

Objective 3D: Literature review on the impact of service learning on participants and clients

Introduction and Method

This literature review was conducted in order to provide a working framework for my third objective, to evaluate the effectiveness of Murphy Commons F.U.N. programming. Four studies were examined that observed service learning and its impacts on college students (participants) and elementary school children (clients). All sources were found from the Meriam Library ReSEARCH Station using various search terms including “service learning”, “elementary school”, and “children”. Elements from the studies included helped shape the interview with Murphy Commons staff (Objective 3B) and the questionnaire distributed to 492 interns (Objective 3C).

Criteria for Service Learning

Service Learning is an educational experience that aims to identify community needs and seeks to meet these needs through organized service opportunities provided to students through college coursework (Eppler, Ironsmith, Dingle, & Errickson, 2011). Criteria for service learning includes: high quality service, integration between service and classwork, self-reflection on the part of the participants, collaboration between the community and the university, and assessment to track progress of both learning and service goals (Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015). Another important factor in an effective service learning environment is that the program be mutually beneficial for all clients and participants (Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015; Scott & Graham, 2015). Service learning differs from the concept of service in that it, “extends naturally from predetermined curriculum, benefits all partners, and is sustainable” (Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015, p. 263).

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Benefits of Service Learning

Participants

Benefits of service learning are documented to extend beyond college (Eppler et al., 2011). Because of the variety of benefits there is a movement among many teacher education programs to provide more service learning opportunities (Tinkler, Hannah, Tinkler, & Miller, 2015). Participants who engage in service learning report higher levels of civic engagement and felt responsibility toward their community after college (Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015). Increased appreciation of their discipline and content area is also reported (Eppler et al., 2011). Service learning also integrates with acquired academic skills and concepts to form more meaningful learning experiences (Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015; Scott & Graham, 2015). Finally, interest in working with diverse people has been shown to increase in participants working with underserved communities and has been linked to decreased racist attitudes (Eppler et al., 2011).

Clients

Most studies on service learning have primarily examined the effects and benefits of service learning for participants and few examine the impacts on clients or report minimal benefits (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Eppler et al., 2011; Hildenbrand & Schultz, 2015). Most research that is available regarding the benefits of service learning in elementary school students includes service from volunteers who had been trained in the role in which they are serving. Eppler et al. (2011) conducted their study using untrained college students to tutor elementary school children and intentionally measured the progress of the children. They reported that children's motivation and

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reading scores increased during the course of tutoring. However, they discuss that a lack of a control group served as a limitation to their study (Eppler et al., (2011).

Service learning has been cited for its' cost effectiveness in providing extra bodies for community-based organizations (CBOs) (Blouin & Perry, 2009; Eppler et al., 2011). Blouin and Perry (2009) discuss that having volunteers present often frees up staff of community- based organizations (CBOs) they report on behalf of a paid CBO employee: "A lot of times we're scrambling around to get some more money so we can run some more programs, but what service learners do is they eliminate the need to pay qualified people to do all of these things 'cause service learners are very qualified people and they're available because most of them don't have families. We would have to pay a huge amount of money to get that kind of semi-professional work to run a program. So they just multiply grant money a hundredfold" (p. 125). It should also be noted that many of the participants in Blouin and Perry's study were CBOs who facilitated child services independent of service learners.

Challenges of Service Learning

Participants

Few of the studies examined reported adverse challenges for participants. However, Tinkler et al. (2015) report one unintended outcome in their findings. They report that one third of their participants included paternalistic remarks about their tutees in their final questionnaire. Such remarks includes: "If you can make your students aware that you care and give them someone to look up to, you might make a bigger difference" (p. 25). These remarks led Tinkler et al. to discuss a potential imbalance of

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reciprocity between the participants and clients, as participants reported having given more than they received from the experience. While service learning exposes participants to greater diversity, the authors wonder if it may also strengthen and reinforce stereotypes.

Clients

Blouin and Perry (2009) cite numerous challenges that clients face when managing service learners. Challenges include: lack of communication between university and community personnel, clash of CBOs and college course goals, lack of student professionalism (including conduct and commitment), and risks of unreturned investments. Clients suggest that to minimize these challenges, participants and clients should, clarify expectations and goals in writing, define roles, work together to develop service components in college courses, and share course objectives (Blouin & Perry, 2009).

Conclusion

Although there exists a research imbalance in the benefits of service learning between participants and clients, the benefits for clients described are still noteworthy. All literature review in this paper helped provide a framework for the questions asked in the questionnaires and interviews. I was encouraged to find that the key components of effective service learning described in the articles were strong foundations in Child Development internship courses offered at Chico State. Communication between the university and community in terms of student expectations and course goals is of paramount importance to an effective service learning experience.

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References

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