

EMBRACING SERVICE-LEARNING: LEARNING BY DOING

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Abstrak

Service learning (SL), pendekatan metodologis, telah dipertimbangkan sebagai bukti dalam pertumbuhan studi SL. Kontribusi SL dalam banyak aspek telah terbukti layak dipertimbangkan. Dengan demikian, memahami apa itu SL, dampaknya bagi guru dan siswa dalam berbagai aspek kehidupan; hubungannya dengan penjangkauan masyarakat; perannya dalam pendidikan; bagaimana penilaian dan refleksi dalam SL dilakukan; dan aplikasi SL memberikan pencerahan kepada para praktisi yang berbeda. Makalah ini membahas topik tentang SL.

Abstract

Service learning (SL), a methodological approach, has been taken into account as evident in the growth of SL studies. The contribution of SL in many aspects has proven its worth of consideration. Thus, understanding what SL is, the impact it brings to the teachers and students in different facets of life; its connection to community outreach; the role it plays in education; how assessment and reflections in SL are performed; and the applications of SL give enlightenment to the different practitioners. This paper discusses topics concerning SL.

Keywords: Service learning, teachers, students, benefits, community outreach

INTRODUCTION

Though a study (see Bauman, 2014) reflects a negative impact of SL, most studies (Brail, 2016; Burton, Hutchings, Lundy, & Lyons-Lewis, 2019; Chang, Ng, & Chan, 2016; Chuang, 2010; Escofet & Rubio, 2019; Currie-Mueller, & Littlefield, 2018;

Farber, 2017; Helm-Stevens, Kipley, & Pheifer, 2018; Kiely, 2005; Hopkins, Ulery, McBride, Simmons, Gaede, & Knight, 2009; Ka & Mun, 2019; McLeod, 2017; Pacho, 2015; Mergler, Carrington, Kimber, Bland, Boman, 2017; Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015; Moulton & Moulton, 2013; Patrick, Valencia-Forrester, Backhaus, McGregor, Cain, & Lloyd, 2019; Phillips, Bolduc, & Gallo, 2013; Priesmeyer, Mudge, & Ward, 2016; Rieger, 2014; Roberts, Edwards, Ivey, 2019; Robinson, Robinson, & Foran, 2019; Suwaed, 2018; Warren, 2012; Wickam, 2018) reflect its positive impacts. SL experience is profitable for children, parents, and students (Chuang, 2019). Given this, Escofet and Rubio (2019) underscore,

“University service-learning enables us to contextualize knowledge socially. Quality academic education is much more than learning new knowledge and developing skills. Such education is also concerned with training students in their future profession, placing them in the real, social context in which they

will eventually practice their profession, and training them to analyze the social, ethical, and civic impact that their professional practice entails. Service learning enables students to live in, act in, and analyze real situations, which are similar to those that will shape their future professional practice; it helps them to do so with sufficient theoretical background and knowledge, so that their practice is not an occasional contact with reality but an active and engaged learning opportunity” (pp. 167-168).

Overview of Service Learning

SL has been taken into account in different fields. A comprehension of service learning assists teachers and students in their roles in reaching for the community. The following discussion covers definitions of SL; the benefits it brings; the role serving has to the community and education; and assessment, reflections, and implementations.

Definitions of Service Learning

The term SL, coined in 1967, was developed out of the work of Robert Sigmon and William Ramsey (Sigmon, 1990, cited in in Giles, & Eyler, 1994). SL is a well-documented pedagogical approach that “uses real-world experiences—beyond the classroom—to strengthen student motivation and enhance the meaningfulness of their learning (McLeod, 2017, p. 20). Furthermore, it is defined as a “pedagogy that integrates community service with academic study, reflection and analysis to enrich the learning experience, teach civic responsibility and strengthen communities” (Pacho, 2015, p. 8).

SL involves several people. Thus, Harkins, Kozak, & Ray, (n.d.) stresses,

“Service-learning is a complex pedagogical and philosophical tool involving numerous stakeholders, including students, faculty, university administrators and community partners to support student learning and civic engagement, community development and university community collaborations” (p. 1).

Benefits of Service Learning

The definitions of SL emphasize the varied advantages it has. It stretches to different ages and levels. Service learning compasses from “individual random acts of kindness, to preschoolers making biscuits for the residents of an aged-care center, to a group of tertiary students providing medical support in a developing country” (Rieger, 2014, p. 25). SL involves students in significant ways (Sparkman-Key, Vajda, & Belcher, n.d.).

Given this, SL has become an integral part of educational system (Moulton & Moulton, 2013). SL is considered as one of the significant elements of quality service programs on students’ involvement (Choi, 2014) because it provides opportunities not only for students’ learning but for students’ growth (Kiely, 2005) in different aspects of their lives.

Personal Development. SL aids students' interpersonal (Chang, Ng, & Chan, 2016; Chuang, 2010; Shouman, n.d.), interactional, and behavioral development (Chan, Ng, & Chan, 2016); respect for self and others, genuineness, nonverbal communication, cultural awareness, relationship building and leadership (see Sparkman-Key, Vajda, & Belcher, n.d.); efficacy (Shouman, n.d.); and self-esteem (Suwaed, 2018). SL also promotes problem solving skills (Chuang, 2019). Students in an inclusive education attest that SL fosters positive changes in students, and higher willingness in their teaching in inclusive education—have the confidence and the preparedness better than before learning SL (Mergler, Carrington, Kimber, Bland, Boman, 2017). With SL, students are gratefulness because they are treated like professionals (Velten, n.d.).

Mental Development. SL enhances mental development. SL promotes students' academic knowledge & learning (Chuang, 2019; Helm-Stevens, Kipley, & Pheifer, 2018; Shouman, n.d.); listening skills (Sparkman-Key, Vajda, & Belcher, n.d.); collaborative learning skills (Wickam, 2018); knowledge, skills, and confidence in using the English language (Suwaed, 2018). SL yields remarkable results both in the teaching-learning processes of second language and in the community where the English language teachers and students perform their duties (Wurr, n.d.).

A meta-analysis (see Warren, 2012) reveal that SL has positive effects towards students' cognitive learning. It must be because SL is an effective strategy of allowing students take part in their undergraduate experience, focuses on students' understanding on its class contents through practical application, organization, follow-up session (Velten, n.d.). In other words, students learn within and without the four-wall classrooms. As Patricia (cited in Currie-Mueller, & Littlefield, 2018) wrote,

“The service experience helped me better comprehend ideas we studied in class because I actually got to practice what we learned. In most classes, students sit in lectures and are given exams on certain strategies, techniques, and more, but never get to practice what they have learned. By backing up the lectures and classroom activities with real life experiences, the lessons were brought to life.”

This is supported by the study of Brail (2016) that those who participate in an SL voluntary activity perform better. In other words, students involved in SL achieve better. This differential can be attributed to the fact that students apply and experience what they learn in the class.

Heart for Others. SL enhances students' self-worth in having importance and contribution towards the society (Suwaed, 2018). It creates social awareness towards citizenship and work-integrated learning perspective (Patrick, Valencia-Forrester, Backhaus, McGregor, Cain, & Lloyd, 2019). Also, SL develops cultural awareness and social responsibility (Warren, 2012). Social responsibility explains why SL plays a significant role towards the community.

Community Outreach and Service Learning

The concept of service is biblical. Jesus said, “. . . the Son of Man did come to be served, but to serve . . .” (Matthew 20:28, NIV). SL offers substantial advantages for students (Harkins, Kozak, & Ray, n.d.) in terms of reaching out for others. Through SL, students are actively engaged in systematic ways (Hopkins, Ulery, McBride, Simmons, Gaede, & Knight, 2009). In their active engagement in the community outreach, students understand better the value of the people they served and wanted to aid them to be like Christ (Helm-Stevens, Kipley, & Pheifer, 2018).

SL offers students great experiences. Thus, students support it with the belief that universities need to continue its practice because it can inspire community engagement making SL a significant pedagogy (Harkins, Kozak, & Ray, n.d.). In addition, SL creates in students more positive feelings about their teaching experiences and longed to partner with the communities to discuss about current issues of the world (Spector, Lake, Basham, & Leard, n.d.).

SL connects academic study and community service—both building each other up (Shouman, n.d.). In other words, they are interrelated. The opportunity to step into a service learning experience can motivate, inspire, and engage students while exposing them to some of the challenges in society (Priesmeyer, Mudge, & Ward, 2016, p. 55) may it be in educating children.

Teaching children as a community outreach is an example of SL. One of the rationales for teaching children include “Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it (Prov 22:6; KJV). The Bible is clear that God considers the little ones. Jesus said, ‘Suffer little children, and forbid them not, to come unto me: for of such is the kingdom of heaven’. (Matt 19:14, KJV).

In reaching for others, students (see Helm-Stevens, Kipley, & Pheifer, 2018) revealed that they they received more than what they gave and that they developed faith and have strong spiritual formation. Though they may be worried at times on what to do to reach out for others and be of service, it is promised “The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee (Num 6:24-25, KJV). Amen!

Education and Service Learning

SL is an integration of community service and school’s academic curriculum (Hopkins, Ulery, McBride, Simmons, Gaede, & Knight, 2009). SL, which is interrelated to the mission of philosophy of higher education (Stanton, 1991, cited in Giles & Eyler, 1994), has been considered to be taken into account in higher education program (Patrick, Valencia-Forrester, Backhaus, McGregor, Cain, & Lloyd, 2019). Higher institutions have a significant role to paly in preparing student for SL experiences (Priesmeyer, Mudge, & Ward, 2016). Thus,

“Modern Christian institutions should serve as beacons of light, much like the early believers did, to showcase to the larger higher education community the

Christian ethos of generous service as exemplified by both our students and faculty” (Hopkins, Ulery, McBride, Simmons, Gaede, & Knight, 2009, p. 25).

Institutions employ teachers—teachers who play a significant role in the implementation and administration of SL. The instructional strategies of SL enhanced teachers’ teaching other subjects than what they are assigned (Spector, Lake, Basham, & Leard, n.d.). Through professors’ lessons’ preparation and application, SL enhanced their “teamwork skills, communication skills, leadership skills, commitment, patience, ability to empower, critical thinking, time management, problem solving, multi-tasking, time respect, and never losing hope” (Shouman, n.d, p. 14). Taking into account SL—placement in the curriculum, pedagogical strategies, and demonstration of positive outcomes—promotes academic program success (Phillips, Bolduc, & Gallo, 2013). More than 80% of teachers attested of the positive effect of SL towards learning and community engagement of their students (Ka & Mun, 2019). SL offers advantages to the students (Chan, Ng, & Chan, 2016), thus, it has to be included in the teacher’s preparation (Roberts, Edwards, Ivey, 2019).

Teachers are to be involved in the SL. Teacher’s responsibilities include identifying the need and developing the project idea, preparing the students (in the classroom), assigning the tasks, evaluating the output, disseminating the results (McLeod, 2017), and organizing and designing projects towards enhancing students’ community outreach (Wickam, 2018). Therefore, it is necessary to ponder on how “to adequately prepare students for service learning experiences” (Priesmeyer, Mudge, & Ward, 2016, p. 55). Teachers need to realize that,

“Effective service learning takes thought and effort. [Teachers] who utilize it as an enhancement to coursework must plan and organize experiences in order to connect them to the course objectives. It takes extra time and effort to work with students, connect with community partners, implement actions, and to follow-up on and evaluate results. (Hopkins, Ulery, McBride, Simmons, Gaede, & Knight, 2009, p. 24).

Though students’ consideration on their SL learning projects was highly positive (Escofet & Rubio, 2019), the tasks teachers assigned impact students’ accomplishment. Ngai, Chan, & Kwan, (2018) stress that,

“Students’ attainment of the different service learning outcomes is influenced to varying degrees by different course and pedagogical elements. Specifically, we found that the most positive outcomes are associated with challenging and meaningful tasks, interest in the subject/project, perceived benefits to people served, preparation for service, and appreciation of the service by the people served” (p. 55)

Assessment, Reflection, and Service Learning

SL enhanced students’ communication with parents and teachers—leading to their significant personal growth; thus, reflection, projection duration, and mutual understanding, (Farber, 2017) and assessment, both formative and summative

alternatives (Moulton & Moulton, 2013). Reflections before, during, and after SL engagement will enable students to deeply think the reasons behind their community service (Miller, Berkey, & Griffin, 2015). Since findings show that SL allows teachers to ascertain that the information has been learned and performed properly (Sparkman-Key, Vajda, & Belcher, n.d.); it is therefore,

“essential to accompany service-learning projects with reflective practice. Participation in these types of projects must be accompanied by reflective practices that foster deep learning, so that the experience can be rethought and reconstructed by the students and integrated into the set of knowledge and competencies that are part of their academic formation” (Escofet & Rubio, 2019, p. 168)

It is significant that SL caters students with “opportunities for meaningful, well-planned service that is integrated with course content and supported by reflection activities” (Moely & Illustre, 2014, p. 14). Thus, Rieger (2014) explained,

“SL needs to have intentional reflection, a reflection whether or not its process has advanced the learners “to think clearly for themselves, see issues and problems from a wide perspective, (re)examine their espoused values, and live authentic lives that contribute actively to peace and progress in local and global communities” (p. 30).

SL pays. Considering one the students’ reaction during the SL (Priesmeyer, Mudge, & Ward, 2016), Patricia (cited in Currie-Mueller & Littlefield, 2018) comments in her reflection,

“The service experience helped me better comprehend ideas we studied in class because I actually got to practice what we learned. In most classes, students sit in lectures and are given exams on certain strategies, techniques, and more, but never get to practice what they have learned. By backing up the lectures and classroom activities with real life experiences, the lessons were brought to life.”

Assessment needs to be filled by the community the students serve. As a matter of fact, assessment is complete only if it is considered also by community the SL is served and not only the students—for it beyond gathering results and reporting but getting information from the target population, as well (Moulton & Moulton, 2013). Considering the community in terms of the performance and service gives more enlightenment.

Applications of Service Learning

Proper applications is needed in all points of the SL. All phases of the service-learning cycle need to be adequately recognized and resourced—the engaging phase, the project activity phase, and the evaluation or follow-on phase—if service-learning is to be successful for all involved and sustainable into the future (Burton, Hutchings, Lundy, & Lyons-Lewis, 2019, p. 101). In addition, suggestions (see Robinson, Robinson, & Foran, 2019) were to create an engaging and safe

learning environment, (over)plan for the unexpected, face fears, and resist anxieties while outside of one's comfort zone.

Suggestions (see Phillips, Bolduc, & Gallo, 2013) also include a framework development for aiding academic departments the placement of SL courses with certain activities that may result to learning and development. Foremost, for students to develop more to becoming responsible citizens is the "framework of a Christian worldview as they participate in making a difference in the lives of others" (Rieger, 2014, p. 30).

Conclusion

SL as a methodological approach has contributed not only to the teachers and the community they serve but foremost to the students. SL has developed the personal aspects of the learners in various ways and has contributed to their mental development, and the willingness and heart to serve others.

Through SL, students apply what they have learned in the class. Through this strategy, they learn to do what they have theoretically acquired in a four-wall class giving them more learning opportunities. It motivates and inspires them to reach out more for others through community service.

Teachers as well are benefited from SL program. Through more well-organized services with students' reflections, they achieve more not only for the present performance of their students but beyond. Teachers' responsibilities and engagement through this methodology has advanced them as well because they can apply this practice in all subjects they are assigned.

Pedagogical Implications

Studies support the positive impacts of SL. When proper implementations of its program are performed, SL benefits different practitioners. Therefore, all its facets need to be learned for better applications that will enhance teaching and learning processes, and community service. Having the framework of Christian worldview as students engage themselves in SL is one of the best lessons they can have. Teachers, therefore, need to see the role they play.

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