

THE ROLES OF SERVICE-LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

Implementing service-learning into curriculum has been given a strong emphasis and attention in higher education worldwide as research found that many university students, the so-called "Generation Me", have overlooked their social responsibilities (Shia, 2010). However, research on how to improve this phenomenon in education is absent from literature. According to Lewis (2009), higher education should highlight the value on the cultivation of citizenship. To help connect university students and the society and make them care more about the society they have lives in has become an important issue in higher education.

According to Tsay (2016), service learning helps enhance students' well-beings both psychologically and physically. Through discussing the effects of implementing service-learning into curriculum from previous literature, the goal of this research aims to find out the roles of service-learning in higher education. Seventeen participants from an Applied English Department of a private university in Taiwan formed a story-telling team in a two-credit hour TESOL (Teaching English as a Second Language) practicum course. Students were required to come up with an English storyline to perform at some remote elementary schools to help promote young learners' English learning motivation, in particular for those underprivileged ones. Under the facilitation of the teacher, the team worked on the storyline, the props, and the worksheets and the activities. In order to create a dynamic learning environment for the young learners, theatre arts, English teaching and administration were taken into account as well while preparing for the performances. "The Gingerbread Man" was the first story chosen and then "Goldilocks and Three Bears" came as the second. During the process of preparation, students experienced a great deal of frustration and stress. However, they had great sense of achievement after completing the whole tasks and receiving positive feedbacks both from the children and the schools. From the data collected from the questionnaire, it was found that students gained not only teaching experience but also the abilities to conduct a whole project. Most importantly, their social responsibilities and self-confidence are enhanced through providing the social services. The roles of service-learning in higher education have turned over a new leaf.

Key words: *service learning, social responsibility, higher education, practicum*

INTRODUCTION

In the twenty-first century, service-learning has become a new notion of teaching and learning worldwide. In the US, the traditional community service has been transformed into a kind of "service learning" which is for students to enhance their learning and has become a new teaching approach in all levels of education (Tsay, 2016). In Taiwan, since 2007, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has encouraged the higher education to promote service-learning, from doing basic community service to integrating social service into some professional courses (Tsay, 2016).

Through discussing the effects of implementing service-learning into curriculum from previous literature, the goal of this research aims to find out the roles of service-learning in higher education. Firstly, the definitions of service-learning are discussed. Secondly, the benefits of service-learning are explored. Lastly, the statistical result from a case study which integrates multi-disciplinary fields illustrating the theoretical foundation of service-learning is offered.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Regarding service-learning, some researchers prefer to use "service-learning" instead of "service learning" in order to emphasize the equal importance of both "service" and "learning" while some are relaxed about it. In this section, definitions of service-learning are explored and then followed by the effects of service-learning.

Definitions of Service-Learning

According to Waterman (1997), service-learning is the integration of "service" and "learning" which can be achieved through systematic design, planning, guidance, reflection and evaluation and is aimed at cultivating the young generation's loving and caring for others.

"Although most service-learning researchers, evaluators, and practitioners would agree that service-learning involves both service to the community and learning tied to academic curriculum all vary widely. Although most agree that the process of service-learning involves planning, action, reflection, and celebration, the content and relative stress placed on each of these components is greatly divergent (Billig & Waterman, 2003, p.8)."

In 2003, Billig and Waterman further state that service-learning combines both community service and academic curriculum, which involves planning, action, reflection and celebration. From the planning of the syllabus, if curriculum is taken into account seriously here, to the final reflection, the content and stress level of service learning can vary greatly from one to another (Billig & Waterman, 2003). Fertman, White and White (1996) suggest that the philosophical grounds of service-learning is based on Dewey and Kolb's (1984) theory of experiential learning and civil education.

Connecting meaningful community service experiences with academic learning, personal growth, and civic responsibility, service-learning is regarded as a teaching and learning method (Shumer & Duckenfield, 2004). A successful program for service-learning involves reciprocal benefits for both students and the community, experiential learning, reflection in a real world context and engaging in a community-based learning project (Shumer & Duckenfield, 2004).

In 1990, the *National and Community Service Act* defined service learning as a teaching method which have students to provide community services through the planning of school and community. In addition to satisfying the need of the community, one of the educational objectives is that the students can reflect what they have learned and experienced from the services they provided to the refinement of their professions (Tsay, 2016). As Cairn and Kielsmeier (1991) and Chen (2000) echoed, service-learning can be regarded as a teaching method, which makes students realize their civil or social responsibility through the services involved. Hence, the definition of "service-learning" in this empirical study can be referred to as learning from providing social services to others.

The Roles of Service-Learning

Sigmon (1994) proposes four modes of service-learning which clarify the different emphases between service and learning. The four modes are discussed as below in Table 1.

Table 1.

Four Modes of Service-Learning

SERVICE-learning	Service task is the priority and learning is secondary.
service-LEARNING	Learning is the priority and service task is secondary.
service-learning	Both are important but not relevant.
SERVICE-LEARNING	Both are important, school and institutes benefit mutually.

In 2007, MOE started to encourage universities to promote service-learning which students can get to understand this world and have real interactions with it through service learning (Hsu, Yang, & Yeh, 2009). Enos and Troppe (1996) suggested that service-learning can be integrated into professional courses, such as practicum, general education etc..

In Taiwan, there are three common modes for service-learning being integrated into curriculum: university common courses, general education courses and professional courses (MOE, 2007). University common courses here mean required courses by university in which students are required to do basic community service for sixteen hours. General education courses mean integrating the idea of service learning into the teaching contents. Professional courses mean students learn from providing services to others.

According to Celio, Durlak and Dymnicki (2011), despite of the increasing number of service-learning, the learning outcomes are still not clear.

Hence, in their research, Celio et al. (2011) have suggested that more studies should be conducted to unfold how students benefit from it and which conditions actually foster students' growth and development. Previous studies suggest that the positive outcomes of service-learning can cover five areas: attitude towards self, attitude towards school and learning, civil engagement, social skills and academic achievement (Billig, 2009; Simonet, 2008; White 2001). Questions therefore arise: what roles do service-learning play in higher education?

RESULTS AND DATA ANALYSES FROM A CASE STUDY THAT INTEGRATED SERVICE LEARNING INTO A PROFESSIONAL COURSE

Many universities, which offer TESOL or teacher education program, require their students to participate or take part in some forms of teaching practice (Tsay, 2016). The primary purpose of setting up an English teaching practicum course in the curriculum is to provide students opportunities to apply the methodological theories learned in class onto the development of their teaching competence through offering services to the communities. Many educators will agree that the first-hand experience is one of the most important aspects in a student teacher education (Clarke & Collins, 2007). Hence, the case study below explores the potentials of how service-learning can be integrated into the curriculum through careful planning of syllabus to enhance and to maximize students' learning outcomes.

The design of the course was to form a story-telling team from an Applied English department. Eight students were selected from a two-credit hour TESOL practicum course. In order to apply students' profession and enhancing their social responsibilities, they were required to come up with an English story to perform at local elementary schools to help promote young learners' English learning motivation. The team started to work on the storyline, the props, the worksheets, and the activities from scratch. In order to create a dynamic learning environment for elementary school students, theatre arts, English teaching and administration were taken into account while preparing for the performances. The English-major students worked with a group of design students from a different university. They took initiatives in creating a seasonal story with stage arts for their audience. "*The Gingerbread Man*" was the first story chosen and "*Goldilocks and Three Bears*" was the second. Although students felt a lot of frustration and stress during the process, they had great sense of achievement. Students not only gained teaching experience but also the abilities to conduct a multi-task project. At the same time, young learners benefitted from the English story told and their learning interest was enhanced. Most importantly, their professional self-efficacy was enhanced through the social services they provided.

Questionnaire survey was conducted in order to get an overview of the learning outcomes from doing the service learning. Five-point Likert scale

was used: one point means "strongly disagree" and five points mean "strongly agree". The results were computed by SPSS. Table 2 offers the mean score of each question.

Table 2. *Means and Standard Deviations of the Variables in the Learning Outcomes of Service-Learning (N=17)*

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation
Q1. Increase of confidence and sense of achievement	4.71	.470
Q2. Learning of other cultures and respecting the differences	4.76	.437
Q3. Enhancing self-reflection and critical thinking	4.76	.437
Q4. Enhancing social responsibility	4.65	.493
Q5. Increase of abilities in googling and using available resources	4.59	.795
Q6. Accepting different opinions	4.76	.562
Q7. Realizing the importance of being responsible	4.65	.493
Q8. Increase of problem-solving ability	4.47	.514
Q9. Willingness to engage in future social services	4.76	.437
Q10. Career exploration and enhancement	4.71	.588
Q11. Personal growth	4.53	.874
Q12. Becoming mature	4.71	.772

From Table 3, the results reveal that the learning outcomes of service-learning have correlated to one another significantly.

Table 3. *Correlations Matrix between Latent Variables*

Variables	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12
Q1	--	.859**	.555*	.874**	.827**	.432	.874**	.609**	.859**	.573*	.555*	.609**
Q2	.859**	--	.346	.751**	.782**	.523*	.751**	.523*	1.000**	.687**	.673**	.708**
Q3	.555*	.346	--	.461	.243	.015	.461	.245	.346	-.043	-.144	-.033
Q4	.874**	.751**	.461	--	.723**	.358	.742**	.696**	.751**	.482*	.606**	.532*
Q5	.827**	.782**	.243	.723**	--	.748**	.723**	.503*	.782**	.527*	.782**	.911**
Q6	.432	.523*	.015	.358	.748**	--	.358	.407	.523*	.345	.650**	.839**
Q7	.874**	.751**	.461	.742**	.723**	.358	--	.450	.751**	.482*	.606**	.532*
Q8	.609**	.523*	.245	.696**	.503*	.407	.450	--	.523*	.280	.384	.370
Q9	.859**	1.000**	.346	.751**	.782**	.523*	.751**	.523*	--	.687**	.673**	.708**
Q10	.573*	.687**	-.043	.482*	.527*	.345	.482*	.280	.687**	--	.687**	.624**
Q11	.555*	.673**	-.144	.606**	.782**	.650**	.606**	.384	.673**	.687**	--	.893**
Q12	.609**	.708**	-.033	.532*	.911**	.839**	.532*	.370	.708**	.624**	.893**	--

** Note: ** p value is < 0.01; * p value is < 0.05

CONCLUSION

Hefferman (2001) regards service-learning as a kind of “capstone course” which students get to offer what they have learned in their profession and apply that onto the services they have provided to the community. Through doing that, students can obtain first-hand experience and reflect on their professional practice through the social services involved. The ultimate benefits are therefore achieved mutually both for the students and the community. Students’ self-reflection and first-hand experience, and interest in community and other cultures, have formed a strong impact on them. Nevertheless, a larger sample size of participants is encouraged in future research.

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