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## Online Tutoring Service For Enriching College Students' Experience In Community Engagement

Lih-Juan ChanLin<sup>a\*</sup>, Hong-Yen Lin<sup>b</sup>, Tze-Han Lu<sup>c</sup><sup>a</sup>Department of Library & Information Science, Fu Jen Catholic University, Xin-Zhuang 24205, NewTaipei City, Taiwan<sup>b</sup>Information Technology Center, Fu Jen Catholic University, Xin-Zhuang 24205, NewTaipei City, Taiwan<sup>c</sup>College of Foreign Languages, Fu Jen Catholic University, Xin-Zhuang 24205, NewTaipei City, Taiwan

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### Abstract

The use of modern technology, in which live teaching and learning is facilitated through electronic media, has extended beyond the reach of traditional teaching and learning space. In the "Online Tutoring for After-School Learning" project, supported by Ministry of Education, college students are involved in online-tutoring to promote grade school children's after-school learning and information literacy in remote areas. This study examines attitude development among college students in an online tutoring service. Main research question was explored: How did students perceive their growth in attitude toward community engagement? A questionnaire containing 68 items was used to assess attitude growth in various aspects. The results of the study indicate that college students react positively from the online tutoring service experiences.

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### 1. Introduction

Service learning is a widely accepted means of enriching students' educational experiences. For university students, learning experiences from community engagement help deepen the relevancy of knowledge acquisition and contribute to a better understanding of social responsibility, thereby advancing the applicability and societal benefits

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\* Lih-Juan ChanLin Tel.: +3-321-321-321.

E-mail address: [035772@mail.fju.edu.tw](mailto:035772@mail.fju.edu.tw)

of higher education (Fontaine & Todd, 2011). Since 2006, online tutoring programs that address the healthy development of children in remote areas have increased in Taiwan and internationally. Taiwan's "Online Tutoring for After-School Learning" project aimed to bridge the digital divide and learning gap for children in remote areas, supported by both the government and society (ChanLin, Lin & Lu, 2012). Children in disadvantaged or remote areas, who often have limited support and resources for learning, seem particularly amendable to the potential benefits of mentoring (Hughes, Boyd & Dykstra, 2010). Online learning offers opportunities and possibilities to reach remote individuals of diverse socio-economic status (Bruning, 2010; Johnson, & Bratt, 2009; Verleur et al, 2011). College students also can learn from serving and being engaged in the online tutoring tasks. A previous study (ChanLin, Lin & Lu, 2012) employed an in-depth approach to assess students' service learning from an online tutoring process, finding that college students adjusted their tutoring to meet specific children's needs. In this current study, students' service learning outcomes were assessed in line with their engagement in the online tutoring setting. This study aimed to study students' attitude growth toward community engagement.

## **2. Research Method**

### *2.1. Context for the service learning setting*

Online tutoring service learning experiences were gathered at Fu-Jen Catholic University, Taiwan, which has been providing leadership (among 27 universities) in the "Online Tutoring for After-School Learning" for the past few years. In the academic year 2012-2013, 184 college students were recruited as online tutors in this project, and recruited tutors were paired with remote children based on their competent subject areas (including: Chinese, mathematics, and English). E-tutor environments using JoinNet, networks, webcams, headphones, keyboards, mice, and writing tablets were set up for the university and 13 remote service sites. The "Online Tutoring for After-School Learning" met online every Tuesday and Thursday night from 6:30 pm to 8:30 pm.

### *2.2. Data collection*

At the end of tutoring period (12 weeks), a questionnaire survey was distributed to the tutors. College students' attitude toward the service work was assessed in various aspects, including: (1) their understanding of the children, (2) service action, (3) self-discipline, (4) interaction with the community, and (5) social responsibility. A 1-5 Likert scale from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" was employed to evaluate student' responses. Items used for the questionnaire were derived from issues addressed in related literature, including: Bonk et al. (2009), Molee, Henry & Sessa (2010), and Ngai (2009).

## **3. Result**

Tutors' service learning experiences were assessed to evaluate their learning growth in terms of attitudes toward community engagement. The tutoring task helped students to develop their awareness, concern, and responsibility toward the community they served. Disposition for social interaction and self-discipline to serve the community were also assessed in tables 1-5. From the overall reactions, students gave high rating to the items in "social responsibility", "self-discipline", and "interaction with community". Tutors devoted themselves to the service, and had high regard for the task objectives. Their service actions focused on their own self-adjustment and their devotion to solving problems with specific tutee learning situations. They expected themselves to effectively manage their time, preparation work, and teaching activities in order to achieve the tutoring objectives. From their engagement in the community, they also gained a sense of responsibility toward the serviced group.

Table 1. Students' responses toward "understanding of children"

Questions	M	SD
I understood the tutee's academic standing profile at school.	3.77	0.882
I was aware of the tutee's learning status from her/his past record.	3.60	0.830
I knew the tutee's past tutee experiences.	3.59	0.999
I was aware of the tutee's current learning status.	4.10	0.654
I got acquainted with the tutee's learning problems.	4.27	0.584
I obtained the tutees' background and personality through teachers.	3.39	0.934
I tried to know the tutee's family status through interaction.	3.72	0.943
I tried to know the tutee's school life through interaction.	4.06	0.755
I understood the tutee's mental and physical condition through observation.	4.20	0.668
I grasped the tutee's learning interests via various approaches.	3.98	0.772
N=184	3.87	0.504

Table 2. Students' responses toward "service action"

Questions	M	SD
I adjusted my teaching content to fit a specific time period.	4.08	0.643
I tried to provide the tutee with interactive content.	3.88	0.803
I used various approaches to motivate the tutee's learning.	3.81	0.784
I used audio-visual contents in tutoring.	3.59	1.026
I designed learning materials based on the tutee's characteristics.	3.63	0.903
I sought assistance from other tutors when I encountered problems.	3.38	1.065
I shared teaching materials from other tutors.	3.02	1.116
I designed learning content based on the tutee's level.	4.18	0.767
I shared materials I designed with other tutors.	3.06	1.170
I shared my own learning experiences with the tutee.	3.99	0.803
I adjusted my teaching strategies based on the tutee's learning situation.	4.18	0.708
I adjusted the teaching pace based on the tutee's level.	4.21	0.710
I often tried to reduce the tutee's learning frustration.	4.12	0.707
I designed vivid and diverse learning materials for the tutee.	3.73	0.849
I encouraged the tutee to behave positively.	4.36	0.629
I taught the tutee strategies for learning.	4.03	0.792
I taught the tutee to develop a positive learning attitude.	4.15	0.690
I corrected the tutee's inappropriate behaviour immediately.	4.01	0.789
N=184	3.86	0.487

Table 3. Students' responses toward "self-discipline"

Questions	M	SD
I prepared before class.	4.05	0.759
I learned to write a teaching plan.	3.40	1.019
I expected myself not to take a leave of absence.	4.57	0.606
I expected myself to prepare effective learning content for my tutee.	3.97	0.689
I devoted myself to the tutoring task.	4.46	0.608
I forgave the tutee's erratic or unreasonable behaviour.	4.21	0.702
I expected to be a role model to my tutee.	4.15	0.684
I handled frustrations positively.	4.28	0.656
I expected myself to adjust my own temper.	4.33	0.604
I kept promises to my tutee.	4.38	0.666
I always set a good example to my tutee.	4.28	0.697
I considered my tutee's learning outcomes.	4.20	0.668
I disciplined myself to meet tutee's expectation.	4.31	0.675
N=184	4.20	0.485

Table 4. Students' reactions toward "interaction with community"

Questions	M	SD
I built up a good relationship with my tutee.	4.32	0.643
I established collaborative relationships with other tutors.	3.93	0.773
I built up co-advising relationships with teachers from the learning site.	3.83	0.789
I established a team relationship with project assistants.	3.95	0.770
I learned communication skills.	4.18	0.698
I used my understanding about the tutee as a basis for communication with him/her.	4.22	0.635
I felt that the tutee relied on me.	4.08	0.746
I encouraged my tutee to communicate and express.	4.12	0.773
I made my tutee feel he/ she was cared for.	4.23	0.748
I shared experiences with other tutors.	3.57	0.984
I developed good interpersonal skills.	3.97	0.839
I cherished the relationships I developed during tutoring.	4.18	0.746
I considered collaborative experiences in the team to be important.	4.07	0.793
N=184	4.05	0.570

Table 5. Students' reactions toward "social responsibility"

Questions	M	SD
I changed my viewpoints of those under-served children.	4.10	0.863
I learned to place myself in the position of minority groups.	4.38	0.737
I understood the lack of learning resources for children in remote areas.	4.35	0.717
I learned to care more about remote children's learning needs.	4.48	0.652
I cared about the learning and growing environment for children from disadvantaged groups.	4.48	0.609
I considered that I should put myself into others' positions.	4.35	0.760
I felt the responsibility for my tutee.	4.52	0.600
I felt that I should do something for society.	4.49	0.627
I felt that I should influence others to engage in the tutor services.	4.35	0.753
I should be involved more in fostering the growth of children in remote areas.	4.32	0.692
I had the chance to understand the education issues of remote children.	4.33	0.726
I will continue to pay attention to remote children's education issues.	4.35	0.670
I could influence others to devote themselves to help under-served groups.	4.36	0.621
I will engage myself in more social works in the future.	4.25	0.703
N=184	4.36	0.537

#### 4. Conclusion

Having grown in popularity over the past 7 years, "Online Tutoring for After-School Learning" has developed into an effective service model linking academic learning with efforts to address issues of social concern. University commitment and support is needed to encourage communities to explore new ways of deepening learning for both tutors and tutees. For service learning, a challenge that consistently emerges in the research is the assessment of students' learning outcomes. In this study, we have employed an effective tool to document students' reflective learning in their online tutoring activities. The rubrics used for assess students' attitude toward community engagement served as independent ratings that appear to precisely measure what they learned from the service work. The main limitation of this study is the results may only be generalized to the type of online service learning used in the research. More work on addition research in testing the construct of rubrics developed in the study is needed.

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