EMPATHETIC AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE, EXPERIENTIAL LEARNERS AS FUTURE EDUCATORS

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Abstract

Adopting an experiential learning approach in 'Teacher education' through Service learning programs, may help to develop, empathetic, socially responsible and next generation experiential educators. Experiential learning occurs through carefully chosen experiences, supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis; where the student is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative and constructing meaning.Some forms of experiential learning include Internships, Service learning,Cooperative education, Practicum, Undergraduate research experience, Community-based research, Field work, etc. Service learning is an out-of-classroom community service experience, in the course schedule wherein, students participate in an organized service activity, that addresses few community needs and reflects on it. Literature suggests that this can develop positive attitudes towards life, enhance social responsibility, promote community involvement, develop power of thought and understand their strengths and weaknesses in a real world context, thereby inspiring personal growth through the development of global competencies. It is essential to prepare 21st century educators, who are equipped to engage and inspire all future generation learners, to be creative and critical thinkers,which will benefit their individual, national and global futures.Our future educators should be able to use innovative approaches for engagingtheir students as thinkers and problem solvers,to make them successful global citizens and leaders of the next century. Thus, it is sensible to include service activities in future teacher education programs.

Keywords – *Empathetic, Socially responsible, Experiential Learners, Future Educators.*

Introduction

We can assert with confidence that our nation is soon, expected to be one of the most influential and empowered resource pool in the area of man-power, service and intelligence. Surely, our future educators need to be geared up to accept and meet the global challenges of the 21st century.The true measure of a nation's standing is, how well it attends to its children, their health and safety, their material security, their education and socialization, and their sense of being loved, valued and included in the families and societies, into which they are born. (UNICEF, 2007)Maybe, it is time to consider young people's out-of-school knowledge and culture not as distractions from the main business of schooling, but as rich, complex, diverse and powerful sources of learning and as an important place to start,for designing education for the 21st Century. (Sutherland, Robertson, and John, 2009)

Background Of Study

Education

Education is the process of living through a continuous reconstruction of experiences. It is the development of all those capacities in the individual, which will enable him to control own environment and fulfil his/her possibilities. (Dewey, 1938)Education is to create in children, adjustability and adaptality with their environment and social condition, develop social vision to cooperate with each other, share hardship in the way of the upliftment of society. It is only through education that, we can inculcate the feeling of self-sacrifice, patriotism, critical and analytical thinking, character building, etc., which may transform an individual and society as a whole. Education is an indispensable asset in its attempt, to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice; has an important role to play in personal and social development; is an expression of love for children and young people, whom we need to welcome in society; is an ongoing process of improving knowledge and skills. It can also bring about personal development and building relationship among individuals, groups and nations.

Teacher Education

As stated by NCTE (1998) in Quality Concerns in Secondary Teacher Education, 'The teacher is the most important element in any educational program, who is mainly responsible for implementation of the educational process at any stage'.Teacher education is a program that is related to the development of teacher proficiency and competence that would enable and empower the teacher to meet the requirements of the profession and facethe challenges therein. (Biswas, 2013) Teaching is a profession that entails reflective thinking, continuing professional development, autonomy, responsibility, creativity, research and personal judgements (Smith, 2006); where a disciplined group of individuals, who adhere to ethical standards, possess special knowledge and skills, derived from research, education and training, as they are prepared to apply these in the interest of others (ACP, 2004); a passion (positive emotional attachment), as an investment of time with students, as a focus on the individual need of students, as a responsibility to impart knowledge, attitudes, values, as maintaining professional knowledge and as engagement with the school community. (Croswell and Elliot, 2004)

Experiential Learning

Kolbe's experiential learning theory,(1984) is based on the idea that, learning is a process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experiences. The cycle has four distinct phases related to learning: concrete experience, reflection, forming abstract concepts, and active experimentation.

Experiential education involves: A mixture of content and process (Proudman, 1992; Wigginton, 1986; Burnard, 1988); An absence of excessive teacher judgement (Proudman,1992 and Wigginton, 1986); Student engaged in purposeful and meaningful learning (Wigginton, 1986); A holistic view of learning of life (Heron, 1989); Accommodating for different learning needs (Kolb, 1976; Proudman, 1992); Reflection in

action (Proudman, 1992; Burnard, 1988; Horwood, 1989; Cowan, 1988); A safe physical and emotional environment (Heron, 1989; Proudman, 1992); The presence of meaningful relationships (learner to self, learner to teacher, learner to learning environment (Heron, 1989; Proudman , 1992; Wigginton, 1986); Extending an individual learning comfort zone by challenge by choice. (Proudman, 1992; Smolowe, 1990)

Community Service

Service learning is an out-of-classroom community service experiences, in the course schedule wherein, students participate in an organized service activity, that addresses few community needs and reflects on it.Whether in form of service learning, internship or cooperative education, most of the programs are built around the philosophical ideology of Dewey (1938) that experience is important. (Perrin, 2014). In these experiences, students reflect on the service activity to better understand course content and gain a broader appreciation of the discipline and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility. (Moore, 2010)

Empathy

Empathy is a fundamental skill that helps people anticipate, understand & experience another person's emotional reaction or point of view. (Davis& Franzoi, 1991; as in McWhirter et al, 2002)

Social Responsibility

Social Responsibility is mainly concerned with the questions of ethics and morality (Kelley and Byrne, 1976). It is defined as reflecting concerns that extend beyond personal wants, needs, or gains (Gallay, 2006). As a value it motivates individuals' prosocial, moral, and civic behaviors; relationships with others and a moral sense of care and justice.(As in Hossain, 2011)

Review Of Literature

Literature suggests that service activities can develop positive attitudes towards life, enhance social responsibility, promote community involvement, develop power of thought and understand their strengths and weaknesses in a real world context, thereby inspiring personal growth through the development of global competencies.Eyler, (2002) states that experiential education is based on the thought that, students will be surprised by exposure to situations and information that conflicts, with their assumptions of the world and they will be challenged to explore further.Theorists believe that structured reflection and active engagement are critical to the development of intellectual components such as knowledge, skills and cognitive development (Dewey, 1938; Eyler 2002; Eyler and Giles, 1999, Kolb, 1984)Development is one of the ultimate goals of education for the future, that has two main aspects: socio-economic development, which is materialistic in nature, and socio-cultural, which is, by and large, concerned with preservation of cherished values and traditions of a country. The modern teacher must be, among other things, a change-agent. (UNESCO, 1990) Article by Ponder et al (2011) explored how twelve classroom teachers, enrolled in graduate course used service learning as an instructional tool, to help students practice active participation in their community and beyond, while also recognizing the relevance of academic coursework, as they applied knowledge and skills to meaningful issues and contexts beyond four walls of the classroom.

Need And Importance Of Study

Professional Expectations

Teachers are the kingpins of any educational system. (Gopalan, 2004)It is said that teachers affect eternity; nobody can tell where their influence stops. Our new National Policy on Education (NPE) 1986/1992 says that no nation can rise above the level of its teachers. As a profession,Teaching lies at the heart of both, the learning of pupils and their social, cultural and economic development; it plays a crucial role in transmitting and implanting social values, such as democracy, equality, tolerance, cultural understanding and respect for each person's fundamental freedoms. (International World Congress, 2011)

As reported by Pillai (2003) The expectations from the teacher are manifold and multifaceted. As the Delors Commission (UNESCO, 1996) suggests that, the importance of the role of the teacher as an agent of change, promoting understanding and tolerance, has never been more critical in the 21st Century. The need for change from narrow nationalism to universalism, from ethnic and cultural prejudice to tolerance, understanding and pluralism, from autocracy to democracy in its various manifestations, and from a technologically divided world, where high technology is the privilege of the few to a technologically united world; places enormous responsibilities on teachers who participate in the moulding of the minds and characters of the new generation. The stakes are high and the moral values formed in childhood and throughout life become of particular importance. The teacher at any stage is expected to bring out the best in the individuals and help them to realize their maximum potential be it physical, intellectual, spiritual. (Pillai,2003)

There is a distinct lack of trust in the teaching profession itself and in teacher educators and researchers. (McNamara and Menter, 2011) While teachers who experience more autonomy feel more satisfied in their work, are more motivated and feel more competent (Bogler and Somech, 2002; Weiss, 1999); they are held between high expectation and low professional esteem and burdened with excessive expectations from society at large. (Punch and Tuetteman, 1996)The irony is that, we in education, are expected to develop in our young people the attributes, skills and capacities, that will enable them to prosper and succeed in the knowledge society and at the same time, we are expected to counteract and mitigate, to an extent, the problems emerging from an increasing globalised economy. (Taylor and Runte, 1995; As in MacBeath, 2012)

Information explosion, changing nature of knowledge, increasing organizational complexity, competitive accountability, public demand for better service, advancement in technology and changes in governmental regulations, has compelled the teacher educators to think that, education is no longer a stage for human development but a life-long activity.(Srivastava, 2005)

The future happiness and success of children, youth and society depend on schools, their teachers and staff. Although, today one can assert that schools are better places for children, better resourced, more humane, more intelligent in respect of diversity and individual needs, more likely to reach out to parents and communities and rights for children too. (As in MacBeath, 2012)

Need of a Shift in Focus

What we know is, if we're not prepared to be wrong, we'll never come up with anything original, and by the time children become adults, most of them have lost that capacity. They

grow being frightened of being wrong, as we stigmatise mistakes and we're now running educational systems where mistakes are the worst thing you can make. (Robinson, 1997)

It is quite possible that the current definitions of teachers' professionalism, as taught and transmitted to every new generation of teachers, is somehow 'out-of-tune' with contemporary expectations, challenges and processes of change. It is necessary to reconceptualise the knowledge and competency core of teachers' professionalism in order to be 'tuned' to developments in learning sciences, challenges in classrooms or schools and expected future innovations in teaching and learning. (Innovative Teaching for Effective Learning Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, OECD) Beyond a concern for the health and welfare of their pupils, teachers' new professional remit extends to collaboration with colleagues, team working, participation in school-based alliances, teacher networks, professional associations and continuing professional development in different settings. (As in MacBeath, 2012)

The role of teachers today, is changing from simply distributing knowledge to heeding the comprehensive feedback and high-quality assessment of the students. Of all the facts, one is absolutely true, "No Technology Can replace Teachers". (Ralhan, 2014) "The quality of a nation depends upon the quality of its citizens, that depends partly upon the quality of their education, that depends more upon the quality of their teacher." (American Commission on Teacher Education) Future teachers need to be thorough professionals, fully equipped with high academic standards, Pedagogical skills, practical skills and, ethical and moral values. Globally, teachers are considered as moral agents of change and not merely technicians imparting knowledge. (as in Biswas, 2013) Teachers must be prepared to find and adapt new technologies, to engage the digital generation and traditional subject areas using project learning; be able to use data and evidence in their practice and work, in virtual learning environments as well as brick and mortar schools; collaborate with the community based organizations and work in multi-service schools. (Berry, 2010)

Teachers personality must reflect characteristics of good citizenship, dignity of the individual, rights and duties etc., so that he may transmit the same to the younger generation. Teacher can safeguard students against the social problems in nation in a better way, if they are sensitive towards these issues, like population explosion, unemployment, diversity, etc., prepare to own responsibility towards society andcommitment to work to build a better world. (Jamwal, 2012)

Along with content & methodology there is a need to integrate emotional competencies, such as, self-awareness and self-management, social sensitivity, social management, info-savvy skills andvarious life skills such as, self-awareness, empathy, interpersonal relationship, effective communication, etc. (Goel and Goel, 2012) The complexity and significance of teaching as a profession, demands that teacher education should be raised and appropriately enhanced.

Challenges of Teacher Education

Teacher education in India is plagued with imbalances and mismatch. India is a multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious society. This needs to be reflected in our educational approaches, to make learning meaningful and develop culture-specific pedagogy for the various stages of education. Education should foster universal and eternal values, oriented towards the unity and integration of our people. Prospective teachers have to be

made aware of the critical issues facing our society and have to be consciously exposed to education in human values. (Srivastava, 2005; Law, 1993)

James and Brown, (2005, as in MacBeath, 2012) thinks the challenges for pedagogy is to be able to measure attainment of competence, inclusion, self-worth-affinity towards and readiness to participate and contribute to groups, etc.Some reasons for growing disaffection among teachers have been listed in MacBeath, (2012) as:i) Intensification due to loss of autonomy and prescribed programs, mandatory curricula, methods of instructions, pressure for innovations and diversification of students. ii) Role diffusion and Overload due toresponsibilities and separate identifiable roles, shortage of suitable teachers, unmanageable requirements, inadequate remuneration.iii)De-Professionalization seen as a lack of sense of fulfilment, unattended queries or shortcomings and unrecognised pressures, organisational Learning disability. iv) Student behaviour and Indiscipline issues based on skills and expectations of teachers, school leaders, etc., conflicting situations, social unrest, extreme violence and so on. v) Special Needs and Inclusion as there is lack of awareness, understanding or proper training for disruptive behaviour of students in class, assuming responsibility of factors beyond personal control.

Most Institutionseven today, have mission statements with civic education as a top priority, but with the push for higher test scores, civic education is often left behind. (Parker 2008) Real world experiences and meaningful curriculum projects are often obsolete, because their format does not support the test preparation regimen mandated by their school districts. As a result, focus on skill and drill strategies is often met with resistance from the administration. (Hilliard, 2000, Santman, 2012) (As in Ponder, Vander-Veldt and Lewis-Ferrell, 2011)A sizeable number of teacher education institutions have been found lacking facilities, such as, Internet, hardware and software. (Goel, 2005)

Thus, the main concern is to build teacher capability to translate curricular intents into appropriate learning experiences for children, to enable them to acquire the desired knowledge, skills, attitudes and aptitudes. It is essential to develop the teacher education program, which can cater the changing needs of the society, as the change has been universally accepted as essential features of modern life in a society. (Pillai, 2003)

Need for Empathetic and Socially Responsible Educators

The National Academy of Education Committee's Report (Darling-Hammond and Bransford, 2005) wrote that: On a daily basis, teachers confront complex decisions, that rely on many different kinds of knowledge and judgement and that can involve high stakes, outcomes for students' future. To make good decisions, teachers must be aware of the many ways in which student learning can unfold in the context of development, learning differences, language and cultural influences, and individual temperaments, interests and approaches to learning.

Empathy is foremost an experiential, emotionally coloured understanding(Greenson, 1960); By means of Empathy one's kindness and motivation to care (practicality) may be directed towards someone else's feelings and need rather than misdirected.Holm (1995) argued that it is not enough to be nice in relation to others, Empathy is also needed. (As in Hakansson, 2003)Several of our country's previous leaders have repeatedly spoken of the need to actively engage all citizens even our youngest, in service to our local communities and beyond. It makes sense to link service learning and civic education to create

opportunities for students to solve problems and make meaningful connections in a real world context. (Ponder, Vander-Veldt and Lewis-Ferrell, 2011)

The well-being of our future generations of children and young people and the opportunities that effective education offers them, lie at the heart of everything that we do and all our energy within the policies, handed down to us is simply aimed at just that. Student teachers and practicing teachers need to be proactive, to understand the bigger picture to appreciate the complexity of the task before them and to understand the professional journey that they undertake in order to become a teacher and to remain an effective one. We need effective partnership working, building bridges, not working in isolation, we need effective transitions and links between stakeholders, and a professional dialogue. Above all, amongst the shifting landscapes and financial constraints we need to think of our moral purpose; what we do, we do ultimately and most importantly for children and young people and this should be our main driver. (Jackson, 2011) Our sight is so suffused with knowing we fail to know what we see. We must learn to know what we see rather than seeing what we already know. (Heschel, 1969)

Key Elements of Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is an ideal approach to achieving the tenets of empowering education because the results of direct experience are often concrete, easily identifiable and applicable. (Perrin, 2014) It engages students in critical thinking, problem solving and decision making in contexts that are personally relevant to them; involves making opportunities for debriefing and consolidation of ideas and skills through feedback, reflection, and the application of the ideas and skills to new situations (AEE, 2011; UNESCO).Ralhan, (2014) writes that Game Based Learning creates an environment where the learners easily relate themselves to and get involved.

Law(2003) writes that, Experiential Learning is all about involving individuals in their own leaning.Wigginton, (1986) developed a Foxfire approach to teaching, a uniquely experiential program, that was based on the principles that, all work must flow from student desire and concerns, work is characterised by student action, work emphasises peer teaching and team work, it must be clearly connected to the real world outside the classroom and students must take time to reflect upon experiences. (Jennings, 1990; Knapp, 1992; as in Law, 2003)

Warren's experiential classroom model, (1988) is student-directed based on the following elements: Students,determine the syllabus, prioritise topic areas, regulate class members' commitment, facilitate actual class sessions, undertake individual or group inspired projects and students are engaged in on-going evaluation. It means to empower students rather than hold power over which does not mean that, teachers withdraw power by renouncing their authority. Student empowerment is crucial to the educational, intellectual, and personal development of students. (Duhon-Haynes,1996; As in Passarelli and Kolb, 2011)

Experiential education is described as a learning process that includes, shared responsibility for content and delivery, student established rules and boundaries for learning, using prior knowledge and experiences in establishing goals and objectives, student ownership of the learning process, lecturers operating as facilitators of learning and practical involvement from each individual learner.

Similarly, some theorists suggestedkey elements of Experiential Education as, Student set individual goals, challenge by choice, establish a group contract for learning, tutor taking the role of facilitator of learning, onus for learning is placed on the student, an open forum for discussion, prior learning is used and built on, students have a major say in what they are learning, self and peer assessment, pupil-centred learning environment, safe environment where it is okay to make mistakes, reflection in action and group work. Reflection, is designed to help learners construct meaning out of their experience whether in class or non-traditional learning environment. The goal of reflection is for learner to construct meanings out of their experiences, the product is discovery of new connections between the most recent experience and past ones. (Horwood, 1989)

Experientialist Educator and Learning Organization

The facilitator needs to be: open and approachable, a guide, a lead learner, supportive, enthusiastic about learning, reliable, consistent and objective, interested in the students and their learning needs, directive when required, non-threatening, prepared to be a learner and to share in the decision making process, able to help students achieve goals, able to set up experiences so that students can discover for themselves, take more of a backseat role, able to share ideas, give feedback on student performance, able to provide network of support and able to empower the students to take responsibility for their own learning, facilitator to keep check on pace and amount of learning and validity of work.The role of learner in the experiential learning requires a commitment to eventually becoming self-directed and taking ownership of the learning process.

Teacher Education Institutions can do the following to become a Learning Organization: -

i) Open Environment: Centralized, mechanistic and autocratic structures do not create a good environment. Teacher educators should be able to question decisions without fear of reprimand. ii) Flexibility: There must be flexibility of structures and processes for institutional and individual development and during contingencies. iii) Supportive Management: The management must provide opportunities for development and support by providing resources in the form of money, time, efforts and personnel. iv) Empowerment: Teacher educators become responsible for their actions. v) Training: Training should be provided by people within the institution who actually do the work and also by resources from outside the institution. vi) Learning Laboratories: Institutions can provide for learning laboratories or simulated conditions, which are near real life settings to permit small mistakes and learning from failures. vii) Team Building: All need to work as a team with education manager as the leader of institution. It is the leaders' responsibility to put together individual views of the team members. viii) Thrive on Change: Institutions should not be scared of change. In fact, they must thrive on change by focusing on new objectives, planning and get committed. ix) Encourage Experimentation: Institutions must encourage and reward experimentation, accept error and uncertainty, Boost morale by recognizing the good efforts or work and take care of the teacher educators. (Garg, 2014)

Service Learning for Future Educators

Adopting an experiential learning approach in 'Teacher education' through Service learning programs, may help to develop, empathetic, socially responsible and next generation experiential educators. Experiential learning occurs through carefully chosen experiences,

supported by reflection, critical analysis and synthesis; where the student is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative and constructing meaning. Some forms of experiential learning include Internships, Service learning,Cooperative education, Practicum, Undergraduate research experience, Community-based research, Field work, etc. (Loretto, 2011)

Service entails mutuality and openness, student learning is enhanced through a careful attempt of processing experiences, learning through service is something that student constructs for themselves, with the guidance of peers and college staff and not merely provided by administrators.Community service may yield clearer understanding of self; it may yield understanding of others different from oneself and it clarifies one's understanding of community and its many connections. (Rhoads and Neururer, 1998) Learning is most powerful when knowledge develops within context of personal and environmental demands. (Kayes, 2002) Through proper understanding service learning can help participants gain a sense of course content, a thorough understanding of civic engagement, an increased sense of self-worth and an improved social skill. (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996, Howard, 2006; as in Perrin, 2014)

Eyler & Giles (1999) found that student gains numerous indicators of equality, justice and social responsibility implicit focus within service learning on social change, and at times social justice. (Butin, 2008) (as in Bowman et al, 2010) Most participants in service activities acknowledged that wanting to help others and satisfaction of making a contribution motivated them to volunteer. (Astin and Sax, 1998) Students tend to become involved, if the activity is expected as a course assignment. (Levine and Cureton 1998) (as in Helen and Robb, 2004)

Research suggests that service learning is an experiential instructional strategy that can help students develop a sense of self-efficacy, increase motivation, enhance academic achievement, improve social skills and develop civic mindedness. (Schultz, 2008; Soslau and Yost, 2007; Werner, Voce, Gaufin and Simmons, 2002) At the college level it has been shown that students who participate in service learning projects are more inclined to continue service engagement after graduation (Astin, Sax and Avalos, 1999); ascertained by Eyler (2002) that past behaviour is a good predictor of future behaviour and community connections established during schooling may well lead to community action after graduation. Service learning projects have a catalytic ability to motivate students into using active democratic skills to better their surrounding community. Westheimer and Kahne (2004), claim that teachers can develop civic commitments for students to have positive experiences while working towards solutions. (As in Ponder, Vander-Veldt and Lewis-Ferrell, 2011)

Application of some models and steps for Program

The program may be developedusing some of the experiential learning principles, like John Dewey's principles (emotional, physical, intellectual and social safety), Kolbe's experiential cycle, (concrete experience, active experimentation, reflective observation and abstract conceptualization) Susan Kovalik's, nine Brain Body compatible elements, (Absence of threat, movement, enriching environment, mastery, collaboration, choices, meaningful content and adequate time) and the Risk Competence theory.

Experiential learning involves a number of steps that offer student a hands-on, collaborative and reflective learning experience which helps them to "fully learn new skills

and knowledge" (Haynes, 2007). Through these experiences students develop communication skills and self-confidence, gain and strengthen decision making skills by responding to and solving real world problems and processes. One of the problems in encouraging Experiential approach is lack of understanding and training available in this particular area of learning.

The steps to be followed through Experiential approach are as follows:

1) Students will perform or do a hands-on minds-on experience with little or no help from the instructor.
2) Students will share the results, reactions and observations with their peers.
3) Students will discuss, analyse and reflect upon the experience.
4) Students will connect the experience with real world examples, find trends or common truths in the experience, and identify "real life" principles that emerged.
5) Students will apply what they learned in the experience (and what they learned from past experiences and practice) to a similar or different situation. (Experiential Learning _ Centre for Teaching Excellence.html)
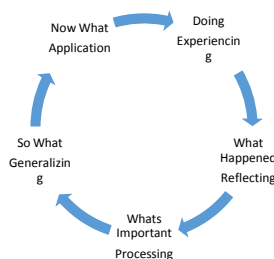
This can be inducted in the Teacher Education Schedule where initially they can visit schools over stipulated period of time for underprivileged, rural schools, schools for challenged, orphanages, etc. to informally conduct educational and recreational activities for the school children. This step can address both, the need of interaction with the children, who face challenges and also,the need to imbibe inclusive values, as well as confidence in future educators. It can be followed by Internship program and so forth for developing expertise.

Conclusion

Each one of us can think of teachers who did impact our lives and who made us feel inspired, valued and empowered. To live an enriched and fulfilling life, learners must be prepared and sensitized towards choices that affect their futures.

It is essential to prepare 21st century educators, who are equipped to engage and inspire all future generation learners, to be creative and critical thinkers, which will benefit their individual, national and global futures. (NCEE, 2006) Our future educators should be able to use innovative approaches for engaging their students as thinkers and problem solvers, to make them successful global citizens and leaders of the next century.

Opportunities to interact with, and work for community has a proven, positive effect on empathy, social responsibility and self-esteem of individuals. Introducing service learning in Teacher Education can help make learning more joyful, interesting and meaningful and may be an effective learning experience for future educators. Thus, it is sensible to include service activities in future teacher education programs.Experience plus reflection equals learning. – John Dewey

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