the clear links between teaching and community building (Shore, 1999). The three projects show the close and integral relationship between the theoretical Curriculum Studies course on English anguage teaching held on campus and the opportunity to practise teaching in a situation that is outside the traditional clinical field experience offered during the practicum posting in schools. Importantly, the theory-practice nexus has also been tightened through service learning. Using English language teaching to benefit the community also allows student teachers to see a role bigger than just the teacher of English in traditional classrooms. Instead, the English language teacher can also make a difference in improving the lives of the community at large. These projects bring home the message advocated by Claus and Ogden (1999) that service learning can broaden and enrich teachers' experience of working with diversity, seen in the work they were doing with the different partner organizations they had chosen to work with, thus increasing the community's potential to be a more powerful ground for learning.

Secondly, and very importantly, meaningful service learning can foster in-depth understanding of the need for social and educational empowerment as mentioned by Eyler and Giles (1999). In the case of teaching foreign workers basic English as a way of helping them achieve better communication with their superiors and the community at large, the example of educational empowerment is demonstrated clearly. This is because the knowledge of basic English helps these foreign workers to integrate with the community within which they live and work. Social integration then becomes the longer term goal achieved.

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Next, a strong partnership between the student teachers and the local community they serve has also been built and this is also upheld as a key benefit of service learning as mentioned by Freeman and Swick (2000). As seen from the sample exemplary projects, the success of each activity lies in a well-directed and robust relationship between the parties involved. However, service learning is a process and every project and experience is unique for each student teacher. To be able to maximize the value and benefits of the service learning process makes all the difference.

In its pledge to produce well-rounded individuals, service learning through GESL is Singapore's commitment to nurturing teachers who are capable of becoming creative thinkers, lifelong learners, and active and concerned citizens. It is only when teachers themselves possess such 21st century competencies that they can also similarly help their pupils to be equipped to face the demands of the 21st century global workplace. Also mentioned in this paper are the learner-centred values of the V^3SK model, many of which can best be nurtured through learning from community engagement.

While service learning has evolved, taking on new paradigms to adapt to 21st century needs, it persists in being a powerful means to promote citizenry and moral education of youth. Feedback from student teachers highlighted that the service learning experiences at NIE were itself a reward. Student teachers felt better prepared to face challenges and handle uncertainties (Ch'ng et al., 2009). Most found that they have improved people and communication skills and were better able to work as a team. Community engagement fostered greater appreciation of the community and student teachers were delighted to be able to make a difference. The reciprocal effect of service learning has been expounded by Anderson (2000) and we end this paper with the powerful vision we embrace within the service learning component of our pre-service programmes, which is to allow our student teachers to "Learn to Serve" and in that process, to "Learn from Service".

Note
[1]Fully implemented in 2010, STELLAR aims to strengthen both language and reading skills as well as promote a positive attitude towards reading in the foundational years through the use of engaging and age-appropriate instructional materials (Speech By Mr S Iswaran, Senior Minister of State, Ministry of Trade and Industry and Ministry of Education, at the Opening Ceremony of the Inaugural APEC-RELC International Seminar held on Monday, 19 April 2010).

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