

Service-Learning as Global Citizenship Education: Acting Locally on Global Challenges and Concerns

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Abstract

Service-learning is a method of teaching that is increasingly used in higher education. Studies are few though on how local placements in service-learning can bring about global citizenship and promote social justice. Hence, this study used multi-sited ethnography to examine the teaching-learning process of service-learning to better understand the construction of civic identity and sense of agency among students when this method of teaching was approached within the larger context of social justice. Study participants included students taking part in service-learning efforts for literacy and maternal health from Miriam College and Ateneo de Manila University, respectively. Data were gathered and analyzed from observation notes during classroom and field visits, entries from reflection journals of students, and verbatim transcripts from semi-structured interviews of study participants. Findings suggest an explicit and deliberate emphasis on social justice is imperative when a critical understanding of global citizenship is expected out of service-learning. As students were guided to understand the socio-economic and political realities of those in their respective service-learning community and examine their previously held assumptions about poverty, these study participants began to recognize how they continue to benefit from their privilege at the expense of the marginalized and disenfranchised. Furthermore, the relationships formed with those from the community helped the students gain a sense of agency to act on the root causes of social problems even in simple ways through their chosen discipline. These findings have theoretical and practical contributions to growing literature on the use of service-learning for global citizenship education.

Keywords: service-learning, global citizenship, transformative learning

Global citizenship education has become imperative in the 21st century as the negative repercussions of globalization have posed challenges and concerns that require collective action and global solutions (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2014). It aims to empower students through giving them educational opportunities to understand global and local issues; to recognize our interconnectedness and interdependency; to gain a sense of belongingness and solidarity; and to respond individually and collectively for an inclusive and sustainable world (UNESCO, 2018, 2019). Among these educational opportunities are real-life experiences of community involvement, which allow students to relate with people of different backgrounds and views (UNESCO, 2017). Service-learning is a pedagogical approach that can offer these real-life experiences of community involvement. Bringle et al. (2017) define it as:

a course or competency-based, credit-bearing educational experience in which students (a) participate in mutually identified service activities that benefit the community, (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way as to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of personal values and civic responsibility (p. 10).

It is a form of experiential learning and community-embedded academic practice that can (re)connect the university to the community where global challenges and concerns have local implications (Terry & Bohnenberger, 2007).

Service-learning has gained popularity as a method of teaching in recent decades, but it “has been embraced by the academy to a much greater extent than it has been scrutinized” (Butin, 2006, p. 1). Further research is required to systematically examine what notions of citizenship are developed and what social commitments are fostered through service-learning (Kahne et al., 2000). Gaps in knowledge also exist on how service-learning can bring about civic outcomes (Bringle et al., 2017). There is likewise a need for qualitative research, which can provide an in-depth understanding of the processes and outcomes of service-learning (Kahne et al., 2000; Jones & Foste, 2017). Hence, this research study used qualitative inquiry to examine the teaching-learning process of service-learning in order to better understand the construction of civic identity and sense of agency among students involved in this type of university-community engagement.

Literature Review

Not all service-learning programs are the same since this pedagogical approach widely differs as to how it is designed and implemented. This is why there is a growing need to re-situate service-learning towards its original intent and purpose of responding to underlying causes of social injustice, rather than merely carrying it out in the context of charity (Kendall, 1990). Depending on its intent and purpose as a form of community service embedded in students’ learning, service-learning can either take on a traditional or a critical approach, which can bring about competing notions of global citizenship.

The traditional approach to service-learning is primarily concerned with the academic learning of students, undermining the reciprocity that should take place between the university and community (Chupp & Joseph, 2010). As a result, the community gets exploited in the interest of students’ learning (Bringle & Clayton, 2013). The service rendered in the community is typically viewed as an act of charity, which often does not seek to attend to the root causes of

social problems (Mitchell, 2008; Robinson, 2000). Power and privilege also tend to be reinforced as students simply do tasks “for” the community (Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000).

This approach to service-learning is oriented towards a neoliberal understanding of global citizenship wherein capitalism dominates the global and local policy scene, oppressive structures in society are maintained, and an us-them dichotomy is perpetuated as part of efforts for a globalization-from-above (Falk, 1997; Mitchell, 2008). It functions to secure power and dominance (Tully, 2008) given that students are apathetic to their historical reality and are unable to acknowledge how they continue to benefit from their privilege at the expense of the marginalized and disenfranchised (Thomas & Chandrasekera, 2015). This often goes on when students are not challenged and disrupted enough to reflect on how unjust practices have led to the need for their service in the community (Bruce & Brown, 2010). Students, in effect, remain constrained to take collective action for genuine social change.

In contrast, the critical or transformative approach to service-learning, as Mitchell (2008) clarifies, seeks genuine social change by attending to structural causes of social injustice. It aims to form students into engaged citizens by providing them meaningful and relevant opportunities to work “with” those from the community in responding to their identified needs and in addressing unjust structures that made them marginalized and disenfranchised (Chambers, 2009; Mitchell, 2008; Ward & Wolf-Wendel, 2000).

Such an approach to service-learning can bring about a critical understanding of global citizenship insofar as initiatives towards a globalization-from-below approach include bottom-up participation for social change (Falk, 1997; Mitchell, 2008). Critical global citizenship entails students disrupting the status quo in society as they get to recognize social relations of power and build authentic relationships with those from the community (Chambers, 2009; Mitchell, 2008). This happens when “students”, as Chambers (2009) points out, “are often challenged not only to step outside their “comfort zones” and confront some of their own assumptions and beliefs about society and its systems but also to seek for themselves the relevance and meaning of their education and their responsibility as members of a privileged social class” (p. 93). To do so requires allotting a safe space for critical reflection, which involves examining deep-seated beliefs about diverse others and interrogating how these commonly held ideas and practices reinforce inequality in society (Stokamer & Clayton, 2017).

Transformative learning can take place during the teaching-learning process of service-learning when “assumptions or premises,” as Mezirow (1991) emphasizes, “are found to be distorting, inauthentic, or otherwise invalid” (p.6). The disorienting dilemma that follows can prompt students to reflect on their commonly held ideas and practices, explore other possibilities and courses of actions, and transform their perspectives and habits towards inclusivity (Mezirow, 2009). Students, in turn, experience a sense of agency or the capacity to act against issues of social justice (Barker, 2000).

However, most literature on transformative learning and global citizenship in service-learning have focused on international placements of privileged students in the Global South. However, transformative opportunities for global citizenship in service-learning not only ensue in an international setting. Acting locally on global challenges and concerns is as influential as international placement in eliciting transformative learning and fostering global citizenship during service-learning since “experience in the local level, in particular, is foundational to understanding issues affecting the larger global community” (Engbert & Fox, 2011, p. 89).

This study, therefore, aims to substantiate how local placements in critical service-learning can bring about the necessary transformative learning for critical global citizenship.

Methodology

To look at the teaching-learning process that occurs in service-learning, this study carried out a multi-sited ethnography because prolonged fieldwork in two or more research sites allows for educational structures, lives, and processes to be carefully examined (Pierides, 2010). Multi-sited ethnography is not only apt in “[following] people, connections, associations, and relationships across space,” (Falzon, 2009, pp. 1–2), but it is also appropriate for making sense of “identities in diffuse time-space” (Pierides, 2010, p. 185). Furthermore, it is suitable when the social phenomena cannot be fully explained by studying a single site only (Falzon, 2009). These social phenomena may include globalization-related social issues (Boccagni, 2019), such as the need for literacy and better maternal health. Understanding these social issues from one research site may help in gaining insights from another site through imagining how these sites are connected and related to each other (Marcus, 1999).

After obtaining ethics approval and informed consents, students from the following service-learning initiatives were recruited as study participants:

- Literacy campaign of Miriam College as part of classes for Moral Development and Education as well as Theology of Social Justice and Peace for the semester of August to December 2015;
- Maternal health initiative of Ateneo de Manila University as part of classes for The Health Professional as Administrator and A Theology of Catholic Social Vision for the semester of May to July 2015 and August to December 2015, respectively.

Eight Early Childhood Education students from the literacy campaign and ten Health Sciences students from the maternal health initiative were included in this study. They were in their fourth year of undergraduate degrees at these two educational institutions. Their names were withheld to safeguard their anonymity and ensure data confidentiality. Pseudonyms were instead used in reporting the findings.

The experiences of these students in service-learning were followed using participant observation of their encounters in the classroom and service-learning placements. The literacy campaign entailed students to go for a one-day visit at Seedling Community, which is a government relocation site for informal settlers from parts of the Philippines' capital. They carried out various activities to support the reading and writing skills as well as values formation of indigent children in the community. The maternal health initiative, on the other hand, necessitated students to undertake a ten-day immersion at Leyte, which is a province in the Philippines where the healthcare system was compromised by typhoon Haiyan in 2013. The immersion involved students assessing the operations of birthing clinics in a rural setting and proposing recommendations for the improvement of maternal healthcare delivery among indigents in Leyte.

During participant observation, notes were written in a fieldwork notebook (Creswell, 1994). To make sense of these written records of events, open coding for the meanings these observation notes might represent was done line by line until no new meaning could be generated. Open codes that were similar in meaning were relabeled to a code that best characterized them. Patterns were explored and comparisons were sought to better understand

the social phenomena being studied. Unrelated codes were revisited, refined, and relabeled. Related codes were thereafter organized together to create reduced categories of codes (Emerson et al., 2011; O'Reilly, 2012). Emerging themes were then identified from these categories of codes that were recurring (Creswell, 1994).

To gain more insights about the students' service-learning experiences, their reflection journals were collected after these journal entries were marked by their teachers. Narratives from reflection journals underwent discourse analysis, which is not only helpful to understand how identity in a given context is constructed through the use of language (Paltridge, 2008), but it is also useful to "explore everyday situations and practices as part of larger processes and social phenomena" (Taylor, 2013, p. 54). First, initial coding was done to sort out and organize these narratives. Second, patterns of language use were analyzed for consistency and differences among and within journal entries. Lastly, meanings were drawn based on how language functions in a social setting such as service-learning (Gill, 2011).

To verify data gathered from participant observation and reflection journals, study participants went through semi-structured interviews at the end of the semester. Audio-recordings of these interviews were transcribed word-for-word and copies of verbatim transcripts were shown to the study participants for member checking. Narratives from these interviews were thereafter examined using discourse analysis as specified above.

To ensure the trustworthiness of this study's findings, prolonged fieldwork and member checking were done so that the gathered data were closely illustrative of the social reality of the study participants. Furthermore, the specific context of this study was described in this report to inform other researchers whether the findings of this study can apply to their setting. The use of multiple sources of data was also detailed in this report so that this audit trail can allow other researchers to replicate the steps by themselves (Maher et al., 2018). Lastly, reflexivity was observed throughout the research process to minimize biases. It involved maintaining a reflection journal while the fieldwork was carried out, undergoing regular debriefing from impartial peers, and being self-conscious of doing research with the study participants instead of researching on them.

Findings

This section describes the civic identity fostered and the sense of agency enacted when social justice is emphasized in service-learning. It also examines the teaching-learning process involved in critical service-learning, looking into the role of critical reflection in promoting transformative learning and bringing about a critical understanding of global citizenship.

Literacy Campaign

Miriam College is a private academic institution that has offered Catholic schooling for women since 1926. Its higher education unit is dedicated to preparing its students "for productive and relevant careers that serve the needs and aspirations of the Filipino people and the global environment" (Miriam College, 2011, p. 7). It seeks to educate its students as socially responsive individuals, who can contribute to "a just and humane society in the context of a changing global environment" (Miriam College, 2011, p. 7).

Its College of Education aims to form students into teachers, who are "engaged agents and advocates for social change," by adopting innovative and relevant approaches to student-centered learning (Miriam College, 2011, p. 197). Included among these approaches are

opportunities for service-learning that cater to the needs of underprivileged children, out-of-school youth, and children with disabilities (Miriam College, 2020).

The literacy campaign is one of several service-learning efforts of the College of Education for its Early Childhood Education students. In this study, it became an integral part of the classes in Moral Development and Education as well as Theology of Social Justice and Peace so that students, according to their teachers, not only understand “the role of a teacher in imparting values to school children as they learn to read and write”, but they can also “make sense of their immersion in the community in light of Catholic Social Teaching.”

Civic identity. During their interviews, the Early Childhood Education students expressed at the outset how the literacy campaign, as a form of service-learning, became a practical approach for them to help indigent children through teaching. They felt “service-learning,” as conveyed by Valerie, “allowed [them] not only to use what [they] have been learning as a teacher but also to make a difference in society”. For instance, this service-learning, as emphasized by Jade and Kayla, provided them meaningful and relevant opportunities to address social problems, such as the need for literacy and quality education in the country, through teaching underprivileged students reading and writing skills as well as values formation, among others.

This service-learning also taught the Early Childhood Education students, such as Jasmine, Jade, Rebecca, Gabby, and Melissa how to acknowledge their privileges and, as a result, how to be considerate of others in need. As they spent a whole day in Seedling Community, they realized their privileged lives were in stark contrast to the socio-economic circumstances of those in a relocation site. So “[their] perspectives”, as stated by Melissa, “about others changed” and “[they] became more sensitive to the needs of those living in poverty”.

Additionally, their immersion in Seedling Community not only made the Early Childhood Education students aware of the “way of living” in relocation sites, but it compelled them to confront the status quo in society, examine their previously held assumptions, and explore how their privileges have contributed to the prevailing social problems. Gabby, Melissa, and Rebecca, for example, found themselves questioning the socio-economic and political realities of people displaced in relocation sites, challenging their stereotypes and deep-seated beliefs about poverty, and evaluating their possible roles in propagating oppressive structures in society.

Sense of agency. Many of them, including Jasmine, felt encouraged that their brief visit in Seedling Community was able to “give simple joys to the children there”. Because of this heartwarming response, Rebecca, among others, realized that “they do not need to do something big to have a significant impact on others”. Their “small, simple acts” of teaching these indigent children gave them a sense of agency that they can contribute to some degree to society. For example, teaching values formation through storytelling might seem too basic but, as pointed out by Jade, “[these children] could learn something that can be useful in the future”.

Even though their participation in this literacy campaign was short, their experiences in Seedling Community reinforced their commitment to contribute to society through teaching. All the Early Childhood Education students included in this study signified their intentions to take part in volunteer teaching, while Jasmine, Jade, Rebecca, Sandy, and Melissa also entertained teaching in public schools and remote areas so that they can help improve literacy in the countryside. Such commitment to make a difference in society, according to Kayla, was

brought about by their understanding that being an agent of social change “should not stop from the time their visit to the community ended”.

However, it was not clear whether this capacity to act and make a difference in society through teaching would be enough to ameliorate the social conditions of marginalized and disenfranchised as well as transform societal structures that made the residents of indigent communities, such as Seedling Community, poor. Commitment for social change was apparent, but there was no certainty if this commitment would be persistent and long-lasting.

Transformative learning. This semblance of critical global citizenship could be partly attributed to the transformative learning that happened while the Early Childhood Education students participated in this service-learning. Changes in their perspectives took place as their experiences in Seedling Community were different from their impressions of families living in poverty. For instance, Melissa was taken aback that the children of Seedling Community were hopeful about their circumstances as opposed to her belief that these children would wallow in self-pity for being poor. Mia was likewise surprised when these children expressed their altruistic intentions to help the Seedling Community when they grow up:

A girl said she wanted to be a lawyer so that she can help those in their community who get wrongly accused. There is another girl, who wanted to become an engineer so that she can fix the houses in their community.

These Early Childhood Education students, such as Melissa, Gabby, Sandy, and others also learned from their involvement in this service-learning on how they should “put [themselves] first in the situation of others” rather than be quick to judge those in poverty.

To some extent, such perspective transformations came about because of the opportunities for critical reflection given to these Early Childhood Education students. Although their teachers for Moral Development and Education as well as Theology of Social Justice and Peace were not able to accompany them during their one-day visit at Seedling Community due to schedule constraints, they were guided closely by their teachers as they planned for their service-learning. In class, they were also instructed to look back and examine their experiences in service-learning by providing them with general prompts for reflection, which were vital to their paper submission and class presentation by the end of the semester.

However, these students could have more opportunities to make sense of their service-learning experiences that were inconsistent with their previously held assumptions and deep-seated beliefs if their teachers were present to mentor them when necessary during the literacy campaign. The broad instructions to reflect on “significant insights to the entire experience in service-learning” also might not be enough in supporting students to navigate through the disorienting dilemma they experienced while in service-learning. Nevertheless, their teachers were available for consultation within and outside the confines of the classroom to attend to the needs and concerns of the students.

Maternal Health Initiative

Ateneo de Manila University is a private institution of Catholic Higher Education, which caters to both men and women since it turned co-educational in 1973. Its liberal education aims to form students, who “will devote their lives to the service of others, and through the promotion of justice, serve especially those who are most in need of help, the poor, and the powerless” (Ateneo de Manila University, 2016, p. 5). It aspires to educate individuals into “leaders, who

are globally attuned but also deeply rooted in local needs and aspirations, especially of the poor and marginalized” (Ateneo de Manila University, 2020, p. 1).

Its Health Sciences Program seeks to “form professionals with a broad and deep understanding of health, from its foundation in sciences to its relevance in development and the effectiveness in its management” (Ateneo de Manila University, 2014, p. 297). Integrated into its curricular offerings are opportunities for service-learning wherein students are expected to become socially aware and socially involved as they apply theories into practice in a community setting (Ateneo de Manila University, 2013).

The maternal health initiative is one of the service-learning efforts of the Health Sciences Program for its students. In this study, it became central to the delivery of classes for The Health Professional as Administrator and A Theology of Catholic Social Vision so that Health Sciences students, according to their teachers, can better understand the Philippine health care system by “building relationships with a marginalized community, analyzing the issues faced by the community, reflecting on those issues using Scripture and Catholic Social Teaching, and developing an action plan for journeying with the community”.

Civic identity. Similar to the Early Childhood Education students, all the Health Sciences students included in this study appreciated their chosen discipline more as they came across the many ways a health professional can contribute to society. Mae, for instance, expressed how her “experience with the marginalized [in their immersion in Leyte] influenced [her] to become a doctor for a bigger reason”. Rather than confining themselves inside the clinic, such aspiration to be “a doctor with a sense of purpose,” according to Sophia, would entail them to get involved in public health issues and concerns, such as the need for better maternal healthcare in the country.

Ciara, among others, also learned in this service-learning how to acknowledge their privileges and “be mindful of the people they were interacting with”. However, this would require looking for similarities instead of emphasizing differences. For example, James pointed out that:

... when we first encounter someone that we do not know, sometimes we may have the tendency to first see what sets us apart from them. We initially see the differences between each other, which may develop into these boundaries that we accidentally or inadvertently create between ourselves. These boundaries somewhat distance us from others and ultimately contributed to the awkwardness or perhaps difficulties that we feel when we try to interact with them... These boundaries that we set up between ourselves could actually be the root causes of these social issues.

In fact, they, as Randolph realized, “can always find some common ground [despite the differences] – a common ground that [they] can build upon”.

However, these opportunities to build relationships with the marginalized and disenfranchised community in Leyte did not occur at once. In contrast to the Early Childhood Education students, who were able to establish rapport early on with the children and residents of Seedling Community, it took a while for the Health Sciences students to step out of their comfort zone. Fiona, for example, was initially “shy” and “did not know how to start a conversation” with those not familiar to her. Nonetheless, they, according to Megan, were able to engage in “genuine dialogue” the longer they spent their immersion in Leyte. As they listened to the stories and became aware of the plight of the marginalized and disenfranchised, the more they

found themselves examining their pre-conceived notions about poverty, considering how their privileges have taken part in perpetuating social problems, and questioning the status quo in society.

Sense of agency. Similar to the Early Childhood Education students, James and the other Health Sciences students were able to recognize through this maternal health initiative that they can “help change certain systems even in the smallest way”. Ciara, for instance, felt this sense of agency or the capacity to act and make a difference by simply “listening to people’s stories” and “giving voice to the people [at the grassroots], who are not able to voice out their concerns”. It meant providing those at the grassroots, according to James, with “a certain hope that they were not fully incapable of changing their situation”.

It was not certain though whether this sense of agency and commitment to social change would be enough to address the social conditions of marginalized and disenfranchised communities as well as challenge the oppressive structures in society. Nevertheless, they, as Rachel observed, “were not alone [in their aspirations] as there are also other people in the health sector, who seek for a better healthcare system in the country”.

Transformative learning. This display of critical global citizenship could be partly credited to the transformative learning that the Health Sciences students underwent during their ten-day immersion in Leyte. There were opportunities for perspective transformation as students encountered dissonance between their previously held assumptions and their experiences during service-learning. Ciara and Sophia, for example, caught themselves being “quick to judge others” and had to remind themselves every now and then “to just be open about everything, to hold [their] assumptions, or to hold their judgment” as they spent their immersion in Leyte.

However, most of their perspective transformations did not happen easily. Their teacher for The Health Professional as Administrator, who accompanied them during the ten-day immersion in Leyte, had to prod these students to “check themselves for personal biases”. This occasional prodding to examine their preconceived notions and stereotypes of others was initially met with resistance because, as Gabriel explained, they “did not like to be provoked to get out of [their] comfort zone”. They felt ill at ease of being “roused” to put themselves in the situation of others.

Nevertheless, all the Health Sciences students included in this study eventually began to appreciate the importance of critical reflection during their service-learning. Journal writing for Erin became an opportunity for her to reflect and examine her points of view and deep-seated beliefs. It also helped Sophia “to know [herself] more and to provide [her] with clarity during moments [she] felt lost, confused, and distracted”. The specific prompts they had to respond in their journal entries also gave Ciara, among others,

the chance to process what [she] had done through the day, to think about what [she] could have done better and what [she could] learn from the experience, and, most importantly, to know how [she] was able to relate well with the people [she] had encountered.

Providing them structured time to share their reflection during their immersion in Leyte also allowed these students to learn from the insights of their peers and, in turn, enrich their own experiences in service-learning. The presence of their teacher during the maternal health

initiative was likewise seen valuable (albeit belatedly) as he was available to attend to the students as they encountered disorienting dilemmas during service-learning. For example, “being guided [by their teacher] throughout the immersion on how to connect with others” had brought Sophia and other Health Sciences students “to think beyond [their] own reality and to acknowledge other people’s reality”.

Discussion

As we confront the negative repercussions of globalization-from-above, institutions of higher education in the Philippines and elsewhere are increasingly looked upon to educate for social justice and global citizenship (Pashby & Andreotti, 2015). It is not surprising then that undergraduate programs, such as the curricula offered by Miriam College and Ateneo de Manila University, have taken the responsibility to respond to the needs of the country and the various challenges of the 21st century. To do so, these curricula seek to render the educational experiences of students more meaningful and relevant by making use of service-learning as a method of teaching that not only can foster professional development but also civic engagement.

As seen in this study, an explicit and deliberate emphasis on social justice is salient if a critical understanding of global citizenship is expected out of service-learning. Social justice should not only be affirmed as an institutional thrust, but it should also be evident and intentional in the delivery of classes that use service-learning as a method of teaching. The Early Childhood Education students and the Health Sciences students in this study were not only given the necessary space to understand the socio-economic and political realities of indigent communities in light of Catholic Social Teaching on social justice, but they were also offered concrete and tangible opportunities to intervene and act on root causes of poverty, such as the lack of literacy and the need for better maternal health. Hence, the underlying concern of these students during service-learning was to change social structures and address community conditions instead of merely focusing on their academic learning. There was an authenticity to respond to social justice issues as a form of solidarity instead of being apathetic to the social conditions of the marginalized and disenfranchised.

Notably, the experiences of these students in service-learning made them realize that they can be agents of change and contribute to society even in simple ways through their chosen discipline: the Early Childhood Education students can advocate for literacy through teaching indigent children, while the Health Sciences students can promote public health through attending to the healthcare needs of indigent communities. This civic identity fostered among these students is characteristically understood in the context of their chosen profession most likely because it is one aspect “they can readily identify and have an impact upon” (Terry & Bohnenberger, 2007, p. 10). Dvir and Avissar (2014) term this in their study as “critical professional identity” wherein students involved in service-learning can find an ongoing integration between their civic identity and professional identity.

Their experiences in service-learning also taught these Early Childhood Education students and Health Sciences students that critical global citizenship entails recognizing how they continue to benefit from their privilege as well as being considerate of others, particularly the marginalized and disenfranchised. Rather than imposing their own set of values, they learned to take into consideration the perspectives of those at the grassroots whom they intend to help (Lapayese, 2003). Similar to the study participants of Jones and Abes (2004), they demonstrated an “ongoing reflection [of the ‘self’] in relation to the ‘other’... and a focus on others as an important aspect of their [civic] identity” (p. 153).

Rather than simply doing tasks “for” the community and perpetuating an us-them dichotomy, these students were able to establish authentic relationships with the community during their service-learning. The Early Childhood Education students were able to connect with the children they taught in Seedling Community, whereas the Health Sciences students were able to eventually strike a genuine dialogue with the indigents they came across in Leyte. Specifically, knowing about the aspirations of children in the Seedling Community and listening to the personal stories of those in Leyte allowed these students to resonate with the plight of the marginalized and disenfranchised. As a result, they learned how to learn about the community where they had their immersion (Borrero et al., 2012). They became compassionate too as their experiences in service-learning made them develop, as described by Rashedi et al. (2015) of compassion as, “(a) an awareness of another’s pain, perception of reality, and psychological state; (b) a feeling of kindness; (c) a yearning to mitigate the suffering; and (d) doing what is within one’s ability to lessen another’s suffering” (p. 132).

The whole experience of being immersed in the community for their service-learning not only made them aware of social justice issues as they witnessed and examined the socio-economic and political realities of the marginalized and disenfranchised, but it also compelled them to respond to pressing issues in society as “an act of necessity and solidarity” (Katsarou et al., 2010, p. 138). Similar to the studies of Crabtree (1998), Jones and Abes (2004), and Mitchell (2015), such social responsiveness and sense of agency most likely stemmed from the relationships that were established between the students and those from their service-learning community.

The unfamiliar now became familiar as the emotional bonds from these newfound relationships helped them to eventually step out of their comfort zones, examine their previously held assumptions about poverty, and seek out similarities instead of differences (Naudé, 2015). Changes in students’ perspectives happened as they made sense of the discrepancies between their preconceived notions about others and their experiences in service-learning. This transformative learning, according to O’Sullivan et al. (2002), “involves experiencing a deep structural shift in basic premises of thoughts, feelings, and actions” (p. xvii) by taking part in critical reflection. As shown in this study, structured opportunities for critical reflection not only included providing specific prompts for journal writing, but these also necessitated creating a safe space for students to share their insights with peers, accompanying them as they participated in service-learning, and guiding them as they navigated through the dissonance or disorienting dilemma they encountered.

Strikingly, resistance to transformative learning can occur when students are challenged to step out of their comfort zones, examine their previously held assumptions, and find a common ground with those unfamiliar to them. Mezirow (1991) calls this as an error in learning wherein students seem to selectively perceive their reality as part of coping with the anxiety brought about by the mismatch between their deep-seated beliefs and their experiences in service-learning. A safe space to articulate their concerns within and outside the confines of the classroom must, therefore, be guaranteed to students so that changes in problematic perspectives can eventually be facilitated.

Recommendations

Commitment to social change was evident among the students in this study but whether this commitment would be lifelong is still unknown. A longitudinal follow up of these students will be useful since examining aspects of service-learning in an academic term, as Dvir and Avissar

(2014) point out, is not enough in investigating the impact of service-learning on civic development. Several factors can also influence civic outcomes in service-learning. Varied social backgrounds, differences in personality, and other situational factors can account for civic engagement in service-learning (Einfield & Collins, 2008). Being educated according to Catholic Social Teaching can likewise affect civic development in service-learning. Additional research should be done to explore how these factors are related to civic outcomes in service-learning. Generalizability of reported findings can also be an issue even if this study used multi-sited ethnography. More studies are necessary to substantiate the presented findings in this study.

Conclusion

A focus on social justice may not be intuitive in service-learning, but it can be made explicit and deliberate particularly if a critical understanding of global citizenship is envisioned among students. As suggested in this study, acting locally on global challenges and concerns through service-learning can be as powerful as international placements in educating students about critical global citizenship. Through structured opportunities for critical reflection and close supervision from teachers, students not only can recognize how their unearned privileges have contributed to social problems, but they can also gain a sense of agency to act on pressing issues in society even in simple ways through their chosen profession. The emotional bonds formed between the students and those from their service-learning community seem crucial for previously held assumptions to be examined and for transformative learning to take place. Without these authentic relationships that were built in service-learning, solidarity and bottom-up participation that characterize critical global citizenship seem unlikely to occur.

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