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Abstract

This qualitative research describes the gains of servicelearning on students' self-concept, social engagement and emotional and cognitive development. Through semistructured interviews, essential accounts on servicelearning experiences are elicited and explicated according to Richard Hycner's guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data. By capturing the essence of the students' experiences, the researchers hope to establish voluntary evidences of the advantages and promises of academic service-learning for the holistic formation of students in keeping with the school's unique academic policies and services. Results may provide basis for more consideration of innovative pedagogical institutional policies and may direct future education and curriculum implementers/managers towards the uncharted areas of service-learning.

Keywords: higher education, Religious and Values Education, service learning, phenomenology, Western Visayas, Philippines

Introduction

Ideally, learning should take place in a real-life, realworld context so students will find more meaning on the theories and concepts taught to them in school. The timeless educational principle says, "we learn best when we do what we learn" – a principle of learning by doing advanced by John Dewey.

The Augustinian Sisters of our Lady of Consolation (ASOLC) in the Philippines, the forerunner of 23 La Consolacion schools in the country, considers formal education as their of mission of evangelization. Imbedded in the academic curriculum of the schools they run and operate, including the campus where the researcher is based is a strong program for community extension service. This community involvement program has been in existence for more than 25 years in the school, and a few years in the other three branch campuses in the province.

The challenge, however, is that there has been no progressive move to combine and integrate academic instruction with service - an approach that will spell a difference in the learning experience of the students. When community service is organized, it is purely dole-out. This observation is backed up by action researches disclosing low levels of satisfaction among our students when they engage in outreach activities. This leads to a supposition that a mere community service that is cut-off from what students learned inside the classroom is invariably insignificant. This practice is even made less significant and interesting for the students with the utilization of traditional assessment practices of student learning, the deficient use of measurement strategies that gauge students' higher order thinking skills, and the lack of training and capacity to introduce new-fangled instructional methodologies that will improve students' experiential learning.

We are fortunate to have one member of the research team to have been internationally trained in the theory and pedagogy of service learning – a teaching method which combines service and academic instruction. Service learning responds to the needs of the school in the delivery of learning that is holistic and totally significant for the students. Implementing a new instructional strategy, however, is not without its challenges. Considering the novelty of service-learning in the institution, the needs that have been mentioned may not be addressed if implementers do not have the capacity to deliver the process. This requires training; yet first and foremost, a relevant knowledge and information about the conduct of service learning is a necessity. This research endeavors to draw insights and observations from experiences of Religious and Values Education (RVE) college students who participated in a novel learning pedagogy.

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to answer to the question: 'What are the gains of service-learning on students' self-concept, social engagement, emotional and affective and cognitive development?'

METHOD

Research Design

The phenomenological research design was utilized in the study using semi-structured interviews to elicit descriptive accounts on service learning experienced by RVE students. Rooted in a philosophical tradition, phenomenology is a way of examining people's lived experiences to ascertain critical truths about reality and study phenomena which are subjective to individuals (Polit & Beck 2010). Descriptive phenomenology as developed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is the unbiased study of things as they appear so that an essential understanding (essence) of human consciousness and experience may be arrived at (Dowling 2007).

Study Context

The study took place in La Consolacion College Bacolod and in service learning sites from the different sub-villages where the participants rendered voluntary services. The participants were students enrolled in Religious and Values Education subject.

Participants

Five students purposely chosen who participated in the service learning project of the RVE area were invited to take part in the study, and each of their narrative on service learning experience was examined in-depth. The five students have knowledge of service learning as a learning method. These students gave accounts on their service learning project experience through a semistructured interview within a safe and free interview environment.

Data Source

The semi-structured interview guide was utilized to stimulate the respondents to reflect on their experiences as service learners of the catechism project. Before conducting the interview, the guide was subjected to content validation by two English teachers for the language and grammatical mechanics. These experts examined each interview question and the question guide as a whole and made suggestions for revision. To check the clarity of the questions after the revision was made, the researchers asked a college student to engage in a pilottest interview.

Data Collection

Qualitative research employs methods which allow researchers to collect data surrounding the 'emic' or lived experiences of people (Polit & Beck 2010). This is made permissible through a number of data collection strategies

such as interviews, focus groups, action research and observation. In phenomenology, the optimum way of collecting data is through one-to-one interviews. Charmaz (2006) posits that interviews are a powerful vehicle where discovery of people's 'life-worlds' can be realized by exploring metaphors context and meanings of unique experiences.

For this investigation, the researcher used the semistructured interview technique in gathering the information from the sample. Lying in the middle between a structured and the unstructured interview technique, the interview technique utilized was deemed advantageous in that it allowed the researcher to identify broad themes necessary for a substantial data collection. Since the researcher recognized that in-depth interviewing is naturally complicated and delicate, the careful, objective and systematic conduct and procedure was ensured.

Leading questions or jargons that may contaminate data were avoided. A confidential and friendly environment was chosen to conduct the interview where subjects can talk freely in an unhurried and open way. The interviews were electronically-recorded and transcribed in verbatim to preserve accuracy and to minimize the likelihood of disruption to data collection.

Data Analysis

We found it imperative that before the presentation of the actual findings and discussions, the process of obtaining and condensing the data provided through the interview will be discussed here succinctly to facilitate clearer understanding of the rigorous process of the 'explicitation'.

In order to facilitate an in-depth, objective description and analysis of the essential experiences of the students, we were guided by the guidelines for the phenomenological analysis of interview data by Hycner (1985). Using such guidelines that explicate in a concrete manner the procedures in phenomenologically analyzing the interview data, we went through the following rigorous steps in analyzing and synthesizing the transcripts:

1. Transcription. Listening to the recorded interview, indepth review of the transcripts delineated a total of 255 units of general meaning. Hycner (1985) defines a unit of general meaning as those words, phrases, non-verbal or paralinguistic communications which express a unique and coherent meaning (irrespective of the research question) clearly differentiated from that which precedes and follows. Table 1 presents an excerpt from the entire transcript and delineation of units of general meaning. It should be noted that it is obviously impossible to convey the overall context in such a brief example.

Table 1. Transcriptions and units (255) of general meaning

Interview transcriptions	Units of general meaning	
¹ Ang learning experiences ko sa church involvement namon (catechism) sa	1 Church involvement (catechism) with children was fun	
children daw daw kasadya lang sa amon pirme, ²daw wala man gid sg daw	² No problem was encountered	
kadramatic nga natabo since 3 ang mga kids daw ka mag jolly kag very participative and cooperative when it	$\ensuremath{^3}$ Kids were jolly, participative and cooperative	
comes to recitation	⁴ Difficulties for others (children) were on memorization	
iban, ang iban nga mga nabudlayanwhen we have activities like		
memorization (sir) daw dira sila nabudlayan, ⁵ ang iban daw naghuya gid	⁵ Kids were shy to recite	
mag recite, 6may ara gid ya nga active may ara man ya iban nga nahuya nga daw wala naanad	$^{\bf 6}$ While others (kids) were active, others were timid and were not used to	

2. Delineating units of general meaning. Initiating the critical phase in the explication of the informants' narratives, a total of 188 units of meanings relevant to the research problem was recorded. A brief extract delineating units of relevant meaning from what the participants reported follows (Table 2).

- ¹ Church involvement (catechism) with children was fun
- ² No problem was encountered
- 3 3 Kids were jolly, participative and cooperative
- ⁴ Difficulties for others (children) were on memorization
- 5 5 Kids were shy to recite
- 6 While others (kids) were active, others were timid and were not used to
- 7 Was surprised about the location/place
- 8 Was surprised about the state of the 'school'; seemed not fully constructed
- 9 9 Children lacked materials/supplies
- 10 10 Books were old
- 11 People were willing to help them
- 12 People were very helpful
- 13 People gave them materials that they asked
- 14 People gave them snacks
- 15 People guided them
- 16 16 Learned the value of quality time
- 17 $^{17\ 18\ 19\ 20}$ Needed to be generous with her time when serving people especially to
- 18 children
- 19 $^{21}\mathrm{She}$ observed that children lack relationship with God
- 20 22 Assumed possibly that parents are sometimes absent
- 21 23 Assumed that parents may not accompany children to church
- 22 24 She realized that life is different today
- 23 25 Noticed that there's lacking in the family
- 26 Believed that family lacked "togetherness"
- 25 27 That's what she realized
- 26 28 As a "teacher" who taught there
- 27 29 Realized how important patience is towards the kids
 - 30 Realized that she doesn't necessarily need to be strict so that kids will not be afraid to them

3. Delineating units of meaning relevant to the research question. On the process of delineating units of relevant meaning from the responses of the participants, some redundancies in the transcripts have been identified.

These redundancies were eliminated cautiously so as not to include in the elimination process those units that might have distinct contextual meaning though might both appear with similar literal forms. This is necessary for the process of clustering units of relevant meaning to happen. The process of revisiting the transcripts, units of general meaning and the units of relevant meaning from time to time has shown that the narratives of the participants can be naturally clustered because there were some common themes or essences that unite several discrete units of their stories. These units had been grouped into 22 clusters as shown partly in Table 3.

Table 3. Clusters (22) of relevant meaning

1. The fun of involvement A. Church involvement (catechism) with children was fun (1) B. Funny moments with the children (80) C. Experience was fun (134) 2. Surprise A. Was surprised about the location/place (7) B. Was surprised about the state of the school; seemed not fully constructed (8) C. Was surprised about the area (139)
D. Area was something [she could not decide right away] (140) E. Said she was caught by the hygiene of the kids (145) 3. Generosity of time A. Needed to be generous with her time when serving people especially to children (17) B. Generosity by giving her quality time (51) 4. Illustrations and exemplifications A. Exemplified situations like going to the malls - while they do not appreciate it because they've been used to it, other might not have yet visited a mall (89) B. Illustrated further that they just waste foods because they often eat them, but said that not have tasted them yet (90) $C. \ Il lustrated that a piece of bread is given so much value and is being shared to others (93)$ D. Illustrated that in one's life, whebs/he is pessimistic, the project can change one's inner and outer self. (112) 5. People's attitudes towards them A. People were willing to help them (11) B. People were very helpful (12) C. People gave them materials that they asked (13) D. People gave the snacks (14) E. People guided them (15) F. Community assisted them in their needs for their activity (74) G. Community leaders were there to supervise the kids (75) 6. Personal values learned A. Learned the value of quality time (16) B. Learned generosity, patience, respect and love (50) C. Learned to respect the state of life to others (52)
D. Realized that she must not "waste" (85) E. Realized that she should not underest imate the small things (86)
F. Realized that some small things are already big things for others (87)
G. Realized that the things they ignore might be things very important for others (92) H. Made them realized that they should not do it (wasting) (94) Was made aware on how to act responsibly (107) $J.\ Learned\ to treasure\ little\ things\ they\ have\ because\ others\ had\ not\ experienced\ them\ (109)$ K. Learned how to be patient with the kids (130) L. Needed to be patient with a person (132) M. Was restrained not to offend the kids (147) N. Learned how to respect people (164)

4. Clustering units of relevant meaning. Finally, an interrogation of all the clusters of meanings facilitated the determination if there were one or more central themes that express the essence of these clusters. In going back and forth the list, the researcher further grouped the 22 clusters into seven general clusters that were deemed to express common essences in their context and implied meanings. Seven major themes were determined corresponding to these seven general clusters of meanings.

Table 4. Groupings of clusters of meaning.

Cluster grouping	Clusters of meaning	Theme/central idea
Cluster I	Generosity of time Personal values learned Gratitude Beliefs formed Interiority "Before-now" statements	The potential of service- learning (SL) in forming personal values and beliefs
Cluster II	Encounters and observations Realizations Self-reflections Observed realities reflecting themselves	SL as a mirror of significant human experiences
Cluster III	Attitudes of people towards them Addresses to group mates Perceptions for others Derived self-perceptions Modified impressions	Views for others and self engendered through SL
Cluster IV	Assumptions about pre-experienced realities Illustrations and exemplifications	Active observation in SL generating social postulations
Cluster V	Surprise	SL in developing socio- civic consciousness
Cluster VI	The fun of involvement Results of serving Impact of kids	SL and its affective consequences
Cluster VII	Role as teacher Remembering RVE	Positive attitude towards teachers & learning

Results and Discussions

This study primarily sought to determine the gains of service learning. Using the data analysis procedure, the synthesis of information is presented as gains achieved in service learning experience.

On Self-concept

A. Service Learning Potentials in Forming Personal Values. The participants in the service learning project found that they were made cognizant of a multiplicity of personal values and ideals that they could take on as they interacted with the community and their peers. These included the value of generosity in the context of sacrificing one's free time intended for their recreation and amusement considering that they do the project on a Sunday. Another value statement that kept on recurring in the narratives was on their putting value on small things and being prudent and economical by not wasting resources. As one student puts it:

My greatest realization is that we must not waste and underestimate small things because they might be very significant for others. While we are just wasting and ignoring the value of small things (say, a piece of bread or going to the mall), the kids already consider these very important. We realized that we should not waste.

Additional list of personal morals gleaned from the experiences of the service learners included patience, respect for others, responsibility, self-control and tolerance, gratitude and the generic moral standard of love and care for others.

It was also interesting to note that interiority as one of the core values of the college was evidently emphasized and integrated by the service learners during their experience. A number of them said that the project necessitated from them a strengthened faith and relationship with God. While others believed that enlightenment in one's life happens through serving God, others were grateful that they were given the opportunity to serve and to test themselves.

I realized the need for me to also strengthen my faith and relationship with God. I believe that

through serving God, enlightenment in one's life happens and so we should value God. I am thankful to God for giving me the opportunity to experience to test myself as I learned how to pray and to teach prayer to the kids.

This reference to God for the meaning and worth they felt in doing the project is indicative of an emergent faith and spiritual wellbeing. One participant even counsels her classmates to actively involve themselves in the project because it is a way to show that God is important in their generation:

I just would like to recommend that my school mates try the activity because they can learn from it while serving the community, as this is also a way for them to show that God is still important in our present time.

B. Service Learning as a Mirror of Significant Human Experiences. On the course of their service learning project implementation, students have reported that they have felt several emotions and observed certain human sensitivities that were significantly reflected in their very own lives. These human experiences that were magnified through their immersion with the community and the people included the idea of innocence, joy and timidity that were best associated with the experiences they have had with the kids in the place.

The broader cluster of the human experience of difficulty identified more specific observations including scarcity, deficiency and hunger; misery and destitution; surrender and abandonment. Two of the participants summed up their observations and insights saying:

The area was poor and depressed and we observed that the kids were hungry and we felt bad seeing the situation. Now, we realized the value

that our parents send us to school while others needed to work hard and struggle.

C. Service Learning as Means to Forming Views for Self and Others. An equally interesting finding of this investigation is the formation of perception of the self among the students which can be labeled as "Iam capable of changing and modifying myself and be responsive if expected to work on something I willingly consider and accept as meaningful." Almost always, the general perception for typical college students is apathy and inactivity for more worthwhile civic activities, say volunteering. The service learning project has seen this modification of selfperception as it came out from the lips of the service learners themselves that if they were only given the chance to participate in things that concern them, they are capable of involvement. This poses then a significant challenge among teachers that the principle of introducing learning experiences that are of interest and meaning to the learners must always be considered. Regardless of the level of complexity of activities asked of students to undertake, the key is to provide opportunities that promise meaning to one's self.

I can be bold and courageous on stranger tides. This is another perception formed by students in the course of their service learning experience. This perception must have been newly formulated by the students themselves to affirm their sense of dependability when asked to do tasks despite unfamiliarity. When they were deployed to various areas in the cooperating community, the place was totally new to them, culturally and physically. Nonetheless, they have shown voluntary participation and courage to tread the place unknown to them – a seeming *missionary spirit* among our spirit. As one student puts it:

I felt it voluntary on my part to participate and I just felt I was brave considering we were a 'nobody' in the community.

In terms of perception of others, our service learners viewed that strangers can be helpful, supportive and responsive. Recognizing a trivial sense of alienation in the area, they felt that "strangers" were helpful enough to them. These perceptions were articulated as:

The people were willing to help us. They gave us materials that we asked. They even gave us snacks. They guided us. As a community, they assisted us in our needs for our activity. The community leaders helping us supervise the kids were a great support.

The service learners also came up with an impression for their peers as another significant group of people. Towards the end of the project, they made the following statements:

I thought that my male groupmates could be non-participative, but I experienced otherwise.

I observed that there are those who seemed negligent, but I conversely felt that I had a good working relationship with my group mates.

I realized that though they are (st***d), they are trying hard to really learn.

Our group mates were helpful, active and determined.

My group mates gave me hope.

I came to know my group mates deeply. I thought they were not serious.

From these statements given by the service learners, it can be gleaned from their experience that their peers can be potentially dependable, unwavering and possible source of hope for them – a perception of others developed through the course of a meaningful service to the community.

On Social Engagement

A. Active Observation in Service Learning Generating Postulations. The narrative reports of the participants in this research generated social conjectures that are basically based on the actual observations of the service learners. The basic observation of the students is that poverty affects adversely parental roles and the students believed that the children suffer the immediate consequence of this social problem. In fact, parental involvement in the home can affect children physically, psychologically and socially. These were objectively gleaned from the reports of the students who said that:

Parents are sometimes absent and do not accompany children to church. It seems that family lacked "togetherness" because the parents are out busy looking for their daily needs to sustain the family.

One informant even reported witnessing of random physical contacts of mothers to kids without necessary and valid reasons. Parents seemed to be quick in punishing their children and they easily get irritated. For the service learners, this may be attributed to parents' desperation and difficulty to manage life's difficulty. Consequently, innocent children are the victims of their parents' irritability. While children are expected to receive all necessary emotional, physical and physiological support, their parents are overcome by their need to sustain their family's daily routine.

B. Service Learning in Developing Socio-Civic Consciousness. The catechism service learning project has developed socio-civic consciousness among the service learners. These realizations included the insufficiency of necessities for some members of the community. These observations were best seen when the students immerse themselves in the various puroks they were assigned to teach kids. Among the common insufficiencies noticed

were on basic food needs and materials needed for the play and learn activities of the children. These were the observations that made the students realize how lucky they were to have sufficient food to eat and that they are attending a private school.

Secondly, the effect and influence of poverty in low income families, particularly among children appealed onto the awareness of the service learners. This is previously discussed in the social postulations also generated by the students as a result of their actual immersion.

Lastly, there was an evidence of the attempt of the marginalized sector to be productive despite inadequacies. The service learners noticed that despite meager lifestyle of the host community, there is a positive disposition among its members to be of contribution to the students. Though this may be best associated with value of hospitality among Filipinos, it was also interesting to note that regardless of one's economic status, there is a deliberate attempt to serve others, especially those who are new to the community. These perceptions are backed up by the following statements of the research participants:

We were surprised about the location and place, about the state of the 'school' because it was not fully constructed. The area was something [she could not describe right away]. We were also caught by the hygiene of the kids.

It is notable to think that the service learners have understood the process of the learning project because it was through it that they acquired a certain level of social awareness, especially on the pressing issue of poverty. This being supported by facts, stated that understanding the process of civic engagement includes understanding the effect that poverty and other issues the development of a young person's civic identity. Truly, this service learning project has met this end for the RVE students of LCCB.

On Emotional, Affective and Cognitive Development

A. Service Learning and Its Affective Consequences. One of the interesting outcomes of this investigation is the report on the affective and emotional domains of the students. Primarily, the students have become more interested to engage in the subject. Statements were made by the participants who unanimously testified that their group mates share the same experience. First and foremost was their act of teaching the kids with love and interest:

I was more inspired by the children when I experienced the catechism project. I have noticed that while there are kids who are mischievous and who lack discipline, they were still "cool". I just felt that when I was teaching, I treated them (kids) as if they were close to me. They (kids) were like our nieces and nephews. And so out of our experience, we established good relationship with the kids who were very participative and funny. Our greatest experience was seeing children gradually gaining confidence. Problems could be forgotten when we saw kids enjoying because we didn't find kids difficult to handle. Seeing the poor kids reduced some of us to tears and we really felt sorry for them that's why we were trying our best to help through our catechism project.

Apart from gaining richer experience with the kids, the service learners felt that their whole aspect of being a person has been positively affected.

I learned the value of quality time. I learned to be generous with my time. I learned patience, respect and love especially for the state of life of others. I learned that I must not waste and should not underestimate and give value to the small things that I have because a lot of people actually do not possess them. While to me they are worthless, to most it is important. The things I ignore might be things very important for others and so I realized

> we should not do it (wasting). Also, we were made aware on how to act responsibly, to treasure little things we have because others hadn't experienced them (like going to the malls). Because we value the feelings of the people in the community, we were restrained not to offend them with our words and remarks.

These narrative reports show the promises of service learning as a teaching-learning method to effect significant change in the behavior, mentality and emotional aspects of the students, significantly among higher education learners.

B. Service Learning in Forming Positive Attitude towards Teachers and the Subject. Among the results of this investigation, the succeeding discussion provides a basis and strong evidence that academic disciplines can be liked and loved when students are provided with related significant learning experiences. As in the case of the Religious and Values Education (RVE) subject taken by the service learners, its significance and essence were fully realized along the conduct of this service learning project. Not only that they appreciated their RVE class, they were also grateful for their teachers for introducing them to the project. Most importantly, they thought that the learning contents in their RVE classes were easily retained and processed because they had a chance to apply them in the praxis level. Statements and reports to support these included:

Ever since, I honestly liked RVE class, but I loved it even more because I learned a lot more.

I knew that RVE subject was about God and it was fun teaching the lessons I learned in RVE to the kids.

We taught prayers and values and it was a sort of review for us.

I found out that exam and questions were easy.

I thanked my RVE teacher for giving us the opportunity to teach and to volunteer.

I am thankful for my teachers who despite teaching other subjects (apart from RVE) taught her Christian values. It is where I am able to connect our RVE lessons.

I am also thankful for the school for making RVE a "core value"

Before, our RVE class was not that serious, but now RVE was important because it us values. Personally, I am considering it seriously now.

These reports show that service learning has the certain potential to increase the academic achievement of the students in any fields and discipline. A research review reports indicating that high quality service learning can enhance academic outcomes because it uses effective, experiential learning strategies .

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

The findings reveal that service learning is a promising teaching method that ensures the holistic formation and lifelong learning of students in higher education. teaching methodology, it engenders the manifestation of personal values such as generosity, patience, respect, prudence, responsibility, self-control, gratitude, interiority and concern for others among the learners engaged in the process. It is a powerful tool in reflecting a litany of human experiences significant for life and living for the youth as it engenders positive perception of self and others. Moreover, service learning strengthens socio-civic consciousness and responsibility. It promises academic achievement among students as it develops positive attitude towards learning content. By and large, service learning as an innovative teaching pedagogy significantly impacts the total wellbeing of the service learner.

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