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Supporting learning and teaching

The Impact of Work Based Learning on Students' Understanding of Citizenship and their Role in the Community

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Report 4

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The Impact of Work Based Learning on Students' Understanding of Citizenship and their Role in the Community

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The Higher Education Academy Social Policy and Social Work (SWAP)

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SWAP funded projects 2005-2006

In 2005 SWAP funded eight projects in social policy and social work education designed to promote the use of effective learning, teaching and assessment activities; to encourage the development and sharing of innovative approaches and to raise awareness of the importance of evaluating the effectiveness of educational methods. The following is the final report *The Impact of Work Based Learning on Students' Understanding of Citizenship and their Role in the Community.*

Introduction

Aim

This project seeks to investigate the impact of work based learning upon the way that students view their roles in the community. Students on an existing module entitled *Social Policy Work Experience* were offered a range of voluntary work opportunities and were asked to reflect upon their experiences in a structured diary. These reflections cover their insights into working in the voluntary sector, their appreciation of their own skills/ development and how they view their roles as citizens. In conducting this project, we were primarily interested in examining whether the experience of voluntary work in the community had any appreciable effect upon the way that students view their roles and responsibilities in the community.

The project contributes to an ongoing attempt within Sheffield Hallam University to achieve a better appreciation of the different forms of assessment where active learning is a central feature, especially relating to the experiences of students working in the voluntary and community sector.

The *Social Policy Work Experience* Module

The *Social Policy Work Experience* module was set up in 2000 at Sheffield Hallam University. Working closely with Hallam Volunteers, an organisation developed by the Sheffield Hallam University Students' Union, students have gained work experience on a variety of projects including work with youth, the refugee community, the elderly and with people with disabilities. There is also the opportunity for students to find their own work experience or to use their existing work as a foundation for their assessment. We have had students, for example, who have worked for the Citizens Advice Bureau, Social Services, Police Force and for a variety of community regeneration initiatives.

The Participants

The current project followed ten students as they embarked upon their work in the community and reflected on their experiences. The students were paid a small fee for participating in the project and, for the purposes of this report, have been assigned a number to conceal their identity. The table below shows the nature of their work experience:

Student	The nature of their work experience
1.	Learning mentor
2.	Police officer in Special Constabulary
3.	Shadowing case worker in Social Services
4.	Organiser of sporting event for children
5.	Organiser of Christmas party for children
6.	Youth worker
7.	Mentor with crime reduction unit
8.	Environmental education worker
9.	Environmental education worker
10.	Gardener in NHS grounds

Monitoring their development

In order to monitor how the students evaluated the impact of their work experience, they were asked to take part in three activities:

1. The Reflective Diary: The students were asked to keep a reflective diary (see Appendix One). This diary was divided into three main sections:

> **Section A:** This is a small questionnaire that should be completed at the beginning of the module. This questionnaire asked students to consider their responsibilities towards the community and their views on different types of citizenship.
>
> **Section B:** This is a structured guide for activities and reflections, which the students were asked to complete after each visit to their work. This guide mirrored the individual sections of the assignment.
>
> **Section C:** This is a repeat of the questionnaire contained in Section A. It is believed that asking the students to repeat this task could identify whether the students have altered their views on citizenship and their roles in the community.

2. The Focus Group: In the early stages of semester two, the students were asked to participate in a focus group to discuss their experiences and to share their insights with other members of the group. This focus group was structured by using Section B of the reflective diary. The aim was to make the focus group relevant to completing the diary and preparing for the assignment.

3. The Assignment: This comprises one 4000 word report (see Appendix Two) in which the students were asked to provide an overview of the project, a description of the main roles undertaken, a link to Social Policy issues and a reflective account of the work experience. In the reflective account, students were invited to discuss how their skills developed and to assess the impact of their work experience on the way they view their own roles in the community.

Taken together, these activities provided the authors of the report with a range of material to examine the impact of work based learning on the way that students view their roles and responsibilities in the community.

The implications for teaching and learning

The authors argue that the structures developed for this module (and evaluated in this report) can be used as part of initiatives to:

- Enhance the employability of students
- Encourage students to reflect upon their social functions
- Provide ways for students to make connections between their own academic work and the world of work
- Contribute towards the student's Personal Development Portfolio
- Encourage the development of active learning and reflective practice

"The voluntary sector is important because it provides services for groups of people and communities who would find it hard to get help elsewhere Volunteering can build character and self esteem"

" Volunteering for me allowed me to give something back to society"

Sociological and social policy context as outlined in a *Social Policy Work Experience Module*

The students enrolled upon the *Social Policy Work Experience Module* are involved with a wide range of volunteering and community sector work. Their roles are different and their experiences have all been different. The module, in part, wanted to provide an opportunity for students to engage with this wide variety of voluntary and community sector work and to be able to position and locate this experience within a wider and critical social and political context.

In this section the report takes a closer look at the nature of the voluntary sector, the role of government funding, definitions, boundaries and typologies of the voluntary sector, the diversity of the voluntary sector and some of the reflections made by students on the work experience module. The analysis of the student reflections is, unfortunately, only provisional and a more detailed analysis will take place at a later stage. However, this section reports on some preliminary and initial themes that have emerged from the data.

The nature of the voluntary sector

Since at least the early part of the twentieth century, the British State has performed a central role in identifying and providing for many of the welfare needs of its citizens and their communities. However, since the 1980s, this relationship between the state and its citizens has been changing in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The job of the state is shifting, in particular with regard to its role in welfare. Crucial to this change has been the introduction of market principles into many of our public services, in conjunction with the encouragement of a 'mixed economy' of provision. It was part of the ideological commitment of the post-1979 Conservative administrations to contain, if not reduce, the role of the state and to encourage the market, voluntary and community sector, and the family in welfare provision. Under the Tory governments of the 1980s and 90s, the voluntary and community sector in particular had been expected to play an increasingly active role in the development and delivery of welfare services. However, this trend has continued under the New Labour administration since 1997 where there has been a mainstreaming of the British third sector in public policy debates.

One of the key lectures/workshops that are first offered to the students in the *Social Policy Work Experience* module focuses upon the way in which the voluntary sector means different things to different people. We show how some writers who are interested in voluntary sector studies are very demanding and exclusive in their definition of what does and does not consist as the voluntary sector. Others, however, use the term much more loosely. Salamon and Anheier (noting the international trend to expand voluntary sector operations) comment that:

> *The increased expectations now being directed to this 'third sector' are not based on a very clear understanding of the nature of this sector or what its capabilities really are. Indeed, there is little agreement even about the existence, let alone the precise contours, of a definable 'third sector' occupying a distinctive social space outside both the market and the state. (Salamon and Anheier, 1995: 71)*

As shown in Figure 1, in order to increase knowledge about the emerging sector across a range of countries, Salamon and Anheier have developed seven criteria which define a non-profit organisation.

Figure 1.

1. An organisation has to be a **formal** organisation of some sort. This therefore excludes informal and temporary gatherings of people together with *ad hoc* family and friendship activities.

2. An organisation has to be **private** in the sense that it is institutionally separate from government.

3. An organisation has to be **non-profit distributing** so that any profits generated by activity are not returned to the owners or directors.

4. An organisation has to be **self-governing**. It controls its own activities with its own internal procedures for governance.

5. An organisation has to have a meaningful degree of **voluntary** participation either in the conduct of its activities or in the management of its affairs.

6. The organisation has to be **non-religious** to the extent that it cannot be primarily involved in the promotion of religious worship or religious education, (although religiously affiliated non-profit service organisations can be included in the definition.)

7. The organisations have to be **non-political**. Organisations that engage in advocacy activity to change government policies on particular topics are included, but political parties and organisations devoted principally to getting people elected to public office are not.

Exploring the role of government funding

One of the main arguments in the literature on defining the voluntary sector is that whatever their remit and purpose, voluntary agencies are (ideally) autonomous representatives of the community. However, what is meant by voluntary sector independence? This is something we want the students on this module to explore. Stated in simple terms, it has been suggested that voluntary and community sector activity should be independent of statutory control. William Beveridge, for example, defined voluntary action as 'private action that is to say not under the direction of any authority wielding the

power of the state' (1948). However, we explore with the students how a number of writers doubt that it is possible to draw up a valid picture of voluntary sector independence, especially given the context of increasing state funding.

It is argued by some that this concentration on organisational autonomy appears to be more a counsel of perfection than a description of voluntary sector practice. Is it an exaggeration to claim that the voluntary sector is independent? Does the focus on independence fail to recognise the many pressures that have been placed on the sector in the post-war period?

For most critical contributors to the debate, the voluntary sector has, over the past fifty years or so, confronted a set of demands that have raised serious issues about the continued existence of voluntary sector organisations as independent, innovative agencies in society. Foremost among these concerns is the increasingly close working relationship between voluntary sector organisations and statutory sector authorities − and in particular, the way in which the voluntary sector can be constrained when money is received from state agencies. With the decline of other sources of income, statutory subsidies have become increasingly important for the survival of voluntary welfare. Consequently, with the advent of more public funding, voluntary agencies are having to accept − to a lesser or greater extent − regulated limits to their freedom.

In many cases, the areas of work in which voluntary groups are engaged have been dictated by the existence, or otherwise, of state funding and as a consequence, it is argued that voluntary groups may risk losing their political and economic independence. For example, Nowland-Foreman regards funding, whether from public or private sources, as the 'Achilles' heel' of voluntary sector organisations. He points out that voluntary organisations in Australia and New Zealand have increasingly been forced to turn to governments for funding and it is apparent that governments have − over the past fifty years or so − had to rely upon voluntary agencies to provide social services (Nowland-Foreman, 1988).

In economic terms the Third Sector in 2001 had an income of over £15 billion, an asset base of £74 billion and a paid workforce of over 500,000 (Wilding, 2002). In the United Kingdom, Kendall and Knapp (1994) show that a greater than ever share of the income of many voluntary agencies comes from carrying out work under service-provision contracts for local authorities, health authorities and other government departments. Government funding has been a crucial feature of the resource base and organisational structure of many voluntary sector organisations. This is especially evident with smaller community-based groups that are heavily dependent on local authority grants. The proportion of income that the voluntary sector receives from the public sector is between 35−40 per cent.

In sum, although there are problems in defining the 'voluntary sector', the definition used throughout this paper is one that a recent report of the voluntary sector adopted, the essence of which:

> *is that the actions taken by voluntary and community organisations are contributions made neither commercially nor compulsorily and are for public benefit (Commission on the Future of the Voluntary Sector, 1996).*

Boundaries of the voluntary sector

The Commission report, from which the above definition is taken, identifies the model shown in Figure 2, which illustrates the space within which the sector operates. This model allows a dynamic interpretation of the range of activities carried out by the voluntary sector. It recognises three important divisions within society - the state, the market, and the informal sector of personal and family relations. Within this triangular model, there is a public space, inside which voluntary organisations exist and work. The voluntary sector has an active role. Some organisations will fill gaps in services and some will challenge values and practices; others do both and more. Voluntary agencies can act as brokers and links between the market, the state and personal and family relationships, with some being closer to the market or the state, and others being closer to the informal sphere. The voluntary sector interacts with informal relationships, the state and the market.

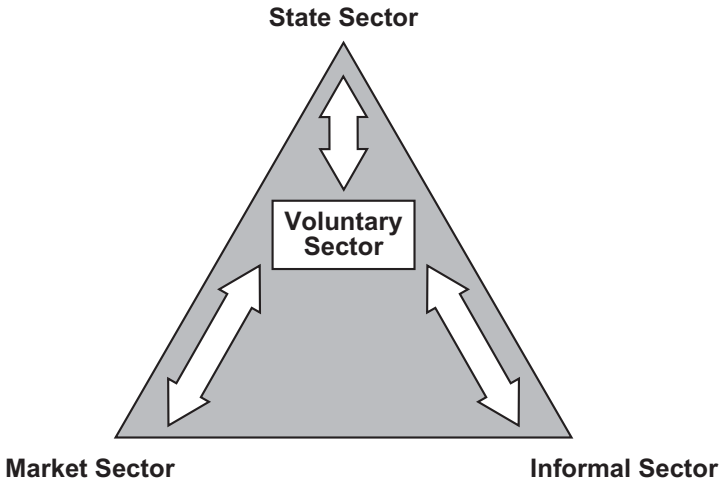

Figure 2 (Source: Commission on the Future of the Voluntary Sector, 1996)

According to one account, the voluntary sector that inhabits this central public space covers a huge range of activities and is indeed “a huge and baggy monster” (Kendall and Knapp, 1994). It is also blurred at the boundaries as it approaches the other sectors. At the boundary with the state sector there are organisations which have been set up largely in response to the decisions of public authorities -- where there may be statutory personnel involved in governance. These organisations may be non-profit distributing but have no meaningful volunteer involvement.

At the boundary between the voluntary sector and the market are organisations that are able to make and distribute profits to owners but which have a strong service ethic in which the quality of service is more significant than the maximising of profit. Owners may sometimes make little money out of such ventures. A number of small private residential care establishments may come into this category, which may rely on voluntary contributions of unpaid labour from friends and family.

At the boundary with the informal sector there is a continuum of activities from the personal activity of unpaid labour within the home, to friendship networks and social events, through to more formal activities such as participating in self help groups or campaigning committees. It is at this point that activity becomes a visible part of the voluntary and community sector. An example of the boundary between formal and informal activity in home support is given in Gordon's account of a good neighbour scheme where volunteers provided help with shopping, befriending and respite care. She suggests that the hallmark of success is when these relationships between volunteer and client are continued without reference to the formal scheme in the "true reciprocity of friendship" (Gordon, 1984: 139). This scheme therefore actively seeks to encourage the crossing over of the boundary between the informal sectors of friendship with the formal sector of organised care.

This continuum of activity from the informal sector to the voluntary and non-profit sector moves from this fuzzy boundary of kinship and neighbourhoods to independently run local groups, then into professionally run volunteer-using organisations. At the more formal and professional end of this continuum is the large professional non-profit organisation which might provide different services to a local authority or a private company. Chanan (1991), commenting on this continuum of voluntary activity from the informal to the established organisations, points out those common descriptions of the voluntary sector underestimate the deep well of community involvement.

The triangular model of the voluntary sector space therefore may not fully take into account the deep roots that voluntary action has with the informal sector. Many well established voluntary agencies that are now clearly in the mainstream of publicly recognised voluntary sector activity (e.g. Mind, Arthritis Care, Alzheimer's Disease Society) began with individuals needing to work together to meet their own needs and to raise the profile of problems they were facing.

The emphasis on service provision underplays the state's function of guaranteeing the encouragement and maintenance of collective association. Lewis (1996), in his discussion of the "virtuous triangle" of the individual, state, and community, considers that the community aspect has been too long ignored by the political system. A look at the distribution of **funds** within the voluntary sector also draws a distinction between the service provision part of the voluntary sector and the other less established community activity that is not focused on services. In England, less than 10 per cent of charities receive over 90 per cent of the total voluntary sector income. This means that a large number of organisations get little or no funds whilst the larger established organisations that may have less involvement of volunteers in any meaningful way have the lion's share of the income.

The official figures on funding of the voluntary sector are also distorted by large payments to housing associations, which in England account for over 80 per cent of central government funding for voluntary agencies.

The international study of the broad non-profit sector notes that only 10 per cent of non-profit income throughout the seven countries in the study was comprised of private donations. Nearly half of non-profit income came from fees and sales, with the rest being provided through the public sector. Although there are variations, the study concludes that in almost every country and in every service field, the public sector has emerged as a major source of non-profit finance (Salamon and Anheier, 1995).

This funding pattern reflects the policy shift away from publicly provided services by welfare states to a sharing of tasks between the state and the non-profit sector. However, it is mainly large, well-established organisations that are likely to take advantage of these partnership arrangements leaving the vast number of smaller charities and organisations with a very small percentage of the funding. There is therefore a whole raft of voluntary activity that is not based on providing services but nonetheless forms an important part of the social fabric of the country. These organisations may be self-help, campaigning or advocacy groups and they may enable people to meet their own needs without a direct service-providing function.

The diversity of the voluntary sector

Turning from definitions to classifications, it is clear that the British voluntary sector is extremely diverse. For example, it can involve small, local community groups as well as nationally recognised organisations; it can include organisations involved in the fields of religion, education, health care, social welfare, arts and culture, as well as professional and other groups. To help us understand the extent of organised voluntary action in the United Kingdom, social policy analysts and voluntary sector commentators have found it useful to attempt a classification according to organisational purpose. It is not intended here to undertake a critical discussion of the various typologies that have been offered; it is sufficient for our purposes to synthesise several of these approaches. These organisations can be categorised as follows.

1. There are those voluntary organisations that **provide a service**. These may be direct services to people such as domiciliary care, information and advice giving such as Citizen's Advice Bureau, and law centres, as well as environmental activities such as canal cleaning or preserving buildings. This is what William Beveridge called philanthropy in his major works on Voluntary Action.

2. **Mutual aid or self-help** is the other function identified by Beveridge. This covers a wide range of self-help activities where there is no boundary between those who help and those who are helped. This would include such activities as support groups for those involved with caring for elderly and disabled people, and identity groups based around support for minority groups to do with race, sexual orientation and gender.

3. There is a **campaigning and policy advocacy** function. This pressure group activity involves the marshalling of information around some particular cause or group interest with the aim of achieving

change through direct action and lobbying. Animal rights groups, MIND, Child Poverty Action Group and Oxfam are examples of these.

4. The **individual advocacy** function is where a case is prepared on behalf of individuals to receive services. This is particularly significant in the field of health and social service and has been given prominence with the community care reforms emphasis on the need to develop user and carer perspectives on services. Organisations such as Citizens Advocacy, Mind and the various local user groups fit into this category.

5. There is the **resource and co-ordinating** function, which involves what Knight refers to as the mobilising function such as fund raising, and volunteer recruiting. It also includes the umbrella organisations at national and local level such as Councils of Voluntary Service, Rural Development Councils, Charities Aid Foundation and the National Council for Voluntary Organisations. They co-ordinate and support voluntary agencies, provide specialist expertise, and act as representatives for voluntary agencies in dealings with statutory authorities. The Wolfenden report on the future of Voluntary Organisations advocated an increased development of the co-ordinating functions of these intermediary bodies as a way of developing the role of the sector.

6. A final function outlined by Knight (1993) is that of **'creating'**. For this function, there is no necessary client, nor targeted poverty, nor any specific need but is often focused on leisure activities. Dance, drama, music, education, festivals or art are common forms of this expression of community.

Although this typology provides a way of categorising the variety of voluntary sector organisations, these functions should not be seen as mutually exclusive. It should be appreciated that any individual voluntary sector organisation might be involved in several of these activities at any one time. Indeed, according to one account, there is often 'a lot of overlap' between the functions, especially in the areas of service and advocacy (Handy, 1990:1).

Student reflections and comments on their voluntary and community sector work

So far this section has provided a brief outline of the literature that we explored with the students in the front-loaded lecture/workshops that took place in the work experience module. The tutors set out to delineate the sociological and social policy context for voluntary and community sector work in the UK. In addition, they examined how the sector relates in particular to the notion of citizenship.

At this point we review briefly some of the student's perspectives and reflections on their understanding of the role of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS).

Many of the students made reference in their reflections to the important role that the VCS plays in British society, in particular to the view that the sector carries out tasks which meet the targets set by central government policy and initiatives:

> *The voluntary sector is important because it provides services for groups of people and communities who would find it hard to get help elsewhere (Student 1).*

A number of the students pointed to the important role that the sector plays in terms of the economy:

> *The voluntary sector is incredibly important in society today, this is shown by the sheer size of it ....estimated that they are roughly 170,000 charities and … 300,000 voluntary organisations in England and Wales (Student 10).*

Some of the students suggested that the VCS reduces the need for statuary services:

> *The strengths of the voluntary sector are that it fills a gap in the market and help those in need (Student 7).*

Some of the students recognised the difficulty that many small and medium size voluntary and community groups face in raising funding to support their work:

> *[Organisations like the NSPCC require] the support and efforts of volunteers in order for them to survive and without the support volunteers, many of these types of organisations would not exist (Student 8).*

It was interesting to note that only one of the students commented upon the patchy nature of VCS provision. Similarly, only two of the students pointed out that the financial resources available to the voluntary sector are not sufficient to deal with the social problems that are faced by British society today.

A number of the students either commented directly or alluded to the view that the VCS encouraged participation in society. The VCS provided opportunities for people to have some part in decision-making, thereby democratising the ways in which services are planned and delivered at a local level. Students point to some of the perceived benefits that volunteering can bring to society and to the individual volunteer:

> *Volunteering can build character and self esteem, and is a terrific learning experience for anyone who participates in volunteering no matter what sector (Student 9).*
>
> *The voluntary sector is a critical voice of the state*
>
> *…people who want to help and change the society in some form… (Student 5).*

Some of the students pointed to the benefits that volunteering could bring to their own CV.

> *Volunteering is also a great way for furthering your career as people can develop information in order to further their career path (Student 9).*

However, a number of the students had a less instrumental view on their role in volunteering:

> *Before mentoring I only thought that it would benefit me as a volunteer, as it would improve my CV and I hoped it would help the mentee. However, through training I found out it benefits society as well, both neighbours and the wider community (Student 7).*

> *Volunteering for me allowed me to give something back to society and allowed me to organise an event for the benefit of others in order to help them to communicate and interact with other children, enabling them to become familiar with working in groups as a team (Student 5).*

> *The voluntary project] has made me want to continue to be a volunteer so that I can continue to help my community (Student 5).*

A number of the students had been involved with VCS projects that required a significant amount of training and preparation before they could start their role. This was a surprise to some of the students:

> *I didn't realise how challenging it was and how involved I was going to end up being in doing it, but I've had six lots of training and I didn't realise how much training you had to do just to be a volunteer in this particular area, and how may policies and how you have to make sure that you don't breech the boundaries between people (Student 4).*

In summary, the students on this module have taken a critical look at the role of the voluntary and community sector in British society and especially the role of volunteering. The students have referred to the position that the voluntary sector may be more cost effective in service provision, that it provides users with choice, that it provide good quality services, that it is more effective and innovative than the private and state sector provision.

The use of reflection as part of experiential learning

"I have benefited from having to be very organised during the work experience"

Reflection and experiential learning

The *Social Policy Work Experience* module is not just concerned with giving students experience of a work situation. It is not a case of just being there, as simply participating in a work experience does not necessarily bring about learning. Since this is a credit bearing module it must be adequately and appropriately assessed and the students need guidance in the skills required for the successful completion of the assessment. This requires each of them to complete a reflective account of the learning they gained from their experience, including an analysis of the relevant social policy issue(s), an exploration of the difficulties and opportunities encountered on the work experience and an evaluation of their own skills development and future needs.

One of the essential aims of the module is concerned with enabling students to see that reflection is an important part of experiential learning. Reflection is also an essential part of the normal learning experiences, however some students seem to see it as a difficult skill to acquire. This is despite the inclusion of a reflective exercise in one of their core first year modules.

The reluctance to engage with this process will be due to a variety of factors but may have something to with the fact that much of their previous learning did not ask them to concentrate on the actual learning process itself. Learning for A levels often involves a transmission model of learning despite the best intentions of teachers and thus may have been passive in its nature. Reflective learning is essentially an active, purposeful activity for which each individual has to take responsibility. We therefore include a session on reflective learning in the early stages of the module, the aim of which is to introduce students to the basic principles of the reflective process particularly as it applies to the work situation.

Reflection can be either individual or collective in its nature and in this module we have attempted to encourage both types of reflection. The individual aspect is by means of a reflective account that each student writes based on the particular activity they have undertaken and the organisations with which they have worked. Group reflections take place in the group discussions that are intended to encourage a group reflection upon the whole process of learning about being a citizen in a work situation. Individual and group reflections are not separate activities but can be mutually supportive when planned within an overall learning experience. Thus although the individual reflections of students are limited to their own experiences they can reflect in general group discussions on both the process of reflection as they went through it and on shared aspects of their work experience.

There are numerous definitions of reflection (Mezirow, 1981; Boud et al 1985; Schön 1987) but what is common to most of them is the identification of two basic elements to the activity; firstly that it is a rational process and secondly that it involves the identification of a potential for change. Daudelin (1997) notes that reflective learning entails stepping back from the experience and pondering its significance. This process involves an examination of the attitudes and values that we bring to any situation and which shape any description and evaluation of that situation. One way of helping students to do this is by presenting them with a trigger situation that is deliberately ambiguous and asking them to reflect upon it.

Let us take an example as used in the module. I showed the students a photograph of young boy standing surrounded by pebbles. He is holding what looks like a mattock and he has a basket at his side that is filled with pebbles. His feet are bare and his clothes look a bit threadbare. The students were asked to describe what was happening in the picture. What is he doing? How old is he? Where is he? Why is he doing it? Can we say anything about his class and ethnicity? The aim of the questions was to enable us to draw a quick description of the scene without thinking too much about it. This may seem contradictory for a session on reflection but there was a purpose behind it.

The initial picture that emerged from the students was of a young boy somewhere in the Indian subcontinent who was so poor that he had to work in a quarry even though he was only eight or nine. I then asked them what they felt about the scene as they had described it, making the point that reflection is about emotional responses as well as 'factual' description. They expressed feelings of indignation, as this was a picture of child labour and exploitation. Children of this age should be in school, they said.

At this point one of the students said 'What if this is a child in India gathering stones to help build the family house?' This caused the group to reconsider their description of the situation and their reaction to it quite radically. Now, instead of a being an illustration of an ethically suspect activity it became an example of good behaviour that might merit praise rather than condemnation.

The point of this exercise was to demonstrate to students that when they described any situation they did so through their existing values and attitudes. What starts off as a simple factual description can become a value-laden activity. Alternative explanations of the situation may exist and it is important that students learn to follow what I call the first rule of management, which is to question all assumptions. This is especially important in work experience since they are going into organisations which have an existing culture and set of values, which may be implicit rather than explicit. Jumping to conclusions without adequate consideration of what may be happening and the reasons behind it can lead to serious consequences for all concerned. Reflection, therefore is not a task that is confined to the end of the project – it is an activity that they need to practice from the start. In a sense they need to be able to practice reflection-in-action as well as reflection-on-action (Schön 1987).

A second visual stimulus to the discussion on reflection consists of a cartoon in which a young boy is filling up his paddling pool by carrying one glass of water at a time from the kitchen sink to the pool in the garden. His friend notices a garden tap with a hose attached and says 'Why don't you use that?' 'Good idea!' says the boy, fills his glass up from the tap and continues to fill the pool from the glass.

'What does that tell us about reflection?' is the question I put to the class. What it might show is that it is possible to reflect and act and yet come to the wrong conclusion about the appropriate action. If you wanted to fill up the pool as quickly as possible, then using the hose is much more efficient and effective. Whilst that is the most probable interpretation of the scene and highlights the importance of reflecting carefully, it is not the only scenario. There might be alternative assumptions to the story which might justify the seemingly foolish action of the boy. What if he had been told to tidy his room after he had filled the pool? In that case prolonging the filling might be a completely rational action to take. Again, we are back to the initial point of being aware of the assumptions that colour our interpretation and reflection.

As Taylor (2000) points out, reflection occurs in many different ways and for many different reasons and her categorisation of reflection into technical, practical and emancipatory is a useful framework to enable students to start to see the many different uses to which the skill can be put. It also helps to highlight the relationship between reflection and the skill of critical thinking to which they have been introduced in year one of the course, especially in terms of their written essays. Hopefully they start to see links between the skills identified in various parts of their course rather than regard each course and its assessment as a separate exercise.

To reinforce this we introduced some of the theoretical background by linking Kolb's learning cycle to the reflective process and to some of the literature on learning styles. They will have encountered Honey and Mumford's typology of learners in the first year when they wrote a personal development portfolio based on the feedback from their first semester essays. The learning and teaching website (www.learningandteaching.info/learning/experience.htm) has some useful graphics that draw relationships between Kolb and Honey and Mumford together with a useful link to Phil Race's website (www.phil-race.com/downloads.html) which offers some critical thought on learning styles and learning theory in general.

"I really enjoyed the hands on learning experience"

To round the session off it is important to consider potential blockages to learning that the students may encounter. The following includes some factors that we had already considered, but the rest are self-explanatory.

- Perceptual - Not seeing that there is a problem
- Cultural - The way things are here...
- Emotional - Fear or insecurity
- Motivational- Unwillingness to take risks
- Cognitive - Previous learning experience
- Intellectual - Limited learning style, poor learning skills
- Expressive - Poor communication skills
- Situational - Lack of opportunities
- Physical - Place, time
- Specific - Boss/colleague unsupportive environment

(www.ic.polyu.edu.hk/oess/POSH/Student/Learn/Learning_to_learn.htm#blockage)

To end the session we looked at the following list of skills that Alan Mumford has devised which he believes to be involved in learning effectively:

- The ability to establish effectiveness criteria for yourself
- The ability to measure your effectiveness
- The ability to identify your own learning needs
- The ability to plan personal learning
- The ability to take advantage of learning opportunities
- The ability to manage your own learning processes
- The ability to listen to others
- The capacity to accept help
- The ability to face unwelcome information
- The ability to take risks and tolerate anxiety
- The ability to analyse what other successful performers do
- The ability to know yourself
- The ability to share information with others
- The ability to review what has been learnt

(Quoted in Industrial Centre, Hong Kong Polytechnic University, undated.)

It is difficult in one session to fully convey what reflective learning involves, but by adopting an active learning approach in which the students have to practice it in a supportive environment it was hoped that some of the mystique would have been removed. In the end the only way to learn reflective practice is by doing it.

Student reflections on work experience and associated skills development

"Being a volunteer made me change my opinion of myself"

The comments of the students in their reflective diaries and the group discussion demonstrate the different ways in which students have reflected and the varied outcomes of the process. In general, the work experiences caused all the students to stop and think reflectively in one way or another about the skills that they had and those that they needed to acquire. Some students did it to a greater depth than others but that is to be expected.

Communication

At a basic skills level one of the commonest skills mentioned was communication. This was mentioned simply as 'communication skills' or elaborated to show the context:

> *…definitely communication and listening skills and half of it was being in an office environment and just being with older people and interacting with them and knowing when you could and couldn't speak (Student 3).*

> *This shows a more sophisticated understanding of communication as listening as well as talking. Some students had obviously started to think of communication as a social skill that is used within different social contexts and included non-verbal aspects including personal presentation skills. For one student this included how to dress as a professional worker and 'appearing reliable and being reliable' (Student 5).*

Team work

Team work was mentioned by several students as a skill that was integral to their experience:

> *I think I've just developed like team skills because we're all working together and making up the lesson plans (Student 9).*

Roles and relationships

One area related to team work that some students became aware of was the need to appreciate the different roles of the members of the team, the need to see the world from various perspectives:

> *You have to put yourselves into other peoples shoes - how would I feel if this person turned up on my doorstep how would I be with them. Its definitely eye-opening (Student 3).*

This included an appreciation of how professional roles have norms and expectations built into them:

> *…and how we should be when we go into the school, that we're there as a mentor and not as the children's friend and things like that (Student 8).*

Organisation skills

For many of the students organising activities was a major part of their work and not surprisingly comments such as the following were not uncommon:

> *I have benefited from having to be very organised during the work experience, and it is now helping me with my university work (Student 4).*

> *Time keeping was essential on the night of the Christmas party as we had a strict timetable of 10 minutes per activity (Student 5).*

In other cases being able to organise quickly was important, especially when things went wrong, so that 'using my initiative' (Student 5) was an important aspect of the work experience.

Personal development

Examples of emancipatory reflection occurred for most students and took different forms. In some cases it was connected to the task of volunteering. Others related it to their own learning experiences:

> *I really enjoyed the hands on learning experience as I had never learnt this way before and…I found it really enjoyable (Student 10).*

> *I then reflected back on how I motivate myself and increase my self esteem and took some of the feedback from the session and applied it to my everyday life (Student 7).*

For some students the experience gave them licence to express themselves in ways they thought they had lost: 'It was nice to be a kid again… participate' (Student 5). For one student there was an interesting revelation:

> *This may sound strange, but learning how to play, its weird you know you have to learn how to play, which is weird (Student 6).*

Relation to course

Some students undertook work that had a direct relevance to their university course and for them it often made the seeming dry policies that they had studied come to life:

> *What I've liked about doing this coursework is that it's made me reflect on policies and it made me think about why I'm doing things a bit better (Student 2).*

> *Similar to what you said, I've learnt so much, there were so many different opportunities that I think that what I've really learnt is how I've applied what I did here last year and actually this year, understanding elements of my course better, like child development and social policy issues and actually seeing it in practice really helps…it does (Student 3).*

> *Some students had to explain what they were doing to other members of the team so that '…applying my course actually really helped because they wanted to listen to what I was saying and to how I'd learnt things (Student 3).*

Citizenship

Voluntary work for some students was clearly linked to being an active citizen:

> *Mainly I'm just putting something back into my community, it's where I've come from so it's nice to be doing something, and giving something back (Student 10).*

It was also concerned with setting a good example in the hope that others would follow:

> *Hopefully it's encouraging other people to do the same, because…if they see people are getting involved and doing something there they might you know go back and do something where they live. Which is a bit like that 'broken window' hypothesis where you know if you see loads of broken windows that's the way you live and if you start doing something about it and stuff.... (Student 10).*

Moreover the realisation that their work was visible had made them more perceptive about their own environment:

> *It's just made me much more aware of the things that go on you know just round the corner from where I live, just the things that I was unaware of (Student 2).*

Perhaps most importantly the work experience module had led to a fundamental shift in their evaluation of their own worth and place in society. They had changed from being passive to active citizens through a process of active learning.

> *I've just realised just how much of an impact being a mentor can have on a community. What I'm doing is not just with the mentee, it's with their family (Student 7).*

> *Being a volunteer made me change my opinion of myself as originally I did not see myself as having any effect on society…by the second meeting I could start to see that I can make a difference in someone's life (Student 5).*

Framework for reflection on the broader social implications for social work

This section on the community and citizenship is designed as a framework for students to reflect upon the broader social implications of their work experience. At the start of the module, the students were introduced to the nature of community and to ideas on citizenship. It was pointed out that we do not live in only one community, but that we are part of many inter-related and overlapping communities. The students were therefore encouraged to recognise the ways in which we operate in local, national and international communities as well as communities of interest and/or identity. The students were encouraged to recognise that they can have an important role to play in the community through the work they do.

Community and Citizenship

Communities can be characterised according to the social capital they contain. Social capital is a measure in many ways of levels of trust in society. If there are high levels of trust, we will have an abundance of social capital. Conversely, if we mistrust each other we will have low levels of social capital. Some level of social capital is essential for society to function. It is an essential feature of economic, social and political life. Without some level of social capital, it would be impossible for us to cooperate. We would be reduced to individuals pursuing our own interests regardless of the common good and we would be left with the problem of how to maintain our own security against possible (or probable) infringements by other people (Todd and Taylor, 2004, pp. 20-22). For the current Labour government, social policies should be designed with the intention of cultivating social capital and to facilitate not only the protection of the individual but also collective growth. Commentators have recognised that this involves a fundamental revision in the way we view the relationship between citizens and the host of agencies and organisations that provide welfare services (Alcock, 2000, pp. 242-246). This involves looking beyond the old distinction between the state and the individual and towards locating the individual within more diverse sets of institutions and communities.

It has been argued (Rodger, 2000) that social capital can be weakened where our needs are met by the state. Social capital relies far more upon reciprocal relations. The existence of a high level of social capital can help the family, community and society deal with their needs without having to rely upon the intervention of state bureaucracies. It is argued that a high level of social capital can assist in the formation and smooth running of a 'welfare society', characterised by mutual aid, social virtues and strong communal bonds (Rodger, 2000, pp. 86-91). The voluntary sector in particular can have an important role in the development of social capital. The NCVO (2005) argue that the voluntary sector is important for getting people together and mobilised. It is thought that if this can be done in the common interest, then the voluntary sector can have an important role in forging social unity and social capital. Problems can arise, however, when voluntary groups promote narrow interests and ignore significant sections of the community. Under these conditions, it might even be the case that such groups undermine

broad social capital. According to the NCVO, voluntary sector groups sometimes produce narrow or 'bonding social capital' where people who are essentially similar to each other join forces. This form of social capital would not necessarily contribute towards greater levels of political participation. Such participation is said to rely upon the existence of 'linking social capital' (NCVO, 2005, pp. 10-11). It is clear that the voluntary sector and voluntary activity can help to unite communities and break down divisions between people and between sections of the community. By engaging in voluntary activity, we can gain understanding of different sections of the community and learn to locate ourselves within a broader social context.

"it is important to look critically at myself, helping others has made my role in society seem worthwhile"

Student reflections on the community

Student engagement in voluntary activities can have a dramatic effect upon the way they view their place in the community. At the start of the module under discussion, students were asked to outline how they would describe the communities to which they belong and the responsibilities they have towards these communities. They were asked to describe their responsibilities towards four different levels of community:

- Local neighbourhood
- National
- International
- Communities of identity and/or shared interest

At the end of the module, they were asked to return to these categories and to consider once more the responsibilities they have as individuals to the communities in which they live. These reflections were recorded in their reflective diaries (see Appendix One). Here are two examples of their reflections.

Student 1 worked as a learning mentor in an inner city school. At the start of the module, he believed that his responsibilities were as follows:

- Local neighbourhood: Recycling, being kind and helpful
- National: To 'analyse and stand against' things (wars and bills) that harm others
- International: To aid others in need
- Communities of identity: He claimed that he could 'relate to other Muslims around the world'.

When he returned to these categories at the end of the module, he provided far more detail and there certainly seemed to be some subtle differences. Instead of emphasising what he might do as an individual, he talked about what he can do (or has done) in co-operation with other people. Here are some examples:

- Local neighbourhood: He talked about the importance of creating a 'safer environment' and helping people to 'develop and fulfil their potential'. This was expanded to include helping people to increase their knowledge

and to help reduce unemployment and, by assisting in cleaning up the local area, he believed that this might '...give people an awareness of respect for their local area'. It is clear that from his views on his local responsibilities that the student saw himself as a participant in making a difference to his local area and helping his neighbours both in his role as an educator and in his role as a member of the community.

- National: To create a forum for people to discuss political decisions that can harm the local community. Using national policies to 'develop the community'.
- Communities of Identity: Part of a community of educators, Muslims, people from Yemen and '…I feel an identity towards others who are of foreign descent living not only in England but in the west'.

These responses illustrate a broader and considerably more positive approach to the community. In the first set of responses, the student emphasised his role as an individual. In the later responses, however, he talked about his responsibilities as a social actor in the community. It is clear that he had taken on the role as an educator and as an activist in addressing problems in the community and in working with others to create solutions.

Student 2 worked as a member of the Special Constabulary. The student was aware that she has many responsibilities towards the community and identified the following:

- Local: The need to be friendly towards neighbours, keep her street tidy, be assertive against anti-social behaviour.
- National: Be respectful of diversity in society, be a 'good representative of the area that I come from' and to be open-minded.
- International: Respect other ways of life and 'speak to people in a way that I would like to be treated'.
- Communities of identity: Work, Police force and the National Union of Students.

Following the work experience, the student returned to these categories and gave more detailed responses in three of the categories. These responses included the following:

- Local: To 'speak to neighbours' and '…get to know if they have any worries or concerns about where they live'. To 'actively engage with people', to 'behave in a professional and courageous manner' and to treat people fairly.
- National: The need to be professional and to put '… the needs of others before my own'.
- International: This included cultivating the ability to '… deal with situations from different angles'.

As with student 1, student 2 became more aware of her ability and even responsibility to actively engage with her neighbours and to do what she can to tackle problems in her neighbourhood. Before the work experience, she talked about the need to be polite and considerate. This was evidently augmented in her later reflections by the recognition that to act in a professional manner could enhance her abilities to exert a beneficial influence in her community.

Benefits to the student

A number of the students talked about the ways in which the work experience increased their levels of confidence. For one student, it had encouraged her to look for further work with children and she had subsequently gained a place as a camp counsellor for Camp America (Student 4). Another student recalled how she had been welcomed as part of a team. She said that the value placed upon her opinion 'made me feel respected' and that this '…brought about feelings of self-confidence and heightened awareness to others' (Student 3). It would appear that work experience helps many students to overcome some fears they might hold about the world of work and to recognise that they have a great deal to offer not only the voluntary sector but also a broad range of potential employers. Indeed, it has often seemed that students learn a lot about themselves in work based learning and are often feel inspired to look for other challenges.

For some students, the work experience evidently had a major impact upon their daily life. Student 2, for example, felt that she was no longer an 'ordinary citizen' and that she needed to be more responsive and proactive. This stemmed, in part, from her realising the significance of her new role in the Special Constabulary. She talked about the need to conduct herself in a 'transparent, non-discriminatory manner' and about the responsibility she felt both in uniform and in her normal life. She claimed that the experience had developed her self-awareness and her decision-making abilities and that she felt that '…it is important to look critically at myself so that I can understand the way my personal attitude may affect my professional performance.

This student was extremely aware of the importance of reflective practice and of developing her skills and abilities on a daily basis. Not one for complacency, she showed signs throughout the module of embracing the ethos of both active learning and active citizenship.

Students also seemed to benefit from work based learning because it provided them with a fresh insight into their academic studies. One student claimed that her experiences on the module represented a 'truly valuable learning curve' and that '…I feel my studies have been given meaning and explained how theory leant through study can be implemented into practice' (Student 3). The student felt, for example, that studying a module on Child Development had '…enabled me to observe specific interactions that may have previously gone unnoticed' (Student 3). For this student, and for others throughout the years, work based learning gave extra meaning

to their academic studies. By engaging with the community, especially on projects that involved marginalised sections of the community, the students learned at first hand the importance of social policy and of taking an active part in tackling the problems of social isolation and social needs.

Value to the community

As well as identifying some of the ways that work experience had benefited them as individuals, many of the students recognised that their activities had made a contribution to the community. One student reflected upon his role as a mentor and clearly felt that it was both a worthwhile role and one that could have considerable benefits in the community. He felt that his role, along with other educators, was to help shape the personality of the child, increase their 'emotional vocabulary' and help to form a 'more peaceful individual'. He talked at length about the benefits of the so-called hidden curriculum (the things that children learn beyond their formal subjects) for both the individual and the community. In his view, it helped children to calm down and to value their social and physical environments. He believed that his role included teaching social skills and giving the children a '…structured environment that will benefit them in their community' (Student 1). Another student found that he was in a position to 'payback' for some of what he had gained in his childhood. Working in a youth club, he recalled how he had been a recipient of these services as a child and how '…only now do I appreciate as a volunteer, the extent of the dedication required to make a success of this venture' (Student 6). These students, and many others, recognised the importance of dedication and endurance to the achievement of long-term gains in the community.

Many students talked about the intrinsic value of giving and how they felt that their activities had been worthwhile and significant. Two of the students, both of whom worked with children, were evidently touched by their experiences. One said that she felt 'such a sense of achievement' (Student 4). She recalled how the children had a good time and she felt that the volunteers had been motivated by goodwill rather than by financial concerns and that this had made the experience even better (Student 4). Another felt that helping others had 'made my role in society seem worthwhile' (Student 5). She noted how 'rewarding and fulfilling' her work experience had been and that '…the volunteers were left with a warm feeling inside them and it was really nice to see so many children turn up and leave with smiles and their faces and new friends' (Student 5).

Some of the students hoped that their activities might do something to undermine the negative image of students (Student 5 and Student 8). One student noted how members of the community had commented that it was good to see students giving something back to the community. The student said that it was good that members of the community could see that students 'are not just binge drinking yobs' and that some students '…do not just take things but actually give something back' (Student 5). By engaging with the community, the students were clearly in a position to make a difference and often seemed a little surprised when they reflected upon the significance of their activities.

Citizenship

In addition to considering how the work experience impacted upon the way that students viewed their roles in the community, we were also interested to see if it in any way had an effect upon the way that students approach and understand the responsibilities of citizenship. Citizenship could be seen as a universal status belonging to all members of a particular state. Research shows, however, that the way that young people view citizenship has moved away from this liberal catch-all and that young people are more inclined to believe that true citizens are those who are economically independent and who serve the community (Lister, Smith, Middleton and Cox, 2003, p. 239). The idea of citizenship can be tied explicitly to that of community. Those who see citizenship in the context of community point out that we are related to each other and have a stake in the welfare and smooth running of the community. It could be argued that any attempt to improve neighbourhoods and tackle social problems must involve the participation of the community (Frazer, 2000, p. 207). Indeed, the current Labour government has helped to create a culture where active citizenship is valued highly. According to NCVO (2005), current emphasis upon active citizenship and civic renewal stems to a large extent from the need to adapt to the decline in political participation in society. Many now argue that it is important to find ways to draw citizens into an active role in governance and thereby nurture the relationship between citizens and governing bodies. The NCVO argues that a vibrant civil society can help to build trust between citizens and engage people in a variety of activities that can benefit society as a whole (NCVO, 2005, p. 9). It should be clear that work within the voluntary sector is now considered of political significance.

Some research has been carried out in recent years on attitudes towards different types of citizens. From this research, a distinction could be drawn between bad citizens and good citizens. When asked to describe the dominant characteristics of a bad citizen, young people will often use such terms as selfish, uncaring and lazy (Lister, Smith, Middleton and Cox, 2003, p. 244). The Labour government has very little time for these citizens. Some citizens are regarded as recalcitrant or a drain on the system. These citizens are seen as either disobedient or those who are likely to cheat the welfare system. For the Blair government, it is important that they are punished in an appropriate manner (Dean, 2004, p.73). Good citizens, on the other hand, are characterised by their willingness to take responsibility for themselves and for others.

Research conducted by Lister, Smith, Middleton and Cox (2003) showed that young people are apt to regard civic virtues and service to the community as high on the list of attributes possessed by a good citizen. Young women in particular emphasise the importance of working in the local community to improve conditions and tend to value neighbourliness (Lister, Smith, Middleton and Cox, 2003, pp. 244-251). Many respondents also equated respectability with economic independence. People who are in employment, own their own homes and pay taxes were often seen in this light to such an extent that young people who were unemployed or were economically dependent on the state or others regarded themselves as

second class citizens (Lister, Smith, Middleton and Cox, 2003, p. 238). For the Blair government, good citizens are responsible for themselves even though they might need to detach themselves further from the welfare state by providing for their own retirement and other long-term welfare needs (Dean, 2004, p.74).

Student reflections on citizenship

For the purposes of our project, we asked students to distinguish between active and passive citizens and between good and bad citizens. The students were asked to define these categories of citizen at the beginning and at the end of the module. We were interested in the way the students saw different groups of people and in seeing if there were any differences between their views following their work experience.

The distinction between passive and active citizenship was thought to rest upon levels of participation in the life of the community. The students viewed the passive citizen as somebody who does not want to get involved in the life of the community. The passive citizen was thought to be willing to let things happen (Student 1), know only their immediate neighbours (Student 2), want to remain in the background (Student 5) and keep themselves to themselves (Student 10). The active citizen, on the other hand, was seen as somebody who wants to be involved in the life of the community. The active citizen was either willing to participate in community ventures (Student 5, Student 6 and Student 10) or play an active part in setting up local initiatives and helping to organise others (Student 1 and Student 2).

For the students who participated in the project, a good citizen was seen as somebody who was willing to help others in the community. This might include somebody who is willing to counter anti-social behaviour (Student 2) or somebody who was dependable (Student 6) or friendly (Student 10). The kind of terms used to describe a bad citizen included vandal, rude, uncooperative, disrespectful (Student 2). Bad citizens were thought to include criminals and those who care nothing for other people and who are '…only concerned with their own interests' (Student 5). One student referred to a bad citizen as somebody who is destructive and selfish and who believes that '…everything is somebody else's problem or fault' (Student 6). Another described a bad citizen as somebody who '…actively takes away the rights, disrespects and hurts others' (Student 1). A good citizen, therefore, is seen as somebody who makes a positive contribution to the life of the community. Bad citizens were seen as those who were destructive and posed a threat to the community.

In some ways, there was a great deal of continuity in the way that students chose to describe the different types of citizens. On the surface, there seemed to be very little difference in the terms used by the students before and after the work experience to characterise passive, active, good and bad citizens. There were, however, some subtle differences. Two examples have been included below.

When student 2 talked about the virtues of the active citizen, she mentioned the importance of courage, a willingness to listen to and take on board the criticisms of others. Whereas a bad citizen was said to be intolerant, a good citizen needed to be fair and impartial. Before the work experience, this student characterised types of citizens according to their level of intervention in the community. Following her work experience, she stressed the importance of the attitudes we display in social interactions. It could be argued that she moved from a predominantly quantitative measure of citizenship to one that paid far more attention to the motives and virtues of those who intervene in the life of the community.

Student 5 seemed to move from viewing citizens in terms of what they do as individuals to what roles they have in the community. Active citizens and good citizens were defined according to their willingness to help the community. Passive citizens were seen as those who understand that '... something should and needs to be done to help the community but does not actually make any attempt to help change it'. The bad citizen, finally, was seen as somebody who '…does not care about the community and is not interested in doing anything to help the community'.. Using the community as a context and focal point enabled the student concerned to see that being a citizen entails responsibilities towards the community and that distinctions can be made between those who embrace and reject these responsibilities.

Conclusion

It is clear from our research that participation in work based learning can teach students a great deal about the world of work and the voluntary sector and that many students welcome the opportunity to reflect upon their skills development and their role in the community. We have found that students generally respond well to the freedom offered by such modules and that they are willing to put a great deal of effort and serious thought into the value of their experiences.

We have seen that work based learning can help students to recognise the importance of both active learning and active citizenship. One of our students, for example, talked about how he had often approached his work without 'thinking why' but through his participation in the work based learning module he had become more aware of '…the different areas of my work and why I am doing them and their effects in the community…' (Student 1). He noted that it had '…not only helped me in the workplace but I have also gained a passion for education and research and will be an active and reflective learner throughout my life'.

A number of the students commented that the work experience had made them feel more like an active citizen. One student said that they now thought they were able to do something constructive to improve the prospects for the 'wider community' (Student 7). Another recalled that she felt that her status as a student made her something of a 'burden on the community' and that she was pleased to be able to 'put something back into the community' (Student 9). Yet another claimed that her work experience helped her to feel part of the community and '…made me want to do more to help my community and get involved…' (Student 10). She said that she wanted to do more voluntary work, partly because it helped her to feel '…less like a passive citizen and more of an active citizen'.
If work based learning can assist in the development of active learners and active citizens, it surely deserves a place in the curricula of modern universities.

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Literature Review

Overview

Many areas of research report on a range of benefits that can be gained from volunteering. These include the improvement of transferable and direct skills for employment, improving self-esteem and health, 'giving something back' to communities or society, or a route to increase social capital, citizenship and social inclusion. These areas are not mutually exclusive and tend to cross over frequently within the literature. The following review is an attempt to bring together some of this research and represent the diverse ways in which the experience of volunteering has had an impact on the individuals and how this may have shaped their attitude towards ideas of community. Main findings have been summarised and volunteers' own words are used wherever possible. A cross section of types of voluntary work and themes regarding impact are addressed in the areas of skills, health, age, volunteering abroad, education and social inclusion.

Increasing skills and employment prospects

A major theme of voluntary work is the opportunity to increase skills and employment prospects by 'looking good on your CV'. Hoban (2005) suggests that participants may find "there are skills that you may not think you have but find volunteering pulls them out of you" (2005, p22), and that nurses who volunteer outside of work may develop an 'enriched connection' with their patients on return. "It takes you away from problems you may have in your working environment…I have something in common with them, and something else to talk about" (2005, p22). In a personal article, Hopwood (2003) talks about how volunteering is 'a great way to learn' and in her volunteer capacity working at a summer camp for children with health problems she became "a jack of all trades, educator, carer, friend, teacher, play leader, nurse and storyteller". Remarking that "the experience is also great for reflective practice" (2003, p39) with an opportunity to share creative ideas that would otherwise be a 'clinical area of medicine', Cordon & Ellis (2004) point out that a lot of initiatives to encourage voluntary work have placed an emphasis on the opportunity to improve skills as a route into work, particularly for recipients of Incapacity Benefit. While there are definite common findings that skills do improve as a direct consequence of much volunteering, the authors state that, "it is hard to find statistical evidence in the UK that demonstrates that volunteering is a significant means of enhancing employability" (2004, p116). Cordon & Ellis suggest that there are a multitude of other benefits that can be gained from being a volunteer for both the individual; 'increased self esteem, improved health, helps maintain quality of life', and for the community; friendship and social interaction, making a contribution. They believe that these are often overlooked, and should be treated as 'an end in itself' rather than a 'stepping-stone' to employability.

Motivational factors and personal experiences

Black & Living (2004) collected data through survey research into motivational factors and personal experiences of volunteerism. They were interested in the effect of volunteering from the viewpoint of an occupation and its potential effects on health and well-being. They found that there was a positive effect on mental health of the volunteer "by providing opportunities to increase confidence, self esteem, gain social support, replace lost roles and feel included in community life" (2004, p526), and they felt that there may even be "some therapeutic value in enabling clients to engage in a volunteer role" (2004, p526). The effects of volunteering on mental health were also examined by Musick et al (2003), they found that, over time, effects of depression were diminished by volunteering, especially in the over 65's.

Volunteering and mental health

Oman et al (1999) found that there were certain health benefits from volunteering for older people but that this was disproportionate toward those who were involved in religious groups. He does comment that volunteering could be used as "possible health promotion and disease prevention" (1999, p301). A study carried out in Canada (Narushima, 2005) into the experience of volunteering for older people (50+) found that the reasons for volunteering tended to cluster around the ideas of a chance to 'pay back' to society what they had taken out, or to 'leave a better world' behind them. Overall the experience for these volunteers was rewarding; it had allowed the individuals to improve their interpersonal skills and had given some a 'greater understanding of difference'. It had inspired confidence in some as they found that they were still able to develop and learn new skills, keeping them mentally active. Again, the impact of volunteering on health issues arose; those who had health problems felt "volunteering provided a source of confidence that they were still healthy and capable of solving problems" (2005, p576) and those who did not have problems "volunteering appeared to be regarded as health insurance." (2005, p578).

There were also difficulties experienced, the older volunteers felt in particular a frustration with the decision making process due to 'non-involvement' in consultation. Narushima records a heightened self-awareness and an elevated 'sense of community' (Narushima, 2005), one participant remarked "when you volunteer, you bring your whole background with you, your whole approach to life" (2005, p578), by having to deal with unfamiliar procedures and 'frameworks', compromises had to be made. "The participants used volunteering as a self-help strategy to sustain their sense of self and to cope with their 'role of exclusion' in society" (2005, p577). This study reports that volunteers developed new insights into themselves and the 'community at large', appreciating the importance and impact of their role, "Volunteers are all over the hospital. Literally, the hospital cannot function without us" (2005, p579). According to the author, this shows how the original motivation of 'pay-back' from the volunteer "gradually transformed into a more realistic community consciousness" (2005, p579).

Volunteering abroad

Volunteering abroad can have many effects on the participants, and while it could be seen as a quite different aspect of volunteering, there are benefits that cannot be overlooked when looking at the volunteer experience as a whole. Palmer (2002) comments on his own and a few others' experiences abroad and acknowledges this is but a small section of voluntary experience but hopes the "paper will resonate more widely" (2002, p637). He lays out a general picture of pros and cons. The positive aspects include the opportunity to meet "people you scarcely would have met otherwise" and have your "thoughts and emotions challenged by a different culture" (2002, p639). This could be in the realm of lifestyle/habits, political or economic philosophical differences. He states that the lack of monetary excesses or access to goods may force you to find alternative ways to spend your time and can increase the level of general communication with those around you or encourage more self reliant methods such as learning to play an instrument, reading etc. Palmer believes that in work "the shortage of technology and other material resources challenges you to adapt and make full use of those resources you do have [and that] this can make your working day very stimulating" (2002, p640).

Palmer admits, however, that volunteering abroad can be a difficult process and warns that the sense of isolation from family and friends and also from the community you are working in can have a negative impact. Not only may there be language barriers, but by being an 'outsider' you are likely to find yourself as 'a figure of interest' and there is consequent 'lack of privacy' that can result from this. Locals may want to know all about you or just have a look through your things and this 'constant attention' of asking questions at every opportunity, can be upsetting.

There can also be added health problems resulting from the change in climate, unhygienic food preparation, and anxiety. Frustration is also a common feeling; there may be heightened expectations beyond your ability as well as communication difficulties or the staff shortages limiting your work. Palmer concludes that volunteering abroad is "an experience that is both positive and negative" (2002, p642), but overall you can feel "part of a larger community spanning both governmental and non-governmental programmes" (2002, p642), and you can gain a "much-valued sense to what you are doing" (2002, p640).

Smy (2004) also talks to two volunteers who went to work in their own occupational field in China. Working as nurses in an under-skilled and staffed hospital in a poor region of the country they became aware of the impact that people from 'outside' could have and consequently were careful not to "blunder in with high handed diktats" (2004, p68). Instead they learnt to appreciate the cultural differences in the relationship between doctors and nurses and consequently developed a style where they were able to change some practices and avoid confrontation. They said that the experience made them "much better at negotiation, more resourceful, more adaptable, more open-minded, more assertive and more able to compromise" (2004, p69); they also agreed that they learnt valuable lessons in 'stress management'.

Learning about difference

The value of learning about difference is also expressed in an American study (Miller & Schleien et al, 2002) which looked at disabled and able-bodied student volunteers working together as 'peer partners' on a nature project. They found that there was a self-reported increase of awareness by the non-disabled group towards people with disabilities. The process of interaction and communication needed to work together on the project undermined previously voiced concerns. "I think it benefited me because my fear was addressed" and "I was afraid about communication…but after we got out there it was a lot easier than I thought" (2002, p225). The non-disabled participants also felt that in the future they would not see disabilities as being a barrier to friendship. They also believed that an increase of exposure to the community of people with disabilities would improve attitudes in general; one stated they would have liked to have brought friends/families to the project so they could have also benefited from the experience.

The health and social skills of the disabled participants improved also; one participant's autistic behaviour was affected by a decrease in 'self-stimulating behaviour' such as rocking and hand waving and others showed an increase in group activities and communication that was very unusual before the project. Both groups remarked on an increase in technical skills and were proud of the trail they had 'created'; one student brought other residents and staff out to show them what had been accomplished.

Skills which can be developed from the experience of volunteering

The work of Hellinson (1993) has shown that by providing a forum for students to learn from each other in a structured environment, social responsibility, cooperation and teamwork can be taught successfully. Yarwood (2005) also believes that incorporating volunteer work into a more formal framework can enhance social learning. Although his findings showed a more pragmatic approach to volunteering by his students who mostly "wanted to gain insights into the workings of organizations" that they were interested in starting a career with, he also found that "as well as improving academic knowledge, the students also gained a better understanding of their locality" (2005, p.362).

Yarwood did not find that there had been an increase in attainment of skills directly, but that students had benefited by being able to 'practice, transfer, and apply key skills' attained at college in a real practical environment. All the students reported that their volunteering was 'valuable experience' in learning what skills were needed for careers with the local authorities and partnership employers that they had been working with. A common belief held by all the participants was that the community would 'ultimately benefit' from their work, and that this was a motivating force for some of them. Yarwood could not draw the conclusion that "volunteering had improved students' social or moral characteristics" (2005, p366) but he did find that some students said they 'felt better about themselves' and all agreed that they would volunteer again.

UK Government policy and voluntary work

The UK government has placed an emphasis on the role of voluntary work to be able to address the 'moral and political decline' (Kidger, 2004) of young people, and has initiated schemes that target 16-19 year olds (YST, MV). This is challenged by Morris, John & Halpern (2003), who question the accuracy of political non-engagement as an indicator of a non-participatory youth, and reveal that many young people do involve themselves in community activities outside of these targeted schemes. They also found that while 'politics' rated quite low on the scale of interest, 'social issues' were rated more highly, reflecting a possible 'narrow interpretation' of politics. Eley & Kirk (2002) studied the Millennium Volunteers initiative as expressed through the Youth Sport Trust. Three hundred students between the ages of 16-19 all in full time education committed to 200 hours of voluntary work in the community and attendance at a 'leadership camp'. A profile of motivation and perceived leadership skills were assessed using self completed questionnaires both before and after nine months of volunteering.

The study suggests that "promoting volunteer work as a means for social satisfaction is likely to appeal to most young people" (2002, p164). They found that out of those that responded to both questionnaires, their perception of the importance of working in the community had increased and that 97% would volunteer again. There was also an increase in the 'Values' motivation showing an increase in altruistic attitude and 'Enhancement' suggesting that the students felt better about themselves. Several of the perceived leadership skills were increased within the nine month period but the authors conclude that "it is difficult to be certain of the cause for this increase in leadership skills" (2002, p164) due to combinations of factors that are impossible to single out. Overall, the impact on the students was positive in many areas and Eley & Kirk suggest that this "implies that voluntary activity is an ideal tool for teaching and developing citizenship" (2002, p164).

Australian government policy and voluntary work

Warburton & Smith (2003) explore Australian policies of 'mutual obligation', aimed at young people, which seek to increase social capital and social responsibility and therefore produce 'good citizens' through the education system. Their findings show that the 'compulsive elements' of these programmes and the absence of choice is a 'fundamental flaw' in the design. The students who were required to do volunteer work as part of their schooling commented on how they did not feel that it could therefore be categorized as 'volunteer' work; "with this programme you have to do this…immediately you're thinking something else I've got to do" (2003, p779), and this caused resentment from the very beginning. By undermining a student's sense of choice and freedom to act 'on their own account' Warburton and Smith argue that far from encouraging 'active citizenship' these programmes "may weaken long-term commitment to society" (2003, p748).

Conclusion

The benefits of voluntary work can clearly be wide reaching; however, some studies have warned that there are important aspects of volunteer motivation that cannot be overlooked when assessing the impact of being a volunteer. Kiviniemi, Snyder & Omoto (2002) suggest that negative experiences of volunteering are compounded by original motivation, suggesting that the more emphasis on a variety of outcomes for the volunteer (i.e. the higher the expectations) the more likely the chance of that voluntary work being a negative experience. Janoski et al (1998) argue that the motivations of volunteers are necessary to understand how volunteering can be built and sustained, emphasizing the need for socialisation of attitudes towards community work. Other studies link the levels of satisfaction with volunteer work to the continuing sustainability (Kiviniemi, Snydoer & Omoto 2002), and show that a positive experience of volunteering increases the likelihood of volunteering again (Yarwood, 2005, Miller & Schleien, 2002, Davis, Hall & Meyer 2003).

Studies into the community-based initiative of 'time banks' in Glasgow (Seyfang, 2004a, 2004b) show how the volunteering process has been used to develop positive integrated relationships within a community. It has been observed that levels of volunteering are generally lower within groups that experience high social exclusion factors, and this is something that 'time banks' have been able to address. The principle idea is that "people give and receive services in exchange for time credits" (2004a, p63). These can be accrued by doing some form of community work; "gardening, DIY, befriending, home decorating, envelope stuffing for local voluntary groups, minibus driving, meals in a local café, and helping out at community events" (2004a, p66) which can be 'redeemed, saved, or donated'. Seyfang argues that in so doing, participants develop "reciprocal social relations" (2004b, p63) within the local area. One of the studies (Seyfang, 2004a) held informal discussions with some of the participants in the scheme and a focus group of 12 members was consulted. Seyfang found that participants felt that they were of 'more use' and that it had fostered a sense of trust in their community. It "involves everybody coming together", "trying to bring back that community sense", "no matter who you are you've got a skill" (2004a, p66). The time bank has also "enabled people to access help they otherwise would have to do without" (2004a, p68). Participants have also been able to redeem credits for training, "something which may aid me in future employment or even in developing skills for use in the community" (2004a, p67) thereby 'adding value' to the community, and in some cases this has also led to employment.

It has been argued that the roles of voluntary agencies within communities are frustrated by the funding situation (Hoatson, 2001, Snyder 2004b, Seyfang, 2004a). According to Hoatson, local government only tends to fund on a short-term basis and central government will not commit to ensuring funding without partnership, for what are essential services in some areas of the UK. It is agreed by Pérotin (2001) that this is a similar picture for most of the industrialized countries. It has also been argued that the role of the volunteer benefits greatly from the professional guidance and support of employed staff (Yarwood, 2005, Hurtado et al 2002). Therefore, if active citizenship is to be encouraged there needs to be a greater investment in the social programmes that are built on the commitment of people to work alongside and within their communities to create a more cohesive and integrated social fabric.

Appendix One: The reflective diary

The Reflective Diary is designed to assist you in recording your reflections on work experience and evaluating the impact of your work experience on the way you view your roles in communities.

Section A: Community and Citizenship

1. Making use of the categories below, how would you describe the communities you belong to and the responsibilities you have in these communities.

Nature of the community	**Responsibilities toward the community**
a. Geographic: Local neighbourhood	
b. Geographic: National	
c. Geographic: International	
d. Communities of identity and/ or shared interest	

2. What values would you attribute to the following?

Type of Citizen	Dominant values
a. The Passive Citizen	
b. The Active Citizen	
c. The Good Citizen	
d. The Bad Citizen	

Section B: Reflecting on the Work Experience

This section should be used to record your experiences of work and the template outlines the main areas you will need to cover in the assignment. Please remember that you do not have to record your views on all the areas after every visit to your work, but the more you do the easier you will find it to write your assignment. Please use this is a template. You will need to make numerous copies of it so that you can use it after each visit to your work experience.

Date	
Key information about the project/ organisation	
Key tasks undertaken	
Insight into relevance of policy initiatives	
Opportunities and difficulties	
Skills used/developed	
Impact on the way you view your roles in the community	

Section C: Reflecting on Community and Citizenship

Once you have completed your work experience, you need to return to the questionnaire used at the beginning of the module.

1. Making use of the categories below, how would you describe the communities you belong to and the responsibilities you have in these communities?

Nature of the community	Responsibilities toward the community
e. Geographic: Local neighbourhood	
f. Geographic: National	
g. Geographic: International	
h. Communities of identity and/or shared interest	

2. What values would you attribute to the following?

Type of Citizen	Dominant values
e. The Passive Citizen	
f. The Active Citizen	
g. The Good Citizen	
h. The Bad Citizen	

Appendix Two: The formal assessment

The formal assessment model calls for students to write a 4000 word report and includes the following guidance notes:

Your report should be divided into the following sections:

1. An overview of the organisation (500 words)

2. A review of the main roles and tasks undertaken in the work experience (500 words).

3. An analysis of the relevant social policy issues that makes links between social policy theory and practice (1000 words). This should cover the following themes:

- Social Policy and the importance of the 'voluntary sector'
- An outline of relevant policy initiatives in your chosen area
- How these policy initiatives provide a background or context for your work experience

4. A reflective account of the work experience that identifies the following themes (2000 words):

- Opportunities and difficulties encountered in the work experience
- Your views on how your skills developed as a result of the experience and how these skills could be developed in the future
- An assessment of the impact of your work experience on the way you view your own roles in the community

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