Navigating the opportunities of service-learning placements: An exploration of benefits to host organisations of allied health service-learning placements

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Abstract

Introduction: Service-learning placements are growing in allied health education programs. Within these placements, students bring their disciplinary perspective to work with an organisation on an identified project or need; as such, there should be equal weighting between student learning and service outcomes. Ensuring such reciprocity is essential to sustainable placement partnerships and is also an obligation of universities, considering their function of contributing to their communities. Yet there is limited research exploring organisational benefits of allied health service-learning placements. Therefore, the aim of this study was to explore the organisational benefits of hosting university students on allied health service-learning placements and how such benefits could be maximised.

Methods: Over 50 students from three different allied health disciplines attended a discipline-specific allied health service-learning placement at a school or childcare centre. Sixteen organisations hosted students between 2018 and 2021. Staff (n = 7) from seven of these organisations engaged in semi-structured interviews about their experiences hosting students. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed and thematically analysed.

Results: Findings were grouped into themes: benefits, resources, student-placement "fit" and supporting stakeholders. Six participants found the placements beneficial, and benefits appeared closely tied to the resources students produced. Organisational benefits may be increased through greater attention to student–placement fit and better supporting stakeholders.

Conclusions: The findings support the potential organisational benefits of service-learning student placements but highlight that achieving benefits cannot be assumed. To maximise the opportunities of service-learning placements, they should involve purposeful partnering, extensive preparation and clear communication between host organisations and universities.

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Introduction

Student placements are an integral part of many allied health pre-registration programs, with students required to complete a specific number of practice education hours for successful graduation and professional registration (Taylor et al., 2017). Placements provide rich opportunities for student learning but also have the potential to contribute to meeting needs of the organisations that host students (Voss et al., 2015). In fact, it has been argued that ensuring such reciprocity is essential to ensuring sustainable placement partnerships and is also an obligation of universities, considering one of their functions is contributing in impactful ways to serving community needs (Connell, 2019; Cooper & Orrel, 2016). This is particularly true for service-learning placements (Flecky, 2011).

Grounded in the idea of civic responsibility, service-learning placements see students bring their unique disciplinary perspective to serve their community by working to meet a community-identified need (Jacoby, 2003; Voss et al., 2015). As such, there should be equal weighting between student learning and service outcomes (Flecky, 2011; Voss et al., 2015)—a distinguishing factor compared to traditional clinical placements (Seifer, 1998), in which student learning is the focus (Seifer, 1998). Examples of service-learning placements within allied health include direct service provision in under-resourced areas, establishing an emerging role for a discipline in a new setting and/or advocacy and policy level work. As these placements may occur in settings that do not employ an allied health professional, or where there is not an established allied health role, it is common for students to be supported by off-site supervisors (Overton et al., 2009; Seifer, 1998). Such placements are increasing in health sciences education (Voss et al., 2015) due to factors such as shortages of traditional placements coupled with increased student enrolments (Gustafsson et al., 2014; McAllister et al., 2018; McBride et al., 2020; Taylor et al., 2017), healthcare reform (Gitlow, 2011; Rodger et al., 2008) and the COVID-19 pandemic (Salter et al., 2020), all of which make procuring traditional placements more difficult.

While the evidence for organisational impacts of allied health service-learning placements is limited (most research investigates benefits to students), what does exist is promising. One allied health service-learning placement laid the foundation for the development of a fully funded service (Campbell et al., 2020). Another created an ongoing speech pathology service for children in a regional Australian primary school (Kirby, Lyle, et al., 2018), and an international allied health service-learning placement increased local partners' skills and knowledge, provided valuable resources and strengthened service quality as well as the reputation of host organisations (Crawford et al., 2020). Analysing service-learning placements more broadly (i.e., in any discipline) reveals marginally more literature on their organisational impacts. Positive impacts include increased capacity and productivity, new perspectives and ideas, and access to professional expertise otherwise

unavailable (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Rinaldo et al., 2015; Sandy & Holland, 2006). However, these placements can also have negative impacts, such as when organisational risks and costs of hosting students outweigh the benefits (Blouin & Perry, 2009).

It is imperative that costs, benefits and risks be clearly understood to help ensure that universities and organisations can be proactive in ensuring mutually beneficial outcomes for all involved. Evidencing organisational benefits of service-learning placements may assist universities in attracting placement providers (Pigott et al., 2022). Additionally, understanding how to maximise such benefits, from the perspective of host organisations, may assist in ensuring these placement partnerships are sustained (Tyndall et al., 2020). In light of the global lack of allied health placements (Taylor et al., 2017), enhancing procurement and sustainability of placement partnerships is essential for allied health programs. There is, therefore, a clear need for research that evaluates experiences and benefits of service-learning allied health placements for organisations hosting students (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Hunter & Volkert, 2017). This study sought to contribute to meeting this need. The aim was to explore organisations' experiences of hosting students on allied health service-learning placements, with a particular focus on the following research questions: What were the organisational benefits of hosting students, if any? And how could these placements be improved to maximise future benefits?

Methods

Context of the study: The Nerang Alliance

The site of investigation for the study was the Nerang Alliance (NA), a cluster of seven schools and 20 early childhood education and care centres (ECECs) from the greater Nerang region in southeast Queensland, Australia. The NA formed in 2011 with a shared vision to improve children's developmental readiness for school, acknowledging this was a priority reflected in the region's Australian Early Development Census data (Clanchy et al., 2022). From 2016–2019, funding was secured for an early years coach to build connections with organisations across the region, and Griffith University was, therefore, invited to collaborate towards addressing the NA's identified community need. The partnership was to draw on existing university capacity. As such, service-learning allied health student placements were identified as a means to increase school and ECEC capacity to identify and support children at risk of, or with, developmental vulnerabilities and their families and, hence, promote school readiness (Clanchy et al., 2022). At the time of data collection, over 50 students from three disciplines had been hosted by 16 sites within the NA on 24 service-learning placements since 2018 (see Table 1). The study sought to explore the benefits for the organisations that had hosted students and how these placements could be improved to maximise future benefits. It was anticipated this would provide insights into whether these placements were, indeed, mutually beneficial and ways they could be improved. The findings would also contribute to the limited research on organisational benefits of allied health service-learning placements.

Table 1

Overview of the Student Service-Learning Placements

Discipline	Description of the Placement	Length & Supervision	Sites	Total Number of Students Placed 2018–2021
Occupational Therapy Role Emerging Placement	Students worked in a pair at one site. They collaborated with key stakeholders to identify an occupational issue (a challenge related to children's participation in everyday activities) and then developed and implemented a suite of intervention resources to build capacity of the site to address that issue. This was part of a mandatory placement.	2 days/week for 12 weeks On-site supervision provided by host staff: approx. 12 hours total Off-site supervision provided by an occupational therapist: approx. 15 hours total	4 schools 8 ECECs	28 undergraduate students
Exercise Science and Sport Development Child Physical Development Program	Students worked in pairs or small groups at one site. After collecting information about the site via staff interview, students developed and delivered a 1.5-hour session targeting the physical development needs of the children. Activities/games delivered were revised and collated in a compendium to be used as a resource by the participating sites. This was a voluntary placement.	Approx. 10 hours over 10 weeks On-site supervision provided by host staff: approx. 4 hours total Off & on-site supervision provided by an exercise scientist: approx. 6 hours total	7 ECECs	13 undergraduate students
Physiotherapy Initiative	Students worked in a pair at one site. With a focus on one child (who was identified by the service), students planned and delivered a goal-directed physiotherapy intervention that built capacity of the site to plan individual and group activities. This was part of a mandatory placement.	½ day per week for 6 weeks On-site supervision provided by host staff: approx. 2 hours total On-site supervision provided by a physiotherapist: 9 hours total	2 ECECs	4 master's students

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Study approval was obtained from the Griffith University Human Research Ethics Committee (project reference number 2019/488) and the Queensland Department of Education (project reference number 21/630961).

Research design

Semi-structured interviews were used to gather qualitative data of the participants' experiences of hosting students. This qualitative design aligned with the epistemological and ontological stance of the research team, who understand that multiple realities exist, and subjective experiences of these realities were what was sought to fully explore the research questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Recruitment

To participate in the study, organisations (ECECs or schools) were to have hosted at least one service-learning allied health student placement between 2018 and 2021. This resulted in 16 potential organisations for participation. Each of these were emailed a participant information and consent form, along with a formal invitation to participate, by the first author. The study was also promoted by the first author in two wider NA email communications and at one face-to-face meeting. As the first author had pre-existing relationships with all potential participants, the perception of coercion was reduced by directing participants to register their interest with an independent research assistant, who would conduct the interviews and maintain participants' anonymity. All participants signed informed consent forms prior to participating. No compensation was provided for participating.

Data collection

Data collection was via individual semi-structured interviews. As the participants were all known to the first three authors, an independent research assistant was employed to conduct the interviews to reduce the potential of courtesy bias. This research assistant had extensive experience in qualitative research, particularly qualitative data collection via interview. Using a semi-structured interview guide, the interviewer encouraged participants to reflect on all their experiences hosting students over the preceding years. Interviews lasted between half an hour and an hour. Participants were offered the choice of participating in the interview over the telephone or via an online meeting platform of their choice. All chose telephone interview. Interviews were audio-recorded, and initial transcription was via voice-to-text software. Transcripts were then carefully checked and corrected by the interviewer for accuracy, de-identified and assigned a unique study identification number. Interviews were completed between October and November 2021.

Data analysis

De-identified interview transcripts were shared with two authors (neither of whom were the interviewer) who analysed them using Braun and Clarke's (2022) method of reflexive thematic analysis. Both these authors had experience in qualitative research,

specifically thematic analysis. Independently, these authors used an inductive approach to complete pen-and-paper line-by-line coding of all transcripts. Coded transcripts were then compared, revealing consistency. Codes and their corresponding data extracts were then collated, and the same two authors then refined, ordered and consolidated codes into potential themes relevant to the research questions. In a third document, themes, their codes and corresponding data extracts were tabulated and drafted into findings by one of these team members, who reflexively returned to the original transcripts throughout to ensure they accurately reflected the dataset. To enhance rigour, this tabulated document of findings, themes, codes and data extracts was reviewed by two other authors, who validated the findings drawn from the analysis.

Results

Seven organisations agreed to participate. The individuals representing participating organisations consisted of one school principal and six ECEC directors. Whilst the participants held senior positions within their organisations, all had been the direct on-site supervisors of the students on their placements. In total, the participating organisations had hosted 25 students from three different disciplines (occupational therapy, physiotherapy, and/or exercise science and sport development) on 11 placements of varying lengths and designs. More than half the sites (4 out of 7) had hosted multiple sets of students from various disciplines, whilst others had hosted just one set of students (see Table 2).

Table 2

Participant Information

Participant Role	Student Placements Hosted	Number of Students
School principal	2018 Occupational therapy	2
	2019 Occupational therapy	2
ECEC director	2019 Physiotherapy	2
	2020 Exercise science	2
ECEC director	2019 Physiotherapy	2
	2021 Occupational therapy	2
ECEC director	2020 Exercise science	3
	2021 Occupational therapy	2
ECEC director	2020 Exercise science	2
ECEC director	2020 Exercise science	3
ECEC director	2021 Occupational therapy	2

Note: Participant identification numbers have been withheld intentionally to reduce comparisons between allied health disciplines, which was not the intention of the research.

The benefits of hosting students spanned a spectrum of overt to subtle, and these appeared to be closely tied to the resources students produced on placement for their host organisations. Participants also reflected on the student–placement "fit" and the importance of supporting all stakeholders. Findings were grouped into four themes, with two themes per research question: benefits, resources (research question one), student–placement "fit" and supporting all stakeholders (research question two).

Benefits: Direct, subtle and lacking

Six of the seven organisations reported that prior to the placements, they had expectations that hosting students would increase staff knowledge and skills and that this would be achieved through providing strategies to support children as well as the new perspectives and knowledge bases students would bring. All these participants reported their expectations were realised, to one extent or another, in the form of either direct or subtle benefits. For three, this was in the form of students sharing their discipline-specific knowledge to upskill staff:

> *They gave ideas to the staff and … worked with the children and … looked at it as a whole, and then they gave specific little exercises that the girls could implement. … They were exceptional.* (Participant 003)

One participant reported students had made system level changes, which she described as "checking in with how they [educators] are coping with those additional needs and providing options for additional trainings and things like that" (Participant 007). And two others spoke to how hosting students had flow-on effects for users of the service (i.e., children and families):

> *I think by having those students in we were also able to educate our families a little bit more about different therapists that children could be seeing to support their different needs.* (Participant 006)

More subtle benefits related to influencing staff perspectives and culture, or at least "validating" (Participant 001) current practice. Participants spoke specifically to the benefits of having a "new perspective" (Participant 005), which helped their service "look at the children with a different set of eyes" (Participant 003) and, for participant 005, "resist stagnation". Similarly, another participant framed the benefit as contributing to establishing "a culture of learning" as "strategies that were being used … were quite universal and … could have been applicable to many other students [i.e., children in the service]" (Participant 004). This participant highlighted "the importance of actually upskilling all of the staff, regardless of what rooms they're in". Two participants reported that hosting students helped validate what they were already doing:

> *Even if it didn't provide new strategies, this was often affirmation that staff were already implementing good practice etc., and this lifted morale.* (Participant 006)

Participant 005 highlighted that it was the students' questioning that prompted reflection among staff:

> *They asked the right questions which... would create reflective thinking processes from staff.*

For one other participant, hosting students lacked benefits. They reported having an expectation that they would receive more targeted support for specific children with specific needs, but that this had not been met:

> *I don't think they [the resources produced] were targeted at the right children, and the children that required strategies for them to get more help were probably not identified and so they were not suitably matched with those resources.* (Participant 002)

Whilst not all participants reported benefits from placements, all reported no negative impacts from hosting students.

Resources

Resources students produced appeared closely linked to the benefits reported by participants. Two participants described the student-produced resources as "nothing new" (Participant 001) and "quite general and basic" (Participant 002). For four of the participants, however, the resources students produced were valuable and were being used, with flow on effects for children:

> *We've even passed them on to our sister centre. ... We're using them in our everyday practices as well. They seem really helpful for the education of staff. ... It's been easily a positive impact. ...We've been able to implement these within the classrooms, and it's not only obviously beneficial for the children within our service but especially for the educators as well.* (Participant 007)

As highlighted above, one of the primary benefits of resources was helping to support and educate staff but also support families:

> *It [the resource] is about transitioning into school, and the skills required, and what parents can do at home to help their children. So, I think that will definitely become a very well used and valued resource.* (Participant 005)

Resources were described as positive if they targeted specific unmet needs known to the site (e.g., self-regulation or fine/gross motor skills):

> *That was the expectation that we would walk away with ... some new resources which the students were able to leave with us ... and things that we could help the children with when it came to self-regulation and emotion. So that was our expectation and they very much fulfilled that.* (Participant 006)

Similarly, the utility of resources was also dependent on whether they were a value-add in terms of new knowledge and ideas, with three participants identifying that they had

already been implementing several suggestions made in the resources produced by students.

Student–placement "fit"

All participants made comments related to the specific student–placement fit, specifically in the early-years context. For one participant, student interest, ability and initiative were the key factors for success:

> *If a student comes here and they're willing and they're able and they take initiative and they run with this... there's no drawback.* (Participant 005)

Three other participants spoke to the complexities of the practice context in early years education environments and how lack of prior understanding of this can result in students being "starstruck" (Participant 004):

> *In a service that has children from 6 weeks to 5 years, it is quite confronting for someone who has never really had much to do with children.* (Participant 006)

For these participants, it was apparent that students with prior knowledge and/or experience working with children in the early years were preferable:

> *I would be more inclined to take students that you know have their interests in obviously additional needs or challenging behaviours and things like that.* (Participant 007)

Matching such students to these paediatric placements, or improving the student preparation for placements in the early years, were suggested ways to enhance student confidence and potential benefits of future placements:

> *I think it's important for the students themselves to maybe have a basic understanding of the kind of setting that they're about to be walking into. … We've got 22 children doing 50 different activities, so it's like herding cats.* (Participant 006)

Providing this scaffolded support for students links more broadly to supporting all stakeholders.

Supporting all stakeholders

Participants identified the primary stakeholders as the host organisations, the university and the allied health students on placement. They also made reference to the families and children accessing their services. In relation to host organisations and students, it was highlighted that "supporting all stakeholders is a really critical part" (Participant 004). Specifically, participants highlighted university support for students as "really important" (Participant 005). They saw this as being in the form of providing more specific preparation for students prior to placement (mentioned above), having a central liaison person students could contact if "feeling overwhelmed or … like they're not hitting the mark, or want to get some more information around their placements" (Participant 004) and also providing students with discipline-specific support that participants

acknowledged not being capable of. Such supports were suggested as ways to improve future placements.

In relation to supporting host organisations, participants highlighted communication and collaboration. Six participants reported being satisfied with the communications with the university, with two describing this communication as "strong". A key focus for improvement, though, was regarding communication and collaboration prior to the placements commencing. Three participants reported wanting more information prior to the placement to ensure clarity regarding what they could expect from the placement, and three others made comments that suggested placement expectations were not clear. For instance, one appeared to have an expectation that was not consistent with the proposed placement model: providing direct services for specific children. Two other participants appeared concerned that the placement was not meeting students' learning needs for direct service-provision, which is not the aim of these service-learning placements:

> *They are going to become occupational therapists, and to work with 4- and 5-year-olds, they could have all the academics in the world, but if they cannot connect to the child right, they're not going to be able to do their job*. (Participant 005)

Another mentioned:

> *What I would love to see is … more hands-on practical stuff for students because I think they would learn so much*. (Participant 003)

Considering direct-service provision was not the focus of these service-learning placements, these comments suggest the need for clearer communication to ensure clarity regarding this placement model and the expected benefits for both students and host sites.

In relation to secondary stakeholders, participants reflected a keen awareness of the needs of the children and families accessing their services. They also had multiple suggestions of how placements could be designed to meet these needs, whether that be through direct-service provision models, involving parents, expanding to include other disciplines and/or extending placements to be longer in duration and more frequent:

> *Families are struggling to get [occupational therapists] and [speech therapists] into services because there's such a high demand. If we had students in here that were helping us, maybe then we could help the families a little bit more*. (Participant 001)

Participants proposed greater collaboration between the university and host organisations to design placement models that provided benefits that better met these needs:

> *Perhaps we could collaborate even further beforehand if we get permission through the parents prior so we can help children who we feel have needs that would benefit the most*. (Participant 002)

Another acknowledged that mutual expectations and benefits can be clarified "once you have the placement and the organisations continue to work together and mature through

that collaborative" (Participant 006). In fact, three participants explicitly commented on the ongoing and maturing nature of the partnership between the NA and the university:

> *It's a learning curve for all of us. … It's good definitely, and I would do it again, but we can improve*. (Participant 002)

Part of this maturing partnership was the need to provide avenues for collaboration to "keep … that rhythm and that consistency of having the students coming in whatever respect, or [the university] being open to different projects and things like that, where they're getting the feedback from the services themselves" (Participant 006).

It was acknowledged, however, that facilitating support for all stakeholders, and engaging in collaboration, required resourcing, and that this was not easy considering "[we] are all very time poor" (Participant 006). The previously funded early years coach was identified as helpful for supporting stakeholders through acting as "that central liaison person … and how we fund that can sometimes be a little bit difficult" (Participant 004). Despite these challenges, participants appeared committed to the partnership, with all stating they would be willing to accept students again on placement.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore organisations' experiences of hosting students on allied health service-learning placements, with a particular focus on the organisational benefits and how placements could be improved to maximise future benefits. Overall, participants reported positive outcomes, with a range of benefits identified. These benefits included upskilling staff with new perspectives, knowledge, skills and training. This consequently impacted service users, as participants reported being better able to support children and families. For some participants, these benefits were linked to the resources students produced that met specific needs or were a value-add in terms of new knowledge and ideas. Other benefits included the validation of current practice and/or prompting staff to reflect on practice. These findings are consistent with, and build on, the limited number of studies investigating the organisational impacts of service-learning placements (both within and outside allied health), which suggest hosting students can have a range of positive organisational benefits (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Campbell et al., 2020; Crawford et al., 2020; Kirby, Lyle, et al., 2018; Rinaldo et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, the fact one participant had unmet expectations (regardless of whether these expectations were realistic for the placement model or not) highlights that organisational benefits of hosting students are not ensured based on good intentions but require purposeful facilitation. While participants in this study did not identify negative impacts of hosting students, such as revealed in Blouin and Perry's (2009) study, levels of dissatisfaction with certain aspects of placements, coupled with suggestions on ways to improve placements, suggests the full potential of meeting organisational need was not

consistently realised. Participants' comments correlate with the literature both within and outside allied health on essential aspects for ensuring service-learning placements are mutually beneficial: partnership, preparation and communication (Bosma et al., 2010; Gelmon et al., 2018; Kirby, Held, et al., 2018; Rinaldo et al., 2015; Sandy & Holland, 2006; Voss et al., 2015).

Partnership

Within the literature, collaboration is the most highlighted element for ensuring mutual benefits of student placements. Regarding service-learning placements specifically, such collaboration should be in the form of genuine partnerships between universities and community organisations, in which community organisations are seen as equal partners as opposed to subjects or recipients of charitable projects (Gelmon et al., 2018; Voss et al., 2015). Such partnerships are heralded as foundational to all that follows, as they are demonstrated to produce better outcomes for all stakeholders (Sandy & Holland, 2006; Voss et al., 2015).

The known benefits of collaborative partnerships suggest that rather than imposing pre-determined placement models into different contexts or organisations, instead they should be co-designed in partnership between universities and host organisations, ensuring a synergy between the needs and goals of the organisations and the student placements (Bosma et al., 2010; Jones et al., 2018; Rinaldo et al., 2015; Sandy & Holland, 2006). This premise was reflected by multiple participants, who suggested better coordination before and after placements to ensure a better placement–partner fit to meet organisations' needs and goals. The use of a guiding framework has been suggested to enable such collaborative co-design, ensure mutuality and formally measure reciprocal impact—outcomes universities should be committed to (Tyndall et al., 2020; Voss et al., 2015). Others (Gelmon et al., 2018; Kirby, Held, et al., 2018) highlight that the partnership relationship itself must also be evaluated, rather than just assessing outcomes, and that such evaluations must have community partner buy-in regarding the methods, time commitment and the potential benefits of the results.

Preparation

Early and authentic partnering would facilitate adequate preparation for all stakeholders, something highlighted by participants, who suggested students receive more organisation-specific preparation for placement. They also reported that they themselves would benefit from more information before placements commenced, something echoed in another allied health service-learning study (Crawford et al., 2020). Within the literature outside allied health, such preparation for students supports them to better meet the needs of their placement hosts (Rogers, 2021; Sheilds et al., 2016; Voss et al., 2015), and similarly, organisations having clear understandings of placement learning objectives helps them better support students (Voss et al., 2015). Indeed, a lack of organisational clarity

regarding the placement aims was apparent from two participants, who were concerned students would finish the placement without demonstrating skills for working directly with children. Yet this was not a learning outcome of the placement. This clearly shows the need for more effective collaboration with partners in preparation for placement to ensure mutual expectations are clear.

Communication

The aforementioned clarity is dependent on effective communication, described by others in relation to service learning as two-way communication that is clear, regular, open, accessible, flexible and that prioritises listening, validating and clarifying (Crawford et al., 2020; Jones et al., 2018; Voss et al., 2015). The challenge is facilitating this in a way that does not place increased burden on host organisations considering the time-poor nature of their workplaces, which whilst highlighted by participants in this study, is not something unique to their sector. Partnering with host organisations to collaborate on preferred communication methods is a proposed solution to this challenge (Voss et al., 2015).

It is acknowledged that organisational need will always exceed the capacity of what student placements can deliver (Gelmon et al., 2018). Effectively partnering with organisations, preparing and supporting all stakeholders, and maintaining clear communication, however, may maximise potential organisational benefits of student placements. It is argued that working to maximise such benefits is not only an ethical obligation of universities but may also assist universities in procuring and retaining placement partnerships, something that is of increasing relevance for allied health university programs in Australia.

Limitations

Participants hosted students on placements of varying lengths, designs and disciplines. It is acknowledged that this undoubtedly influenced their views and that the strength of the findings may have been enhanced by recruiting only participants with exactly the same experiences. This would have significantly reduced the potential participant pool, though, as different centres had different requirements and, therefore, chose to host different sets of students. Some participants may have also been reflecting on experiences that occurred 2 to 3 years ago, which may have impacted their ability to recall specific details of the placements. Despite this, we feel the results offer some preliminary considerations for allied health service-learning placements. Additionally, the relatively small sample size in the study, which is specific to one context (the NA), limits the generalisability of the results. A larger sample size, spanning a variety of organisational service-learning settings (beyond the education settings described in the current study) may inform stronger conclusions on the benefits to host organisations, how these can be maximised and which placement environments may benefit more from allied health service-learning placements. It would also be beneficial for future research to investigate the impacts of

service-learning placements from the perspectives of end service users, which was outside the scope of this study.

Conclusion

This study provides insights into organisational benefits of allied health service-learning placements within early years education settings. In doing so, it contributes to the limited literature on organisational benefits of allied health service-learning placements. Findings support the potential for creating student placements that are mutually beneficial, serving both organisational and university student needs. For this to be optimised, though, these placements must be built on a foundation of partnership, preparation and communication. It is argued that striving to ensure such mutuality, and monitoring its actualisation, is not only a responsibility and ethical obligation of universities but may also assist in procuring and maintaining placement partnerships, something of particular relevance in the context of allied health programs in Australia.

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