

## Professional Development for Service Learning: A Case Study in Hong Kong

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### Abstract

This study explores the development and understanding of service learning among educators in Hong Kong through a collaborative action research approach. Service learning, recognized for connecting academic theories with community needs, fostering student engagement, and promoting social responsibility, has been integrated into Hong Kong's secondary and tertiary education sectors since the 1980s and early 2000s, respectively. Despite its widespread adoption, challenges such as misconceptions—particularly equating service learning with voluntary work or community service—persist among educators. This presentation focuses on an experienced early childhood education lecturer's first attempt to implement a service learning module. Through two cycles of collaborative action research—comprising planning, acting, observing, and reflecting—her evolving understanding, skills, and attitudes towards service learning were examined. Data sources included field notes, lesson plans, reflection journals, and student feedback, providing rich insights into her pedagogical journey. Findings reveal that initial misconceptions impeded engagement; however, reflective practice facilitated deeper comprehension and attitudinal shifts, fostering more meaningful and authentic service learning experiences. The study underscores the critical role of targeted professional development in equipping tertiary educators with the necessary knowledge and skills. It also demonstrates the effectiveness of collaborative action research as a professional growth tool, promoting pedagogical innovation and reflective teaching. Ultimately, this case highlights the importance of continuous professional learning to enhance service learning implementation and enrich student engagement in higher education.

**Keywords:** Service Learning, Collaborative Action Research, Higher Education, Professional Development, Reflective Practice