

## Proposal for a Paper Presentation

### Reflective Teaching in Service-Learning to improve academic connection in a Chinese Literary module

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#### Abstract:

#### 1. Introduction

In response to Ngee Ann Polytechnic's adoption of Service-Learning (S-L) as a signature pedagogy in 2016 in which all students were to do at least one S-L module during their course, the lecturer teaching *Modern Chinese Literature* in the Diploma in Chinese Studies (CHS) at the School of Humanities & Social Sciences (HMS) took up the challenge to design S-L activities for the module.

Reflective teaching in terms of gaining feedback from students in the October 2017 semester, analyzing how the S-L module was taught and how the practice might be improved or changed was carried out to enhance the next run of the module in April 2018 semester.

#### 2. Theoretical framework/literature review

Research on S-L has typically been studied in colleges and universities as a separate course with a focus on S-L (Anderson, Swick, & Yff, 2001) or as strategy for teaching academic concepts in disciplines such as education (Chen, 2004), and nursing (Romack, 2004). The study of academic S-L within a Chinese literary module in a polytechnic setting in Singapore is less investigated.

Further, research has supported the positive impact of S-L on civic, social, and academic learning (Billig et al., 2005). It has been suggested that in order to achieve academic outcomes such as a better and deeper understanding of course content, it is necessary to be intentional about students' reflections on their S-L experiences (Knight-McKenna et al., 2011). However, the effort to

integrate S-L with literature can be problematic and challenging (Grobman, 2005) in the first place. Indeed, selecting suitable S-L community partner and S-L project that would allow students to see the link between the project and the academic contents taught in *Modern Chinese Literature* proved to be extra arduous with students giving feedback during the October 2017 semester that the academic connection to the project was remote.

Part of a wider study on the impact of S-L with structured reflections on civic outcomes, academic connection and personal growth in polytechnic students, this study focuses on the academic connection aspect of S-L and aims to examine a) how well students perceive academic connection in a S-L Chinese literary module in two consecutive runs of the module; b) how academic connection might be strengthened. Data analysis from October 2017 informed the teaching and practice for the April 2018 run of the module. Both sets of data were analysed for comparison.

### 3. Methods/analysis

*Participants:* Year 2 students taking the module *Modern Chinese Literature* in October 2017 and April 2018 semesters were invited to complete a post S-L survey at the end of their semester. The response rate for the 2017 cohort was 100% (29 students) while that for the 2018 cohort was 82% (32/39). The mean ages of the participants in October 2017 and April 2018 cohorts were 19 (SD=1.25) and 18.5 (SD=1.32) respectively and a majority of them were female (82.8% in the 2017 cohort, and 75% in the 2018 cohort).

*S-L Project:* The students worked with community partners such as the public libraries and a Chinese-based literary association. Students formed groups to either conduct four or five children's storybook reading sessions at public libraries (with one session at the site of the Chinese literary association) or write feature reports for potential publication in newspapers or the association's magazine.

*Research Design:* This study consists of observations of mean scores for academic connection from the 2017 and 2018 cohorts, and comparison of these mean scores vis-a-vis mean scores in S-L design and delivery features such as students' Perceived preparedness for S-L, Perceived quality of reflection prompts and Perceived impact of S-L.

*Instrument:* The survey consists of four items that measured academic connection (e.g., "This S-L experience helped me to learn the academic content of the module.") and uses a five-point Likert scale, with (1) *Strongly Disagree* to (5) *Strongly Agree*. The measure was adapted from relevant scale items in the literature (e.g., Aselage, 2005) and has high internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha = .90. The 14 items that measured S-L design and delivery features include: (a) three items on Perceived preparedness for S-L (e.g., "Before the S-L project/activities/ideas, I understood the purpose and objective of S-L in this module."); (b) four items on Perceived impact of S-L (e.g., "In this S-L experience, I had opportunities to make a meaningful contribution to the community."); and (c) seven items on Perceived quality of reflection prompts

(e.g., “The reflection questions were structured with clear directions and guidelines.”). The measures have high internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .72 to .94.

*Reflective Teaching practices:* Following analysis of the data collected from the wider study that found a significant correlation between academic connection and three S-L design and delivery features such as perceived preparedness for S-L, impact of S-L and quality of reflection prompts (Choo et al., 2018), and qualitative feedback from the 2017 cohort that they do not see a link between the S-L project of reading session to children and the seemingly profound contents in *Modern Chinese Literature*, the lecturer made the following changes for the 2018 cohort: (a) explicit description of the purpose and objective of the S-L project, using concept maps and illustrative examples to show how academic contents of *Modern Chinese Literature* are related to the role and function of the community partners and the storybook reading sessions (Perceived Preparedness for S-L) (b) included a field visit to the Chinese literary association in which students learnt of the challenges faced by the association and how promoting the Chinese language might revive interest in Chinese literature (Perceived impact of S-L); and (c) explicit explanation of the reflection prompts during class, and providing additional reference materials (Perceived quality of reflection prompts).

*Data Analysis:* The comparison of Academic Connection mean scores for the two groups were analysed using independent samples t-test to see if students from the 2018 cohort (who were given more explicit preparation and guidance) was significantly greater than that of 2017 cohort. The mean scores of Perceived preparedness for S-L, Perceived impact of S-L and Perceived quality of reflection prompts for the two cohorts were also analysed for comparison.

#### 4. Results and Discussion

Independent samples t-test revealed that academic connection mean score for the 2018 cohort (Mean=3.99, SD=0.53) was significantly greater than that of the 2017 cohort, (Mean=3.59, SD=0.97,  $t(59)=2.05$ ,  $p<.05$ ) which suggests a stronger perception of a link between the S-L project and academic contents for the latter cohort.

Also, the 2018 cohort of students reported a higher mean score than the 2017 cohort for (a) Perceived preparedness for S-L (Mean<sub>2018</sub> = 4.06, SD=0.58 vs Mean<sub>2017</sub>=3.83, SD=0.80); (b) Perceived impact of S-L (Mean<sub>2018</sub> = 4.23, SD=0.57 vs Mean<sub>2017</sub> = 4.14, SD= 0.61) ; and (c) Perceived quality of reflection prompts (Mean<sub>2018</sub> = 4.07, SD=0.65 vs Mean<sub>2017</sub> = 3.99, SD= 0.70) although the differences were not statistically significant.

The results that show higher mean scores for the variables in the 2018 cohort than those of the 2017 cohort were in the direction that may reflect improvement in the implementation of the S-L module. Speculatively, the improvement was the basis of the higher scores. Bringle and Hatcher (1995) have pointed out that it takes several offerings of a S-L course for it to stabilize (e.g., instructor confidence, community partner’s familiarity, improvement of reflection activities); our findings suggest that faculty development does not end after a S-L module has been designed and implemented. Rather, there is always room for improvement in the next run of the module.

## 5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

The scholarship of teaching and learning requires that lecturers practise reflective teaching in the S-L pedagogy. Through carefully and critically examining one's own practices and improving them, the promise of the S-L pedagogy can be better achieved and sustained (Butin, 2006). This is especially so for courses in which the academic contents and the S-L project might not seem a perfect fit. Improving one's teaching and learning practices in terms of enhancing students' preparedness for S-L, their perception of the impact of the S-L project through field visit and interaction with the community partner and closer guidance on the reflection prompts may be ways in which reflective lecturers could strengthen students' perception of academic connection.

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**Keywords:** Reflective teaching, Service-Learning pedagogy, Academic connection, Modern Chinese Literature (up to 5)

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## Biographical sketch of each presenter

Please send the biographical sketch of the presenters together with the proposal using the following format:

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