

SERVICE LEARNING FOR THE CREATION OF A HOLISTIC GRADUATE: A CASE STUDY OF TAYLOR'S UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY SERVICE PROGRAMME

Marzura Abdul Malek¹
Usha Devi Rajaratnam²

¹Marzura.AbdulMalek@taylors.edu.my

²UshaDevi.Rajaratnam@taylors.edu.my

Accepted date: 26-12-2018

Published date: 07-05-2019

To cite this document: Malek, M. A., & Rajaratnam, U. D. (2019). Service Learning for The Creation of Holistic Graduate: A Case Study of Taylor's University Community Service Programme. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 4 (30), 356-363.

Abstract: *Community service is a way to engage students in active learning, making the learning process more satisfactory and meaningful. Zlotkowski (1998) recommended the academicians to focus on active learning strategies for a greater impact on social service learning: learning reflection. High-Quality service is obtained from reflection on learning experience as stated by Dewey (1916) where personal experience gives the theory a different meaning when analysis and critical examination on experience are done. This paper examines the educational values and aims of the students participating in community service projects from Jan – June 2017 from their weekly reflective journals. For the weekly reflective journals to be educative, a content analysis was done based on Dewey's four conditions of inquiry-based learning process of 1) it must generate interest among the students 2) it must be intrinsically worthwhile to the students c) it must create a curiosity and a demand for information when a problem arises and d) it must cover a specific time and foster development over time. A minimum of 5 reflections was done by each student. The findings of the study show an astounding result of unprecedented student behaviour towards the community service.*

Keywords: *Service Learning, Community Service, Learning Reflection, Values*

Introduction

The employers of today prefer graduates who do not only excel in academics but have the ability to make decisions and sensitive towards the needs of others (Job Outlook, 2016). Leadership is ranked the highest (80.1%) in the National Association of Colleges and Employers Job Outlook (2016) survey. Other attributes in the top five are ability to work in a team (78.9%), writing skill (70.2%), problem-solving skills (70.2) with verbal communication skill and strong work ethics both occupy the fifth rank (68.9%). With this statistic in mind, students were asked to do some community work in places such as the soup kitchen where food is given to the homeless, and the refugee home for the Myanmar refugees.

Making the meaning of what one does is becoming essential in shaping one's life (Mayes, 2012). This is also true according to Noddings (1998) where the knowledge and experience outside the classroom can lead to a new way of thinking. In this study, the emphasis of gaining knowledge and experience is from the service learning during community service programmes.

An important aspect to highlight when doing a service learning is the reflection practices. Reflection, according to Hatcher and Bringle (1997), is the intentional consideration of an experience in light of particular learning objectives. This includes the understanding that the community service itself does not produce learning but the reflections by the students will give a new interpretation of the events and will provide a new understanding of the community.

In this study, the reflection activity emphasised was the writing of weekly journals based on a given criteria. Students were graded using a rubric scheme.

The objective of this study is to identify the educational values acquired by this group of students and to assess if the aims of the community service programme were achieved.

Literature Review

What is community service? From the university's point of view, community service is a collaboration between the university and the community at large for the mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge where the community is able to leverage on the expertise of the university to solve the problems or the needs in the community whilst enhancing the students' learning (Alter, 2005).

What is service learning? It is another term to describe the student learning in the community. According to Brown (2001), service learning involves individuals from an institution to participate in the community.

Furco and Billig (2002) describe service learning as a platform to engage individuals in activities that combine both community service and academic learning, and because service – learning programmes are typically rooted in formal courses, the service activities are usually based on particular curricular concepts that are being taught. These formal courses included core academic courses, elective courses and vocational courses.

In achieving its mission to be a highly developed country, Malaysia needs to cultivate future leaders with a strong leadership skill and equipped with humanitarian values (Munir et al, 2012).

Youth are our future leaders and that this generation is found to be action-oriented hence the need to spend some time in a productive environment where the young people can 'get their hand dirty' in concrete activities and experiences, for positive attitude to be-internalized (Rahim, Rusinah, Azizan, & Azimi, 2004).

This is possible when active learning takes place when students are engaged in activities addressing the needs of humans and the community using a systematic structure for student learning and development (Jacoby, 1996).

Among the qualities and attributes that are critical among the youth and may be developed through the time spent in the community are physical fitness, self-esteem, internal locus of control (a sense that one's behaviour influences outcomes), hardiness (appreciating challenge as opportunity), coherence (able to see that all aspects of the created world are meaningful and connected), mental health (mindfulness, involvement, engagement), trust in people and one's place, a sense of community and intimacy, new social roles as per demand, social supports and bonding, peak experiences (moment of joy, moment of sweetness), accepting that one's life is whole, enchanted and meaningful, a sense of coming home to contribute, to do good deeds, and to fulfil others' rights and not demanding your own. (Hamzah, 2004).

According to Pennebaker (1990), analysis using writing determines the relationships between past, current and future learning through the students' expression of a certain event.

Theoretical Framework

This study considers the philosophical framework by Dewey (1916) in which in the learning process, reflection bridges the gap between experience and the theory. Personal experience gained from the community service, allows the students to look at the theory in a different manner, giving them a different meaning of a particular situation. Dewey argues that experience is equally important as a theory.

A reflection, according to Dewey, is an active, persistent knowledge and in the presence of a critical thought produces "educative" experiences. In order to capitalise on the potential inquiry - based learning, the weekly journals were analysed based on Dewey's conditions:

1. It must generate interest in the learner
2. It must be intrinsically worthwhile to the learner
3. It must present problems that awaken new curiosity and create a demand for information
4. It must cover a considerable time span and foster development over time

These conditions were the basis of the research questions for this study.

Methodology

In this study, two sources of data were collected. The first one being the data from the weekly journals, analysed based on Dewey's four conditions. Each student was asked to complete a minimum of 5 weekly journals in a span of 10 weeks. In order to manage and guide the

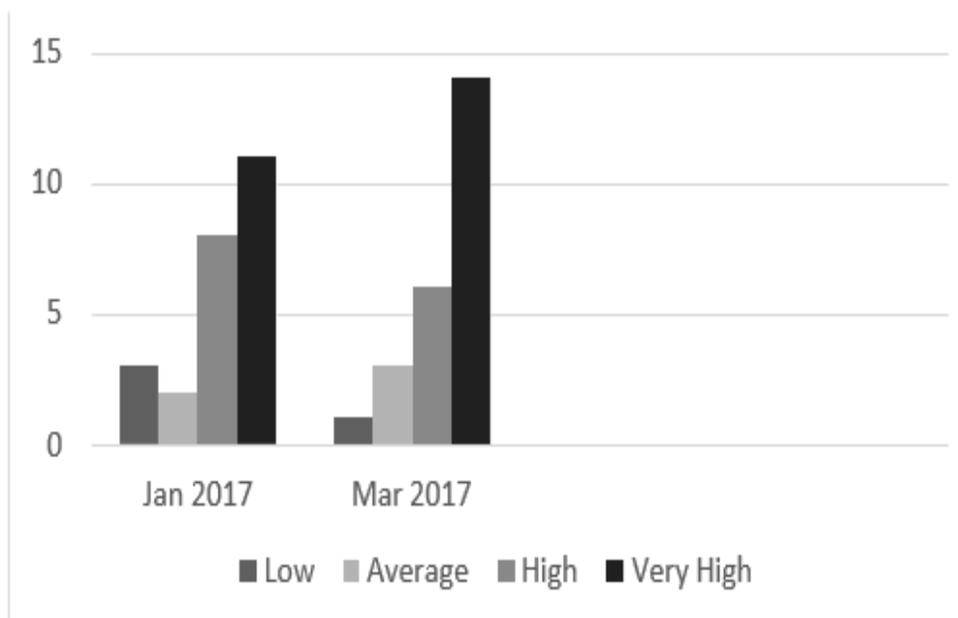
students effectively, the weekly journal was to be submitted on a weekly basis using a link in TIMEs, an internal portal. A set of criteria was given for the students to follow when preparing the weekly journals.

Secondly, data from questionnaires were also given out to students to identify and describe their experiences during the community service programme. This was done in a close environment such as in a class in the presence of 20 students per class. SPSS software was used to analyse and interpret the collected data.

Findings and Discussion

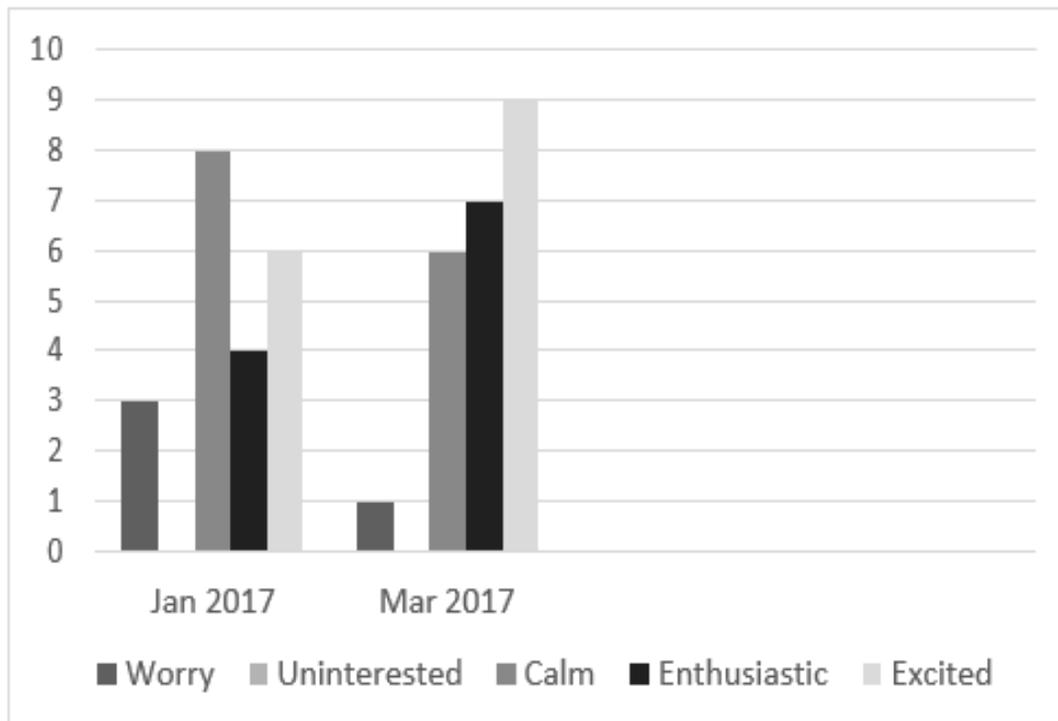
The population of the study comprised of 48 students from the Jan – June 2017 intakes. The results from the content analysis of the weekly journal showed a better reflection in the March – June 2017 intake compared to the Jan – March 2017 intake.

Table 1. Level of Openness in The Weekly Journal



Despite both groups were given the same community to serve with almost similar tasks to complete, it is interesting to note that the March 2017 intake took more efforts in expressing their thoughts and did more reflections in completing their tasks. In some cases, it was mainly about their personal challenges when carrying out the duties given to them by the group leader. Some of the challenges were the difficulties of coming to group meetings as they had different class timetable, to adapt to the community environment, to accept ad-hoc or last-minute instructions from the management of the community and self or intrapersonal thoughts.

Table 2. Initial Feelings About the Programme



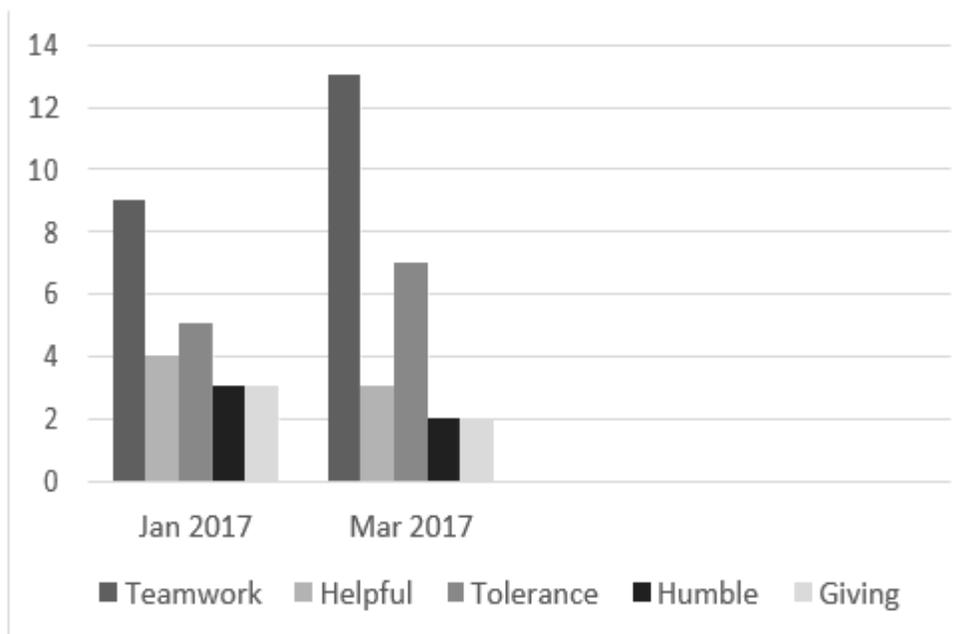
At the beginning of the semester, all the students showed some interest or concern about the community service programme. An increase is seen in students of March 2017 who were ‘excited’ and ‘enthusiastic’ about the programme compared to the January 2017. Consequently, there is a decrease number of ‘worry’ in the March 2017 batch compared to the earlier batch.

The findings show that the majority were either ‘excited’ or ‘enthusiastic’ as they felt that they were doing something good to the community. The fact that they were going to carry out the community service programme together made them less worry as they would be with their friends should support was needed. This became one of the calming factors for these categories of students.

From the perspective of values acquired, the students mentioned ‘teamwork’ and ‘tolerance’ which were ranked 1 and 2 respectively, in both the weekly journal and in the survey.

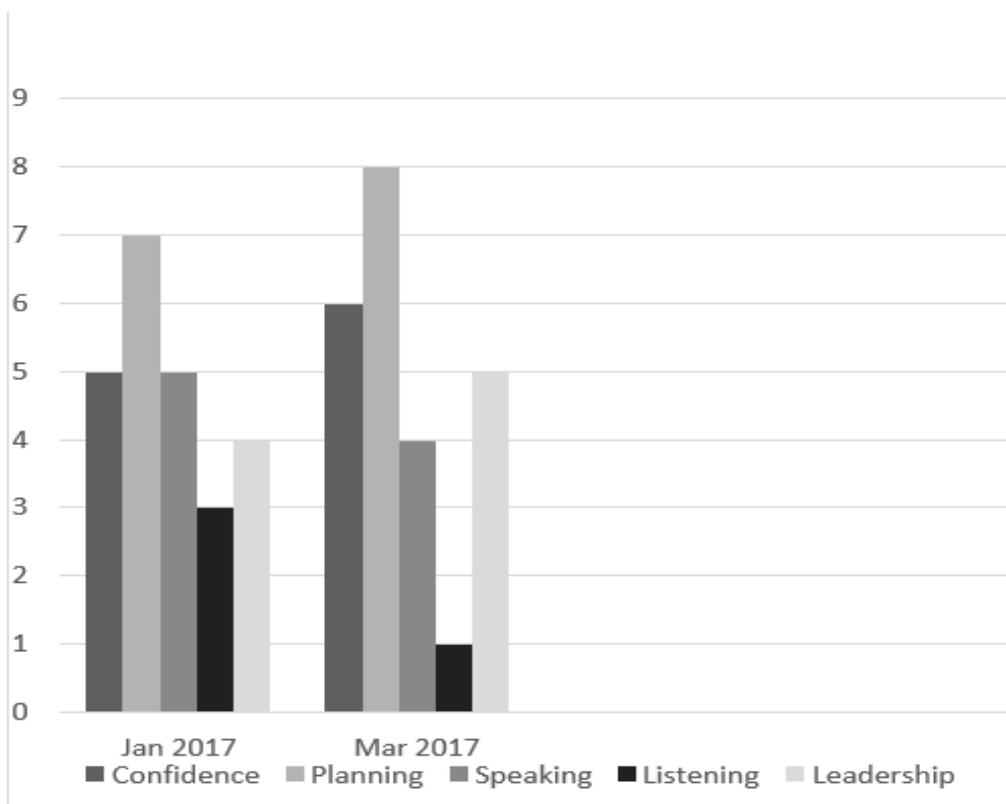
The students were asked to carry out the tasks such as serving the homeless at the Soup Kitchen or to teach a group of refugee’s children. All these tasks needed some kind of understanding and tolerance among the group members. The students realized that they needed to trust to one another if they wanted to complete the programme well. Due to the short period of time given for the students to complete their community service programme, everyone was given a task to be done in a specific time. With this in mind, there were constant communication especially using the WhatsApp, in order to complete the tasks.

Table 3. Values Acquired from The Programme



Even though, these students knew one another, some found it quite difficult to work with the same students who have been studying with them for more than a year. This itself was an experience to the students as this did change the whole perspective of who their friends were during hard times and ‘working’ time.

Table 4. Skills Acquired from The Programme

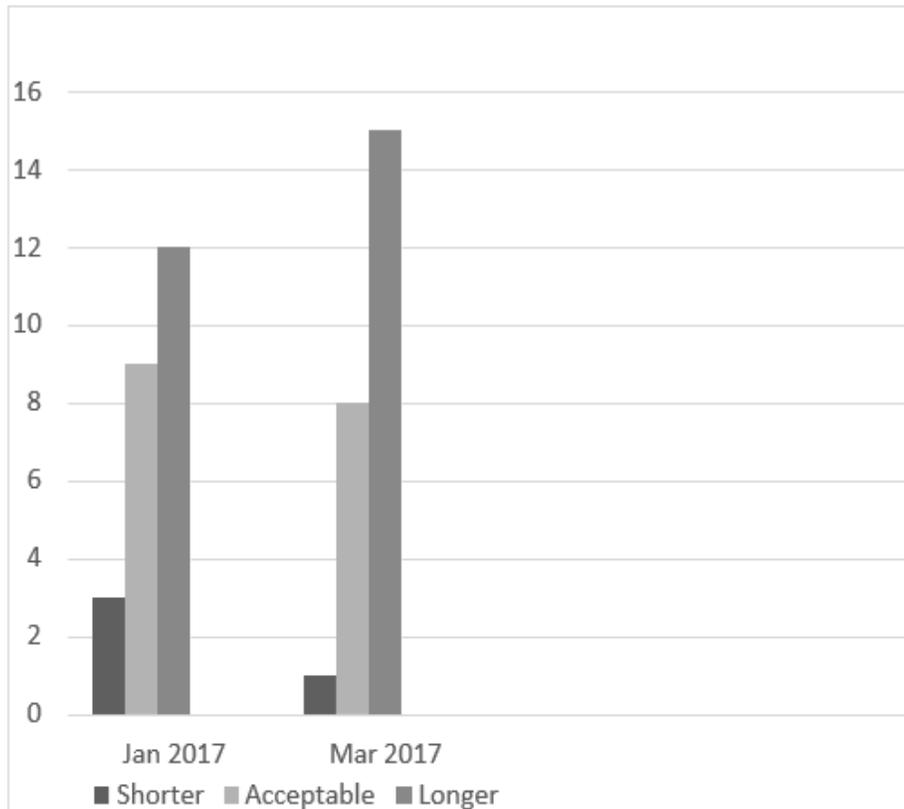


It is discovered that for both the groups, planning is the skill which was acquired during the entire programme. ‘Confidence’ is the soft skill acquired, ranked at number 2 for both groups. At the beginning of the semester, the students were asked to plan their activities with the selected community. This was done in at least 2 meetings. Despite these plans, they encountered some challenges when carrying out their tasks in the community. With all the challenges faced by the two groups, they felt that it was worth the while as they felt that they became wiser each time a problem cropped up.

When asked about duration of the programme, majority thought that more time should be given for them to be more effective in carrying out the task in the selected community. They

also felt that they had very little to prepare the given task especially if they were to ‘teach lessons’ to the refugee group.

Table 5. Programme Duration

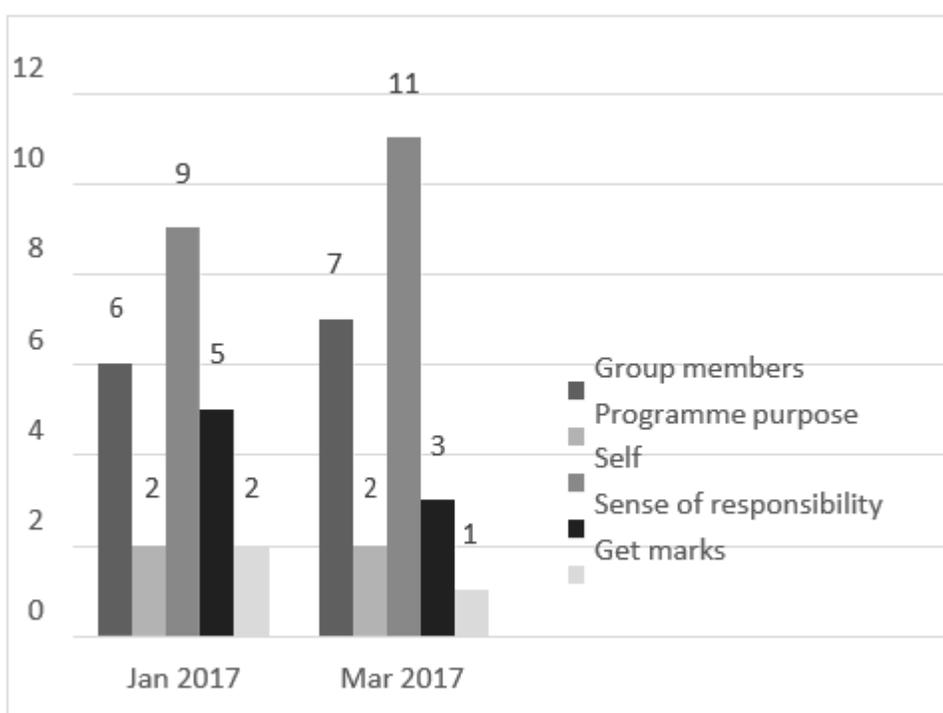


The above chart shows that more students in the March 2017 intake preferred to have a longer time for the community service programme compared to the January 2017 intake. For both groups, the second place falls for those who are agreeable with the given duration of 10 weeks.

The students felt that more time was also needed for them to carry out some work which they felt could change and make some differences to the community.

When asked what or who motivated them to complete the programme, the graph below shows the following findings.

Table 6. What/ Who Motivated You to Complete This Programme?



The results show that both groups had self - motivation to complete the programme. The second motivator was the group members.

Conclusion

From this study, we found that the students ‘grew’ up overnight as they faced with the real-life experiences. The students were able to complete the given tasks because they were given the knowledge which then helped them when facing challenges.

References

- Alter, T. (2005) Achieving the Promise of Public Scholarship. In S. Peters, N. Jordan, M. Adamek and T. Alter (eds.), *Engaging Campus and Community: the Practice of Public Scholarship in the State and LandGrant University System*. Kettering Foundation. 461–487.
- Brown, D. (2001). *Pulling it together: A method for developing service – learning and community partnerships based on critical pedagogy*. Washington, DC: Corporation for National Service.
- Dewey, J. (1916). *Democracy and education: An introduction to the philosophy of education*. New York: The Free Press.
- Furco, A., Billig, S.H. (2002). *Is service – learning really better than community service? In Service Learning: The Essence of the Pedagogy*: Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing Inc.
- Hamzah, A. (2005). *Helping Malaysian Youth Move Forward: Unleashing The Prime Enablers*. Inaugural Lecture. Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Hatcher, J. A., Bringle, R. G. (1997). Reflections: Bridging the gap between service and learning. *Journal of College Teaching* 45.
- Jacoby, B. & Associates (Eds.). (1996). *Service - learning in higher education: concepts and practices*. San Francisco: Jossey – Bass.
- Job Outlook Report (2016). National Association of Colleges and Employers.
- Mayes, C., Williams, E. (2012). *Nurturing the whole student: Five dimensions of teaching and learning*. Rowman & Littlefield Education.
- Munir et al. (2011). *Capacity Building for Regional Cooperation*. In Morshidi S., Aniswal A. G, & Clarence Tan C. C. (2011). *Universities, Communities and Region: the case of the Penang City-Region, Malaysia*. Higher Education Research Monograph 16/2011. National Higher Education Research, Universiti Sains Malaysia: Penang.
- Noddings, N. (1998). *Philosophy of Education*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Pennebaker, J. W. (1990). *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Expressing Emotions*. New York: Guilford Press.
- Rahim,S, Rusinah, J., Azizan, A. & Azimi. H. (2004, May). Penerapan budaya kerja petani [epun di kalangan petani muda Malaysia. Paper presented at the 2nd National Seminar on Empowering Agriculture Community, 25-26 May, Universiti Putra Malaysia.
- Rawlings, F., Sanaei and Sachs, J. (2014). *Transformational Learning and Community Development: Early Reflections on Professional and Community Engagement at Macquarie University*
- Zlotkowski, E. A. (1998). *Succesful service – learning programs: New models of excellence in higher education*. Boston: Anker Publish.