

Project Title : Cross-institutional Capacity Building for Service-Learning in Hong Kong Higher Education Institutions

Leading University : The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Participating UGC-funded University(ies) : Hong Kong Baptist University, Lingnan University, The Education University of Hong Kong

Project Leader(s) : Dr Grace NGAI, Associate Professor, Department of Computing; Associate Head, Office of Service-Learning, The Hong Kong Polytechnic University

Summary of Proposal

We propose a cross-institutional project with the objective of supporting and promoting service-learning (SL) in Hong Kong universities, which has been found by research as a high-impact educational practice to nurture holistic student development, especially in the intangible aspects of social responsibility.

Although SL has been integrated into many Hong Kong universities to some degree (either in the form of a curricular graduation requirement or community service hours requirement), there are still some major challenges in its implementation. Academic SL that integrates academic learning with community service is relatively new to most faculty and there is still much misunderstanding among staff about its nature and methodologies. Most of the teachers who are involved in SL have not received any systematic training in SL pedagogy. While Hong Kong undoubtedly has its “stars” in SL, this expertise is mainly confined to isolated pockets. There is limited collaboration or sharing of expertise among the institutions. This has a negative impact on student learning experience, which is especially serious in SL, since it incorporates experiential and reflective aspects that make teaching these courses a bigger challenge than conventional classroom-based teaching. Studies we have conducted suggest that ill-conceived and implemented SL programmes may cause harm, both to the service recipients as well as to the students.

We therefore propose a multifaceted approach that will fill in the gaps and build up capacity in SL in Hong Kong universities. Our core deliverable is a mixed-mode staff development programme for teachers. To support teachers in offering SL classes, we

propose to develop also an eLearning module for students, a bank of assessment tools, and a database of exemplars of good SL practices for reference. To share expertise among the institutions, and to promote further inter-institutional collaboration, we will initiate cross-institutional SL projects/subjects. To promote an evidence-based, critically reflective approach to teaching, we propose a programme to support colleagues in action research projects that will lead to improvement in their SL subjects. Finally, we will create a cross-institutional Community of Practice that will sustain and spread these efforts among colleagues, and foster increased inter-institutional collaboration.

We believe that this project will result in increased capacity in SL and increased inter-institutional collaboration in Hong Kong's higher education institutions, learning to more rigorous SL subjects or projects that will help develop our students into productive and socially responsible members of society. It will also help establish Hong Kong's emerging position as a leader in SL in Asia.

Summary of Final Report

This cross-institutional project aims to enhance and support the development of SL as an effective pedagogical strategy at the participating UGC-funded institutions and beyond through a multi-faceted approach.

The project successfully completed in November 2021 with the following fruitful achievements:

- Developed and offered an e-Learning module for SL teachers and practitioners on teaching concepts, pedagogical knowledge and skills of SL.
- Organised teacher development courses in four consecutive years to offer teaching training to 92 participants from various local and offshore institutions who are interested in developing and teaching SL courses at higher education institutions.
- Developed an SL e-resource platform comprising
 - an e-Learning module for students that enrolled 7 345 students from the participating institutions;
 - a bank of tools for teachers to assess the impacts of SL on students and the community; and

- a database of 16 bilingual exemplars of good practice that focuses on various themes in SL, and are documented online for reference.
- Piloted and implemented four collaborative SL subjects and projects that facilitates peer learning and collaboration between colleagues in the participating institutions.
- Supported 12 action research projects with grants to promote an evidence-based, critically reflective approach to teaching SL.
- Built up a CoP on SL with a membership of 340 SL academic and practitioners to promote sharing of experience in the UGC-funded institutions and beyond, and organised workshops/seminars, symposia for staff and students respectively, details of the events organised are shown as follows:
 - 33 workshops/seminars were organised and attended by 1 963 from UGC-funded institutions and beyond;
 - 83 participants from eight local tertiary institutions participated in the staff symposium;
 - 34 students from nine local institutions attended in the student symposium; and
 - participants had positive views about the workshops/seminars and symposia
- Conducted a qualitative study on teachers' practices of assessing students in SL and an exploratory study to identify SL teachers' perceptions of the challenges towards assessing an SL subject with scholarly outputs.
- Carried out a systematic compilation and review of literature about service-learning in Hong Kong.
- Generated and disseminated quite a number of scholarly outputs from the project; and
- To publish a book entitled *Service-Learning Capacity Enhancement in Hong Kong Higher Education* (publisher: Springer).

To conclude, throughout the entire project period, the whole project team had worked together to enhance the capacity of the participating institutions and beyond in developing and implementing academically rigorous, highly rewarding SL subjects and projects, and to promote sharing of experience as well as encouraging conducting research in SL with close collaboration.