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Service Learning: A Need Of The Hour For Promoting Social Responsibility Among Students In Higher Educational Institutions Through The New Education Policy

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Abstract

A type of experiential learning known as "service-learning" blends academic study with community involvement. The field of service-outcomes research suffers from an absence of critical evaluation. This study used an inductive approach to discover the causes and consequences of the issue and develop strategies for dealing with them. The research strategy was anchored on qualitative and inductive approaches. Semi-structured, in-depth, one-on-one interviews with six participants. Additionally, two focus groups were convened. The information acquired from diverse sources underwent a sequential and comparative analysis relevant to the study. The research reveals the connection between intellectual growth and personal transformation through service-learning. Although it also identifies potential drawbacks, it is suggested that service-learning is often beneficial and possibly favorable to students transformation. Furthermore, the study suggests incorporating service learning components as one of the mandatory subjects in the corresponding major course through the New Education Policy.

Keywords: Service-Learning, Experiential Learning, Qualitative Research, Intellectual Growth, New Education Policy

SERVICE-LEARNING

Service-learning is a way of teaching, a theory, a plan, and an experience, according to different general meanings (Anderson, 1998; Kenworthy-U'Ren, 2003). People think of it as a way to learn by doing that blends schoolwork with service to the community. The relationship between the service and the academic work is a key part of service-learning, as is the way that students use critical thinking to link their service experiences to what they are learning in class. Other standards are that service learning meet the needs of the community and that the programme be reviewed (Bringle and Hatcher, 1996; Butin, 2003; Pritchard, 2002; Weigert, 1998). In the end (Billig and Welch, 2004), classroom learning and social involvement are two broad but important parts of service-learning. The end goal of service-learning is to help both the

students and the people in the community who will get their help, which makes it unique (Deeley, 2004; 2010). So, it's different from other ways of learning through experience, like internships, field education, job placements, and trade training, which are only meant to help the student. In a similar way, it is different from volunteering, which doesn't involve official learning and aims to help the person who is receiving the help.

Service-learning has been called"pedagogy for citizenship" (Mendel-Reyes, 1998) because it teaches students to be good citizens by having them work in their communities and learn in the classroom. But the main reason why it should be used in higher education is that it improves students' thinking skills. Batchelder and Root (1994), Bringle and Hatcher (1996), Mendel-Reyes (1998), and Tonkin (2004) One of the most important parts of getting smarter (Batchelder and Root, 1994; Giles and Eyler, 1998) is learning how to think critically. Critical thinking, which is a type of critical thinking, is one of the most important parts of service-learning. In this case, critical thought on experience and how it relates to academic homework may lead to the development of new meanings and understandings (Schon, 1987). In this process, it's important to question beliefs and ask what they point to. But the studies on service-learning don't explain how people's minds get smarter through doing service. But a study shows that service-learning helps students become better at critical thinking and fixing problems. (Eyler, 2000; Kearney, 2004). Astin et al. (2000), Billig (2000), Driscoll et al. (1996), Eyler (2000), and Kearney (2004) Mendel-Reyes (1998) says that service-learning "mixes the cognitive with the affective," which is something that may help students grow as people. Eyler (2000), for example, thinks that service-learning helps people get along better with others. Also, it can help students talk, interact with others, and make better decisions (Kearney, 2004, p. 9). Students may also gain self- confidence and a better understanding of how to get along with others (Batchelder and Root, 1994). Lisman (1998) says that service-learning can help students feel more confident and good about them. It also helps them get better at working together and getting along with others. He agrees with Howard that service-learning can help people learn how to be leaders (2003). Mendel-Reyes (1998) and Quiroga (2004) also say that service-learning makes people change.

On the other hand, Jones (2002) disagrees with the idea that service-learning is always good. Service-learning does not always help students, as Jones et al. (2005) show in a refreshingly honest study that ties this to student resistance. They say that the main reason students give bad feedback is that they can't make the connection between service-learning and classroom learning, which makes them unhappy and confused. The resistance is put down to students not being ready for the next step in their growth. Because of this, service-learning might be better for seniors, who are more likely to have higher brain skills (Perry, 1999). Because of this, many claims have been made about the benefits of service-learning. But there isn't a lot of critical research in the books about how these effects happen. This is because most people assume that service-learning has good effects. Overall, there aren't enough facts to prove that it has an effect (Eyler, 2002). The study that comes next makes a small attempt to fix this problem.

THE COURSE

During the academic year 2001-2002, the service-learning component, previously known as Outreach Programmes, was started as a trial exercise with four departments at Loyola College, Chennai, before being included as an obligatory component in all other departments' main subject courses. This component of service learning was investigated among sociology undergraduate students at Loyola College in Chennai. There were 68 students registered for the course. The study's goal was to investigate and comprehend how service-learning affects students in higher education. The study's principal interests were the consequences of service- learning and how they occurred.

RESEARCH DESIGN METHODS

The study included 60 students from the course, with the remaining 8 students not being questioned due to their absence and irregularity in class. Two focus groups included everyone who had been invited. At the beginning of the semester, 30 students participated in a semi- structured focus group. This focus group was primarily exploratory in nature.

At the end of the course, a second semi-structured focus group of 30 students was held. This group was given the findings to remark on and validate the researcher's interpretation and knowledge of the data. This focus group obtained additional student opinions that reinforced the topics already identified via data collecting.

Six semi-structured qualitative in-depth interviews were done in the interim between focus group discussions. All focus groups and interviews were audio recorded and fully transcribed. Each interview lasted about 30 minutes on average.

The objective was to see whether the course changed the students' perspectives on influencing socially committed organizations like NGOs that deal with the disadvantaged and marginalized, choosing a career path that allows them to serve others, and helping people with less resource. Students were asked to fill out a questionnaire that included a rating of their level of community service commitment relative to other students their age. Despite the sample size being insufficient for this quantitative data portion to be significant, it was nonetheless extremely helpful in understanding some of the course's effects. Statistics also included the reasons why students chose to enroll in the course as stated in their personal statements.

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Following the first focus group, we dove into the data coding phase. As part of the coding process, we double-checked each and every line of the transcript. It was possible to identify central ideas by looking for recurrent concepts, terms, and phrases. This shaped the framework for the first individual interview, which was then studied and coded in the same manner. The interviews continued to be analyzed in this sequential fashion until they were all finished. The last set of themes included the development of one's mind, inner growth, civic duty, and inspiration. These broad classes were then subdivided into a plethora of specific groups. This essay will mostly discuss the first two topics since they are the most common.

ETHICAL ISSUES

Loyola College in Chennai granted ethical approval. Students were given written information regarding the study, as well as pledges of anonymity and confidentiality, as well as consent papers. They were advised that they might leave the study at any point without being questioned or prejudiced. The participation of all students was voluntary. All details were kept confidential and safe.

FINDINGS

Although various themes came out of this study, the academic and personal growth of students is the main topic of this study.

INTELLECTUAL DEVELOPMENT

The course as a whole was designed to get students to examine their assumptions, but this was particularly stressed in lessons dealing with issues of oppression, discrimination, and even spousal and child abuse. The way you think is changed as a result, according to the students. They stated that it had motivated them to "think more thoroughly about things," "question rather than just accept," "look at things differently," and "listen a lot more closely to others."

It was clear that the interaction of various elements improved intellectual skills. The following variables were involved: placement, small-group discussion, critical reflection, critical examination of the texts, and journal writing. A student who stated that "in this course you're related to you and how you see things" provided a helpful nugget of knowledge. This emphasizes the entire nature of experience learning. It incorporates the complete self, which is perhaps one of the factors that make service-learning such a "strong learning experience"

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

The majority of the students said that the course's holistic nature contributed to their intellectual growth. I would connect what I learned in class to how I think and feel about things in my daily life, as one student put it. According to several students, service learning fosters deeper learning since it "makes everything clearer and helps you to remember it," as one student put it. Their

perception of the connections between theory and practice expanded their grasp of societal functioning and social relationship as well. According to the words of one student, "what really gets me going in school is when I can draw connections between what I'm learning and my own life." This brings to mind the philosophy of non-dualism, which holds that the mental and physical worlds are inseparable. As a result of the individualized nature of their education, rather than just following directions, students reported feeling more in control of their learning. However, for some, this was first interpreted negatively because it was coupled with a sense of uneasiness. However, a lot of the students felt that "conventional" methods of instruction and learning were less efficient. According to Russell, These approaches entail a "conveyor-belt approach to education that is not about discovery, but the slavish repetition of exactly what you have been given." (Russell, 2007: 33).

CRITICAL REFLECTION

Critical reflection is essential to service-learning in order to make the connection between academic coursework and students' experiences of comprehending society and establishing social connections and relationships. Unfortunately, the literature on service learning contains few references to critical reflection. The multiple degrees and complexities of critical thinking are, however, investigated in other types of literature (King, 2000; King and Kitchener, 1994; Mezirow et al., 1991; Moon, 2013). Literature demonstrates unequivocally that critical reflection support is necessary for students to advance through a cycle of experiential learning. By identifying "important events," students are motivated to investigate assumptions based on their personal experiences (Brookfield, 1990; Conrad and Hedin, 1987). This paralleled the academic coursework's emphasis on conscientization, or awareness-raising (Freire, 1970). One student described this subject as requiring "out-of-the-box thinking," while another claimed it required more "organized thinking."

Evidently, the majority of the pupils had recently acquired the skill or instrument of critical reflection. Although it had numerous repercussions, many students reported that it "simply opened my eyes," suggesting that it could be beneficial. Initially, some students experienced discomfort because they questioned their own values and beliefs. Second, some felt incapable of managing their newly acquired knowledge and were perpetually critical of numerous aspects of their lives. As a consequence, they believed it required a great deal of effort. According to Bulpitt and Martin (2005: 213), "children should be taught to disengage with contemplation" to avoid any potential problems that may arise from critical thinking. In addition, some students asserted that maintaining a journal of reflection and discussing issues with peers after class helped to alleviate their apprehension.

SMALL CLASS

To function effectively as family members, students majoring in sociology established the following basic rules: respecting others' beliefs; friendliness; encouragement and support of one another; full participation in class activities; on-time arrival; and good manners. This was done largely to foster a classroom environment of trust and respect, which is critical in cultivating students' reflective practice. These basic rules aided in fostering friendships and an environment conducive to study. The students encouraged and supported one another while exchanging stories about their experiences.

Most students discovered how to listen more intently and take into account one another's opinions through engaging class discussions. This was demonstrated by a student, who said, "It can be surprising when someone think differently than you do, and this helps you learn as well." Another student stated how he was able to better comprehend his own experiences by listening to others' stories. Without a friendly atmosphere in the classroom, one student claimed, " To be able to merge theory with personal experiences is not something I personally think I could relate to." The result was an increase in the students' confidence. This is consistent with studies on the benefits of small classes for student learning. (Cartney and Rouse, 2006; Gillies and Ashman, 2003; Jacques, 2000). So it would appear that service-learning has a variety of elements that foster intellectual development. Personal transformation can also occur from these same factors.

PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION

Everyone who participated in the study claimed that it had altered them. Some students' intellectual and personal growth or transformation took place gradually, while other students' experiences were abrupt. While

some people said the transformation happened "in subtle ways," others said it had a profound impact on their lives. One student used the phrase "I think it's altered me as a whole person" to demonstrate this. In the words of one participant, " In just a few months, you come to the realisation that you are a completely different person" after implementing the Service Learning through sociology major subject. "It's amazing". A few students felt as though they had gone through the stages of consciousness described by Friere (1970), with one student describing it as "ongoing conscientization." It's only begun the process, one student remarked, "which I suppose I'll continue for the rest of my life."

The study's findings essentially reaffirmed reasons for transformative change that have been written about in the literature (Brookfield, 1990; Cranton, 1994; Mezirow, 1991, 2000; Rogers, 1969).

CHALLENGES

The difficulties in the initial portion of the implementation of the service learning were mostly cerebral in nature and helped the students become more conscientious. The course does challenge you to consider your preconceptions and other people's expectations of you, according to one student. Although the course presented numerous difficulties for the students, it also gave them the tools to deal with those difficulties. These difficulties grew more complicated and demanding as they thought about theory, practice, and their own individual experiences. Critical reflection was used to clarify the difficulties, which were then discussed in small groups. Some students found this to be challenging at times, demanding, and emotionally taxing as they started to question their own values and beliefs.

CONFIDENCE

The pupils' self-assurance was important to their development. To paraphrase what Mezirow (1978:107) has written, "self-confidence for perspective shift is often achieved through an expanded sense of ability and through a supportive social milieu." There are several ways in which service learning may boost students' self-assurance. One or more of the participants improved their sense of academic competence. As a consequence, people generally felt better about themselves. When they were with others, they were able to relax and open up. They developed more confidence and a freer range of expression. Students' increased self-assurance had a direct influence on their ability to identify and resist forms of oppression. Some respondents said that they were more likely to take initiative in order to address a social problem.

DISCUSSION

A large body of quantitative research has been conducted to try to pin down the effects of service-learning, lending credence to many claims made about it in the literature. However, this qualitative research project sought to explore and comprehend the impacts of service-learning from the students' own points of view. The intellectual and emotional development of the kids was found to be the most significantly impacted areas. These two characteristics emerged via the process of doing group work, analyzing results, and learning from doing.

Ironically, a sizable chunk of the literature lauds service-learning without offering much in the way of critical analysis of its efficacy. The benefits cited in the research may be attained via service-learning, but this is by no means guaranteed. Learning outcomes in the service sector are complicated, yet this issue is seldom discussed in the literature. The results of service-learning are investigated, and the research highlights how variable they may be. People didn't like the unexpected since it made them nervous.

It's important to keep in mind that service-learning draws on a wide range of approaches, any of which might improve student retention and progress. The success of the whole depends on the actions of each part and how they interact with one another. Students' use of critical thinking skills in non-academic contexts is one way in which critical reflection not only benefited their intellectual growth in this research but also their own growth as individuals. Students' social and academic development was boosted by the opportunity to work in smaller groups on class projects. When students were grouped together, they had someone to count on for support. There was a therapeutic impact from being in a small class, and it also helped students make friends and develop as individuals. Overall, it served as a good setting for education.

Through making connections between their classroom work and real-world experiences, students gained both knowledge and insight. How students change is not well explained in the literature on service-learning. In this research, students altered their minds by questioning the validity of their own preconceived notions and worldviews. The students were aided in this endeavor through critical reflection in cooperative study groups. By integrating theory and practice in the classroom, service-learning is an effective method of teaching that promotes the process of growing awareness. Quantifying it is difficult, if not impossible, and the outcome is uncertain. Although change is possible through service-learning, it is not guaranteed. Students may be affected in a variety of ways and for varying lengths of time by their participation in service- learning activities, even after the course has ended.

Last but not least, critical reflection brings together different mental, emotional, and physical aspects of service-learning. The students' own lives have provided evidence of the course's effectiveness. Because of the small sample size, these findings should be interpreted with caution. Furthermore, it was limited in time, making it impossible to deconstruct and reassemble its significance.

There is a potential for bias in the data and their interpretation because of the researcher's dual function as a course teacher and researcher. Alternately, the instructors' and students' shared excitement may have had an impact on the course's outcomes through a "halo or Hawthorn effect" (Kember, 2003: 92). Better service-learning practices might benefit from more qualitative research, which could also help identify problems that could be addressed or avoided. This would serve as an argument for the viability of "transformative pedagogy" in the context of higher education (Hooks, 1996).

The findings of this research suggest that service-learning may have positive effects on students' cognitive and affective growth. According to Mezirow (1978:109), the aim of adult education should be to increase students' openness to adopting new viewpoints. To encourage students' critical thinking and "thinking outside the box" (Freire, 1970), this research suggests that teachers use methods other than the traditional "banking" approach.

RECOMMENDATION

Service learning is a kind of experiential education used in higher education that benefits both the community and the students involved. When properly implemented, service learning integrates service and learning via reflective processes while also fostering students' academic, social, and personal development. The primary notion behind service learning is that it may benefit both student learning and volunteer work when combined with other educational opportunities. There are hundreds of meanings for the phrase, but most of them center on the qualities of Community Service. The New Education Policy also has to speak the importance for service learning as a teaching method that aims to accomplish the following objectives.

1. To help students learn and grow by involving them in well-planned service opportunities that meet real community needs and involve both the educational institutions and the neighborhood.
2. To provide students with the opportunity to use newly acquired information and abilities to solve real-world problems in their communities as part of their academic plan.
3. To provide students the opportunity to consider, discuss, or write about what they observed during the real service activity.
4. To motivate students to cultivate a compassionate mindset
5. To offer opportunities for students to extend their learning outside of the classroom and into the community.

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