

“Involve me, and I will understand”. Reflective Writing for Experiential and Service Learning in the context of ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and ED (English for Disciplines)

ABSTRACT

The aphorism by Confucius (450 BC) "Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand" is often referred to as being at the core of the experiential learning concept. It can equally be applied to the concept of service learning in which the student is involved in understanding purpose, actively participating, recording, and reflecting on engagement with the wider community. Research indicates that community partners see greater benefits to their organizations and constituents when faculty work directly with them over multiple quarters, semesters, or years (Sandy 2007). Establishing reciprocal relationships and deepening the commitment between partners and faculty result in more meaningful service learning experiences for students and real impact on communities (Jeandron and Robinson, 2010). Critical reflection is the key to connecting coherently these concepts with experiential and practical service learning experiences. This paper will present and discuss theories and methodologies for reflective writing in the context of ESP drawing on the experiences of teachers and students at the undergraduate level. It will be argued that critical reflection requires a distinctive protocol that integrates forms of personal narrative with intellectual inquiry. Of particular interest is how reflection on service learning experiences can be instrumental in enhancing knowledge of disciplines taught through the medium of ED.

Key words: Reflective; Writing; Experiential; Service; Learning;

Biography

Vivian F Chaplin, MSc

Vivian is a Senior Instructor at the English Language Centre in University of Macau. She has a wide range of teaching experience in the undergraduate level ranging from Management, Communication, and various English language courses. She specializes in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and spearheaded the implementation of English for Business for 3 years. She is involved in curriculum development, and she mentors Education major students seeking to acquire first-hand experience in the classroom setting. Vivian is interested in materials creation and is keen in developing electronic teaching materials for use in a virtual learning platform. She has presented widely in international academic conferences.

Manuel Antonio Noronha, PhD

Prior to joining the residential college, Manuel was Senior Instructor at the English Language Centre (ELC) where he taught various English language courses and public speaking courses to undergraduate students. He also taught more specialized English courses (ESP) to office candidates at the Academy for Public Security Police of Macau (ESFSM). In 2008, Manuel received his PhD from the University of St Joseph. His dissertation focused on the linguistic evolution of Macau Portuguese and he has also co-authored several articles related to that field. Manuel is also interested in Technology-Assisted Language Learning (TALL) and has presented widely in international conferences.

Introduction

In the current context on higher education, a growing number of private and public institutions appear to be offering a more complete style of education that is vastly similar to Oxford, Cambridge, Harvard, and Yale. In the fall of 2014, all freshmen enrolled at the University of Macau (UM)¹ were assigned to one of the eight Residential Colleges (RC); an internal close-knit intellectual, cultural and social learning environment. College Fellows (with diverse areas of expertise) are appointed from different faculties and departments across UM to offer workshops and seminars to RC students to enhance whole person qualities to develop together, collegiately.

RCs should not be seen or perceived as just another form of a student dormitory. This is correctly exemplified as:

“A dormitory is organized to provide food and shelter; a college, to provide for the student’s intellectual, social, and personal development” —Mark Ryan, A Collegiate Way of Living²

“Our residential colleges provide the familiarity of a close-knit community that nurtures individual growth. Our residential colleges foster the whole person and allow learning to take hold within extensive areas of the brain without minimising the roles of memorisation and emulation as tools in the learning process. Through this whole person experience, MCM hopes that each student will discover his or her own unique place in the greater world community” - Professor Kevin Thompson³, Master of Moon Chun Memorial College

Thus, the RCs are a big community and family where the Masters and Associate Masters of the colleges and some Resident Fellows also live there. Residents are made up of local students from Macau as well as non-local students from Mainland China and Hong Kong and a small inclusion of international exchange students which creates a multi-cultural living and learning environment.

Liberal Arts Learning: UM’s 4-in-1 Education Model

All enrolled freshmen are expected to implement the newly adopted 4-in-1 Education Model as a required component for graduation for their undergraduate education programme. This model has four basic components:

1. Discipline-specific Education;
2. General Education (GE);
3. Research and Internship Education;

¹ The University of Macau (UM) was founded in 1981. Its predecessor was the private University of East Asia. Through thirty years of development, UM has become a leading university and also the only public comprehensive university in Macao. Ever since its founding, UM has nurtured over ten thousand outstanding graduates for society. http://www.umac.mo/about_UM/about_UM.html , retrieved 24.04.2015

² Mark Ryan, A Collegiate Way of Living: <http://collegiateway.org/> retrieved 24.04.2015

³ Professor Kevin Thompson, OBE, Knight Officier dans l’Ordre des Arts et des Lettres de la République Française, FRSE, MA, PhD, Hon Doc Arts, FRCM, Hon FTCL, Hon FBC, FRSA, GRSM, LRAM, FTCL, Sir Winston Churchill Fellow. Recognised internationally as one of the most pre-eminent academy and conservatoire directors, Kevin Thompson, was, from 2004-2012, Director of the Hong Kong Academy for Performing Arts, one of the largest and most comprehensive academies in the world. <https://mcmc.rc.umac.mo/433-2/> , retrieved 24.04.2015

4. Community and Peer Education.

The objective of this model is to nurture students to become more:

- Self-reflective;
- Caring;
- Socially responsible individuals who can grow in a challenging and multicultural environment.

As an important vehicle for carrying out community and peer education, the RCs also have their core educational objective, which is to help students meet the requirements in the five Areas of Competencies—Interpersonal Relation and Teamwork, Global Citizenship, Leadership and Service, Cultural Engagement, and Healthy Living—through systematic planning of all courses, programmes, and activities.

Each RC ~~is~~ receives approximately 450 undergraduates across various disciplines, and in different cycles of their programmes. The University of Macau strives to become a concentration of world-class education, science and culture. In addition, the implementation of the soft skills approach to ‘whole-person education’, cross-disciplinary perspectives and international connectivity is a fundamental step in our students’ participation in the cultural and creative growth of Macau. Lifestyles and intellects are broadened when students continue to pursue learning outside of the curriculum. RC students are regarded as having an extended advantage, especially when they graduate and enter a demanding and highly-competitive job market. More importantly, they have the tools with which to lead more balanced and fulfilling lives upon graduation.

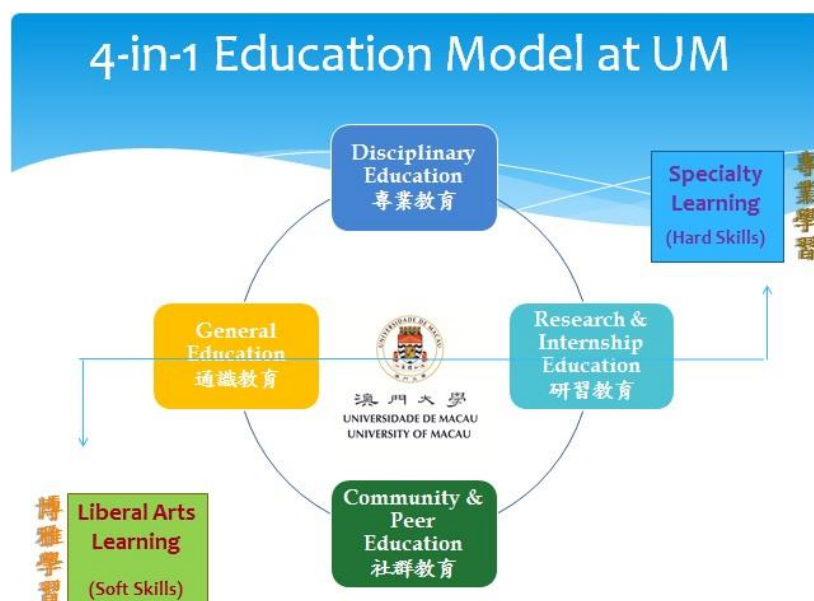


Figure 1: UM's 4-in-1 Education Model⁴

Moon Chun Memorial College (MCMC), W11

⁴ <https://rc.umac.mo/4-in-1-education-model-at-um/>, retrieved 24.04.2015.

Moon Chun Memorial College⁵ celebrated its commencement supper on 13th September, 2013, and was one of the first RCs to operate on UM's new Campus on Hengqin Island⁶. MCMC embraces a set of distinct values: inclusivity, diversity, and integrity.

The college aims to enable a quality residential experience for all, which is celebrated through an arts and science enriched social and ethnic community, promoted by recognizing the potential of education across borders, and demonstrated through open and honest relationships.

Experiential Learning

Experiential learning, or “learning through action” may also be interpreted in the following ways:

- learning by doing;
- learning through experience; and
- learning through self-discovery and exploration

All of the following quotes also highlight the definition as:

“I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand”
Confucius, 450 BC

“Tell me and I forget, Teach me and I remember, Involve me and I will learn”
Benjamin Franklin, 1750

“There is an intimate and necessary relation between the process of actual experience and education”
John Dewey, 1938

In fact, the concept of learning through experience had been explored by psychologists: Dewey (1859-1952) focused on problem solving and critical thinking instead of the traditional rote learning styles; Rogers (1902-1987) considered experiential learning “significant” as compared to what he called “meaningless” cognitive learning; Kolb, renowned for his Learning Style Inventory (LSI) also noted that concrete learning experiences are critical to meaningful learning and is which is widely used in many disciplines today to help identify preferred ways of learning.

A key element of experiential learning, therefore, is the student, and that learning takes place (the knowledge gained) as a result of being personally involved in this pedagogical approach.

Principles of Experiential Learning (EL)

Unlike traditional classroom situations that are highly lecture-oriented and extremely instructor-focused, where students' participation and output are decided by the number of grade points earned and the credits that follow. In the current context, there are students that remain minimally involved or are seen as unmotivated. However, when the mode of

⁵ Moon Chun Memorial College (滿珍紀念書院) or more commonly known to the students as MCMC, is named to honor the memory of the spouse of the College Donor, Dr. Chan Sui Kau, GBM, GBS, JP (陳瑞球博士).

⁶ Since 28 August 2013, UM has started arranging for some students to move to the new campus first. Approximately 1,600 students moved to the new campus during this first stage. A larger-scale relocation continued between late 2013 and early 2014. On 25th August, 2015, all classes were held on Hengqin.

instruction becomes student-centered, the approach and results can be more positive and engaging as students are able to learn from each other and are also able to understand and process what is being asked of them.

Classes need to be redesigned to engage students in direct experiences that occur in authentic situations and surroundings. The role of the instructor is to facilitate instead of dictating learner progression.

It is clear that the pivot of EL is emphasized on the process of allowing the process of learning to take place, and less on the final product of learning itself. In addition, experienced practitioners of EL will also be able to attest that their students exhibit higher levels of motivation to absorb new theories and concepts, especially when:

“... they have a personal stake in the subject rather than being assigned to review a topic or read a textbook chapter”. (UC Davis, 2011, 12 Op cit: Proudman).

Freshman Experiential Learning: SAGE 100

The Student Affairs General Education Course (SAGE100) is a compulsory two-semester course that is specifically designed as part of the General Education curriculum to orient first year undergraduate students as they transition from secondary education to meet the expectations and experiences of university life at the University of Macau.

SAGE100 aims to provide active learning opportunities through the formation of student learning communities that are facilitated by an RC academic staff. This learning process will encourage students to explore a wide range of experiential learning activities in five RC competency areas (Interpersonal Relationship and Teamwork, Global Citizenship, Cultural Engagement, Healthy Living, Leadership and Service) while documenting and assessing their personal growth in an e-portfolio.

Reflective Writing as an Assessment Tool

One of the assessment tools for evaluating and monitoring students enrolled in SAGE100 is reflective writing.

“It is not sufficient simply to have an experience in order to learn. Without reflecting upon this experience it may quickly be forgotten, or its learning potential lost. It is from the feelings and thoughts emerging from this reflection that generalisations or concepts can be generated. And it is generalisations that allow new situations to be tackled effectively” (Gibbs, 1988:9).

Primarily, this genre of academic writing permits students to develop an understanding of how the process of learning can be achieved, as well as achieving the intended learners' outcome. This understanding of acquiring self-knowledge is also termed as metacognition, or the ability to critically organize one's thoughts with the aim of improving learning (Fleming, S.M. 2014:31-37)⁷.

⁷ Stephen M. Fleming. "The Power of Reflection: Insight into Our Own Thoughts, or Metacognition, Is Key to Higher Achievement in All Domains." *Scientific American*, September/October 2014, pp. 31–37.

Reflective writing after each activity allows students to retract each step of learning: looking back at the motive for the activity, and thinking about it and learning from it. It should not be viewed as simply describing their actions, but exploring them.

Part of their writing should also include ways in which they may improve upon it next time. It is often helpful to think about it in depth and from different points of view, as this stage could generate a full understanding of it.

Gibbs' (1988) reflective cycle is a popular model for reflection. The model includes 6 stages of reflection and, as students collect their thoughts and prepare to write their reflective pieces, there may be a few questions that could have an underlying importance:

- Did the activity play an important part of your academic or working life?
- How did you feel about what you did/saw?
- Did you (and your classmates) get any new insights from the activity?
- What lessons did you learn from the activity?
- How would this activity fit in with your future work and personal development?
- Is there anything you would do differently in the future? Why?
- Has it allowed you to develop or more easily identify your skills?

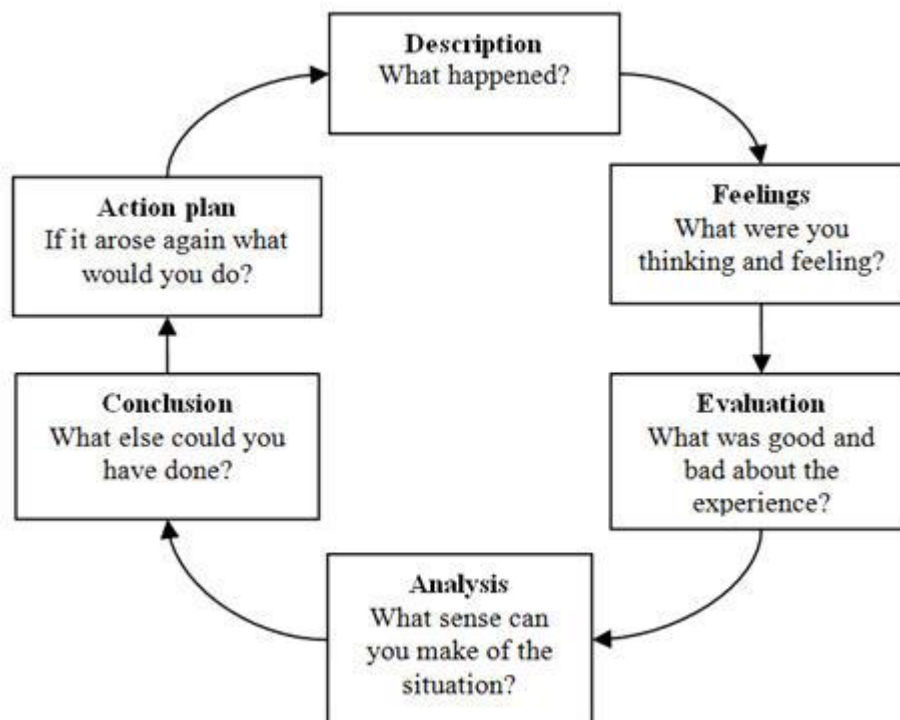


Figure 2: Stages of Reflective⁸

E-Portfolios using Mahara

⁸ Gibbs' (1998) reflective cycle - Adapted from: Gibbs, G. (1988) Learning by doing: a guide to teaching and learning methods. Oxford: Further Education Unit.
<http://www.cumbria.ac.uk/public/liss/documents/skillsatcumbria/reflectivecyclegibbs.pdf>

The University of Macau uses Mahara⁹ to provide an online platform as a means for reflective learning. The *Journal* is the key tool for promoting reflective learning in SAGE100. A *Journals* are created and published by students and can be shared not only to the course instructor, but also to their fellow classmates as an accessible electronic portfolio. The Mahara system facilitates students of SAGE100 to document and submit their reflective writing assignments.

Unlike a Blog, *Journal* entries are normally visible exclusively to the user. Therefore, the default settings need to be altered so an entire Journal or specific entries can be shared to the class community for feedback, and also for the course instructor to evaluate and assess students' learning progression.

Grading Rubric:

The assessment of each journal, which is based on five competencies, will be graded according to the rubric below:

	Exemplary	Competent	Needs Development
Content	strong content	good content	minimal or no content
Understanding	very thoughtful	complete ideas	minimal or no understanding
Participation	extremely active	participatory	minimal or no participation

Course instructors are required to perform a calibration session, so that there is a consistency for fairness across the board. Samples of previous e-portfolios will be assessed to ensure that everyone fully comprehends that rubric.

Here are several examples of e-portfolios as submitted RC students.

⁹ Mahara is built on open source and is customisable and flexible. It is also considered as being part of a student's personal learning environment that allows social interaction and networking: allowing them to collect, reflect on and share their achievements as well as their personal development on an e-Portfolio platform.

I chose to talk about cultural engagement & health

by Jessy (SANTARÉ) JOCELINE BRITO O. MORAES - (SANTARÉ)

I chose to talk about cultural engagement & health

The big change in my life to come to University

First I thank God for the opportunity that may be the only to be "someone" in this life. It is inexplicable describe what I felt with the news that I got a scholarship to UM. It was very difficult because there were many candidates. Left thousands of miles my country, my home, my family (especially my beloved parents), but I know it is for a good reason. My life here at UM is calm, try to distract with my countrymen, studying and some fun activities. Study and live was a big change in my life, because I never lived in another country, to not be my hometown Cape Verde.

Why I chose the University of Macau

There are several reasons that made me choose this place. I am a very dreamy person wanted to know something new, wanted to have a little freedom, I didn't want to be attached only to my country culture. Always heard the University of Macau by my uncle, and on students who studied here, and today they have a very stable working life.

My contact with Chinese language

The first impression I had of the Chinese language and a very complicated language and could not understand anything, very different from the languages I had contact. I currently have the Chinese lessons every Tuesdays, and has been very good, I love the classes and my beloved teacher.

Living with people of different nationalities

I've always been a very "closed" girl, but since I arrived at the University met people from Macau, China, Portugal, France, Angola, Mozambique, Guinea, Germany, United States. They are good friendly people, I had no difficulty in interacting with them, and I'm learning a lot.

One of the greatest experiences we had together was a recently organized event by UM, "Open Day Activity", where we had to take traditional food of our country and the best cumida had a prize. There were many people to taste our food, everyone enjoyed themselves and even my country not winning so the participation and every smile we received was a great prize.

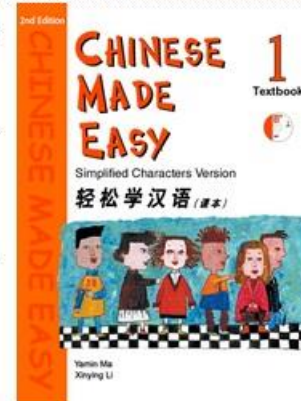
Open Day



My island - in Cape Verde



First chinese book



High table dinner



cooking contest and international cuisine

Figure 3: A Detailed Journal

Figure 3 is a good example of how a detailed *Journal* should be presented. The student had very clearly stated her views on how she had come to Macau (from her native Cape Verde Island) and encountered an unexpected cultural shock.

She clearly documented her personal thoughts and experiences of coming to terms with a foreign language, as well as adapting to a new culture through culinary and interpersonal exchanges.

The evaluation for the submission was categorized as exemplary, and the student received a grade in the upper range of a 10-point scale. The student has clearly followed the stages of reflection and the written piece is highly content-specific that includes a detailed personal reflection, as well as a high level of participation.

About me

db42591 CHAM MAN HOU's pages

- Career Planning
- Cultural Engagement
- Final large-scale assignment
- Final large-scale assignment2
- Global Citizen
- INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS & TEAM WORK
- Leadership & Service Assessment Component

db42591 CHAM MAN HOU's groups

Not in any groups

db42591 CHAM MAN HOU's friends

Manuel Manuel Antonio Noronha

1 friend

db42591 CHAM MAN HOU's wall

Maximum 1500 characters per post. You can format your post using BBCode.

Make your post private

Post

Manuel Manuel Antonio Noronha (mnoronha) - 09 May 2015, 11:37 AM

These are some nice pieces - it could of course be better if could add a little more description and information

Leadership & Service Assessment Component

by db42591 CHAM MAN HOU (db42591)

Halloween activity

This is the Halloween activity on my college. I was one of the game's helper. I need make up to make people afraid. My game is "Challenge One Minute". There have two challenge in my game. The challenger need to take some pellets to the other bowl with chopsticks. The other challenge , challenger need to bite a stick and put five dices on the stick. This two challenge must finish in one minute. The room is very small. It just can 4 people to play. But we didn't have people to control people come in. I think this can be improve. And I had a large satisfaction when I make some people afraid. If there have some activities in the future. I think I may not to be a helper. Because playing on the activities is funnier than doing helper.

Image

Figure 4: A Basic Journal

Figure 3 is an example of how an average Journal is presented. The student only highlights some simple facts about an activity that he had participated in, but included very limited thoughts and personal reflections.

He does offer some kind of improvement measure, but generally does not clearly state how or why. In addition, the students does not offer any consolidation on the lessons learned from that activity, and does not indicate how it had any implications on his academic or personal life.

The evaluation for the submission was categorized as “needs development” and the student received a lower to mid-range grade of a 10-point scale. The student generally needs to improve in many areas of reflection writing, and consider expanding the contents and include some visual examples or links to further examples.

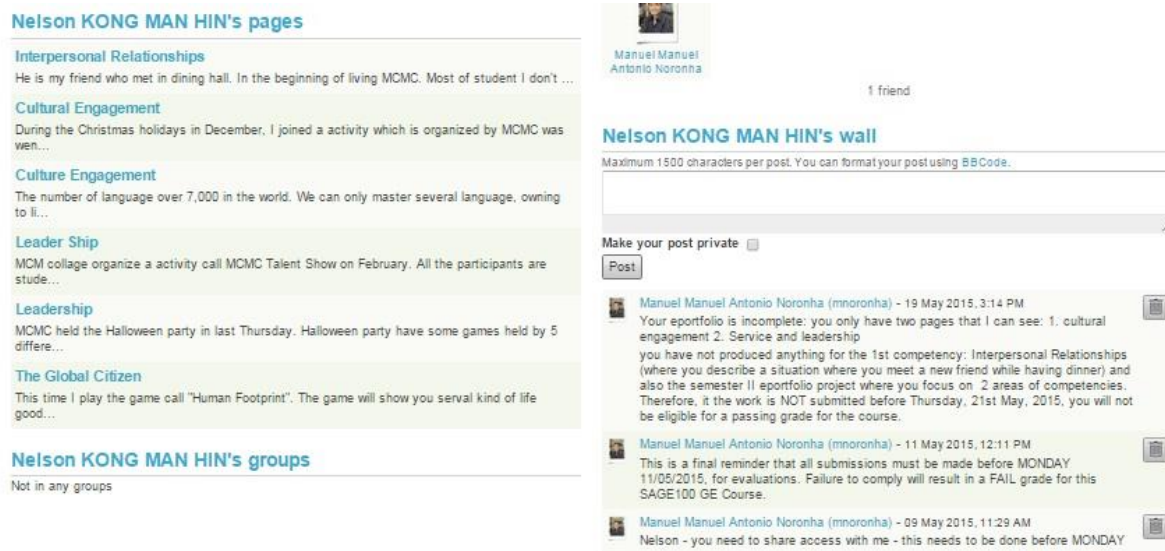


Figure 5: An Incomplete Journal

Figure 5 is an example of an e-portfolio that was considered to be incomplete at the time of evaluation. Although the student had created all the required pages, but had only shared two pieces with the course instructor and his fellow classmates. Therefore, the instructor posted three comments to the student, informing him of a fail grade if the pages are not shared on, or before the due date.



Figure 6: A poorly created Journal

In this example, the student offered some very basic factual information about the activity, but the visual image did not contain a caption. The content of the article is also generally lacking in any real reflection of the activity and it does not clearly state how or why. In addition, the students does not offer any consolidation on the lessons learned from that activity, and does not indicate how it had any implications on his academic or personal life.

The evaluation for the submission was also categorized as “needs development” and the student received a lower grade of a 10-point scale, and the student generally was asked to improve in many areas of his reflection writing skills. He was also asked to consider expanding the contents and include some examples of how he learned to become more competent in his skills regarding interpersonal relationships.

Service Learning Project: Paying-it-Forward

The Paying-It-Forward Project (PIFP) is a student-centered course project that needs to be completed by students taking English Level 4. It is based on a film with the same title in which the main character (a primary school kid) decides to complete his social studies assignment by doing good deeds to 3 people that he identifies to be in dire need for help. In return, he asks that the recipients repay him not by reciprocating his kindness, but by paying it forward by doing good deeds to 3 more people that need help.

The PIFP divides the students in groups and they have to propose 3 activities (good deeds) for the community. This concept is in line with the main goals of general education to engage the students more deeply with their community by allowing them to demonstrate “personal and social responsibility” (GE Handbook, p.9). By personalizing community issues, it is hoped that this will help students take responsibility and ownership of their implemented ideas, and experience the sense of global citizenship in their involvement in the implementation of this project.

In this project, students were put in teams of 5 and together, they spent time observing the community to identify areas that need help. They then formally presented their proposals detailing their ‘good deed’, schedule of activities, and their total budget. The presentations were conducted in a packed auditorium to an audience of approximately 30 students from different faculties who would vote at the end of the presentations. The groups also posted a 1-minute video online for voting. The proposal that received the most number of votes would get the funding.

Implemented Activities

UM Hour

Stemming from National Geographic’s idea of Earth Hour, the winning team implemented UM Hour in all the eight Residential Colleges in the University of Macau on 9 April from 8:30 to 9:30pm. The activity was well-supported with an estimate of 50% participation rate. Considering that this was the first time such an activity was done in the university, the group thought that it was a success.

Plastic Owl Workshop

Students conducted a workshop on how to make a decorative Owl out of recyclable plastic water bottles. This was successfully implemented and participated by around 25 students from different faculties who produced their own version of decorative pieces from recyclable bottles. The prototype was an owl, but participants produced other characters like Sponge Bob, Angry Bird, and other animated characters from the apps that they use. This proves that one idea can bring out others more and facilitate students’ creativity.

Lights Out-Sun In Photo Competition

The winning team sent out invitation to a photo competition highlighting the beauty of natural sunlight coming in the room. This was also to promote the use of sunlight during daytime, by drawing the curtains open and switching off the lights in the classroom and in the residential colleges. A total of 9 photos were submitted online, and the whole class voted the best composition.

Switch Off the Lights Campaign Mini-Poster

Students went to primary and secondary schools in Macau to hold a switch off the lights campaign. Employing the school children's innocence, the winning team asked them to draw their thoughts of using natural light during daytime. The purpose is to pick the best drawing and reproduce it to replace the "lights out" notices posted next to the switch all over the university. Three drawings were selected but for their plan to replace the notices takes approval from the university body.

Reflection

Students have generally expressed surprise in the success of implementation of their planned activities. It has also made them realize that they are more capable than they thought they were. As one student wrote, *'...this experience has given (me) knowledge in how to handle events. It was like a short experience in a working place, a small taste of how working with people is like. It has also put a light on my creativity side. I am forever grateful to have participated.'* This project also gave students the experience in putting their studies into practice as evidenced in one student's reflection that stated, *'As a student who studies management, we do know a lot of plan (in) theory. But practice, it is first time we apply the theory to these use project (sic). I think a good plan really helps a lot...'* On a personal level, one student expressed that *"...these experiences became treasures beyond price... After this semester, I would be more vigorous and active to organize or participate in the upcoming activities in the future (sic)."*

Conclusion

The implementation of the 4-in-1 Education Model in the Residential Colleges, at the University of Macau, has one prime objective, which is aimed at orienting all freshmen entering UM, to prepare for their chosen careers through the acquisition of both hard and soft skills. The model offers opportunities for freshmen to learn from each other by doing, discovering, reflecting and applying new skills and concepts, rather than learning through the more conservative "instructor-centered methodologies". The philosophic concept of *"Tell me, and I will forget. Show me, and I may remember. Involve me, and I will understand"* will enable students to develop better communication skills, increase their self-confidence and gain strength in decision-making techniques by responding to and solving problems and processes that become the focus of their pedagogic learning components.

Service Learning Projects (SLPs) at MCMC is considered as a mutually beneficial learning tool for students and Macau, as it is contained component of experiential education by its very nature of learning, while getting a specific task completed for the community. SL involves solving some of society's issues; such as, homelessness, poverty, lack of quality education, pollution, etc. One of the goals of SLPs is to help students become aware of these issues and

develop good citizenship in learning how to help solve some of these problems, and document their lessons learned through their e-portfolios.