

Plenary Session 4

Youth Citizenship Engagement

Date: 8 Oct, 2016

Time: 12:00 – 13:30

Session Chair: Prof. Tai-Lok Lui

Speaker: Prof. Steven Sek-Yum Ngai

Title: Youth Citizenship Engagement: The Experience of a Local Service-Learning Program at Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong

Abstract:

People commented that young people are becoming more apathetic to social issues. This may be due to the feeling among youth that their voice, unique ideas and concerns are not being heard and respected in society. Accordingly, this presentation aims to explore how we can involve young people civically by promoting youth citizenship engagement. Youth citizenship covers civil, social and political rights and obligations that young people acquire in the processes of their life course. It is where they come to see themselves as valued members of our society and develop a sense of belonging to it. In order to be civically engaged, they need to see the moral and civic dimensions of issues and to take action when appropriate. To motivate young people and to develop their faith in becoming full participants in our society, service-learning programs (SLPs), which combine academic study with community service, are becoming increasingly popular throughout the world. As noted by many local and overseas educators and researchers, SLPs are ideally suited to help young people understand the needs and responsibilities to care for their community. They offer opportunities for young people to apply knowledge from the classroom to serve disadvantaged groups in society. Academic SLPs also have the potential to equip young people with skills to develop professionally and personally. This presentation seeks to illustrate the importance of SLPs as a means for youth citizenship engagement by using a local example of SLPs implemented at Chung Chi College of the Chinese University of Hong Kong. The results showed that the majority of the student participants have benefited in two aspects: (1) By developing personal autonomy through real

world experiences, the program develops within students a recognition of and faith in their potential. It enhances their ability to be self-assured, to assume new responsibilities, and to achieve individual growth. (2) Students move to becoming responsible citizens and active agents of social change. As they learn to care for different deprived groups in the community, they are assuming meaningful roles and responding to real issues in ways that have long-lasting impacts on their own lives.

Speaker: Prof. Maurice Devlin

Title: Promoting Citizen Engagement through Youth Work – Perspectives from Ireland and Europe

Abstract:

Ireland is one of the European countries with the longest traditions of youth work provision and practice. It is also one of the few where there is legislation defining what 'youth work' is and what makes it distinctive from other types of work with young people. Ireland's Youth Work Act emphasises the *non-formal educational* dimension of youth work, its focus on young people's *personal and social development*, its reliance on their *voluntary participation* and the vital contribution of voluntary, *civil society organisations* in developing and delivering youth work in partnership with the state.

While the presence of youth work varies in individual countries, the major transnational organisations, the European Union and the Council of Europe, have taken significant steps to promote it. Youth work has a central position in the *European Youth Strategy 2010-18*, on the basis that it has wide-ranging benefits for young people (in terms for example of their education, employment, physical and mental health, cultural development and creativity) but also because it facilitates the *active participation* of young people in shaping their own lives and contributing to social inclusion, social equality and positive social change. All of these features mean that youth work is a particularly effective way of engaging young people as citizens. Moreover, given its intergenerational character, youth work engages other age-groups in working for and with young people, in ways that benefit society as a whole. In the light of contemporary global challenges, this work has never been more important or more necessary.

This paper will present some case studies highlighting the contribution of youth work to citizenship engagement, drawing on research and practice from Ireland and throughout the continent of Europe.