

Reflective Learning Gained By Selected University of Santo Tomas' BA Sociology Graduates (Academic Years 2015-2016 to 2018-2019) From Service Learning Vis-a-Vis Community-Engaged Research

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Abstract:

1. Introduction

Service Learning has been part of the curriculum of Bachelor of Arts in Sociology of the Faculty of Arts and Letters of University of Santo Tomas (Manila, Philippines) since 2012 (2012 Curriculum). Though, historically, there were same approaches tapped in teaching major courses in BA Sociology, it was only 2012 that Service Learning was officially coined as teaching strategy. Service Learning was offered as 6-units course (SL: Theory and SL: Application) and at the same time, this was tapped as teaching strategies in different BA Sociology major courses. One of the major channels maximized by the Department was thru its Thesis program specifically its Community Engagement Research track.

There were several researches (theses) produce thru community engagement research track from Academic Years 2015-2016 to 2017-2018. For the reason of this paper, there were ten (10) purposively selected graduates who were invited to be participants of this research that fully supported to answer the research problem of what are significant reflective learning gained from the whole process of community engaged research. Their reflective learning has been asked after their graduation from the college and presently engaging and journeying with their professional life.

2. Theoretical framework/literature review

This section should consist of theories and concepts to relevant scholarly literature and theory that is used for your study or include an overview of significant literature published on service-learning by accredited scholars and researchers.

Reflective learning

- Reflection as personal learning, deliberate and active process (rationalize), thinking to learn, grounded knowledge, recalling the event and posing questions (John Dewey, 1938).
- Professional development and professional practice, reflection on action (retrospective) and reflection in action (“thinking on your feet”), reflecting on action can help

practitioners to build upon previous experiences and scenarios (Smith, M. K., 2001& 2011 on Schon).

- Experiential learning, created a learning cycle, Concrete experience (something happened?)/Reflective observation (what happened?)/Abstract conceptualization (So what?)/Active participation (What now?) (McLeod, 2017 on Kolb and Fry (1975). Pedler, Burgoyne and Boydell (2001)).
- Inclusion of emotions to reflection and learning like fear, panic hesitation, calm or elation (Boud, Keogh and Walker, 1985).

Community engaged research

- As an alternative and countervailing practice to traditional research and can be directly translated to improve community or target group's situation. It is framework or approach of conducting research, not methodology in and of itself. It has characterized by distinct principles of partnership in development, cooperation, and negotiation and commitment of addressing local issues. It gives importance on/in relationships between researcher/s and communities. The engagement of researcher and the community reflects in the different stages or processes of research (Community Engaged Research Toolbox.pdf).

Service Learning

There are varieties of service-learning definitions but it boils down to the philosophy of service and learning that exists in experiences, reflections and community engagement within the partnership involving partner communities. Service-learning integrates the structured opportunities for faculty, students and partner communities to reflect on their interactions and activities in the light of both educational and community objectives. It is a balance of service and learning output from the process partnership. It also serves as pedagogical approaches in integrating academic service learning and community service.

Aside from the theories and concepts developed and introduced by the reflective theorists (Dewey, Schon, Kolb and Fry, Boud et. al.), critical theories (Freire, 1971; Shor, 1987 as mentioned by Flecky, n.d.) and feminist pedagogy (Brown, 2001; Deans, 1999; Weiler, 1991 as mentioned by Flecky, n.d.) also contributed to the development of service-learning as a means for political, dialectical, critic of social system, power relations between privilege and poor and empowered societal engagement. This is where community-based and participatory action research developed advocacies and programs as means of facilitating greater voices of the poor and communities (Flecky, n.d.).

Key Words: Reflective learning, community engaged research, service learning

3. Methods/analysis

The research design is descriptive because in general it tried to answer the reflective learning gained from the process of community engage research by the selected ten (10) graduates of BA Sociology from Academic Years 2015-2016 to 2017-2018. Research participants answered and reflected on the guide for reflective learning gained in the process of community engaged research. The results were analyzed thru thematic analysis in each step of community engaged research. At the end, a whole picture of the reflective learning was developed.

4. Results and Discussion

Key Results

The result will be presented through before, during and after the research as experienced by the ten research participants.

Before the research proper, participants are convinced and interested with community engaged research track despite of some differences in motivations in doing research. They all considered the participation of the community in the research and its support for the development of the community. They also relied on the guidance of the adviser. With clear orientation and dialogue with their adviser, they all went to their target partner community and possible research participants and started for initial discussion and leveling-off on the situation of the community and organization. They all earned the consent of the target communities.

When they got clear communities and organizations' issues and concerns, they started to organize related literature and studies as part of the formulation of research proposal. These help the researchers and participants to be clearer with their direction. But still, student researchers as undergraduate students, there were feelings of fear, doubts and uncertainties. Research was a new experience for them during those college days.

When the student researchers started in the research, they always relied with the process of consulting the people and communities. Deeper acquaintance, proper consultations and approval of the communities were basic applied principles and processes of community engaged research. With these, research participants were clearly identified and research arguments and research tools were formulated jointly by the student researchers and community research participants. Even the research method was clearly presented and got the consensus of their respective communities. Despite of tedious research data gathering, most of the community research participants participated well.

In the aspect of the data analysis, there were student researchers who were not able to conduct in a participatory and consultative process due to time constraint and other concerns of the student researchers as regular student in the university. All student researchers followed their commitment by giving back the result of the community engaged researches to the communities in certain opportunities. Partner communities maximized the results of their researches in their respective community development plan.

After graduation, this research became a venue to look for another level of reflective learning gained from the processes. The research asked the research participants in terms of the reflective learning in three aspects: Head, Heart and, Habit.

In terms of Head:

- Realizations on the importance of an effective community engaged research to facilitate the development of the communities and organizations; and
- Appreciated the technical aspects of the community engaged research especially the methodologies and processes.

In terms of Heart:

- Deeper understanding on the local/indigenous capacities and knowledge of the communities given that they are directly experiencing the different issues and concerns in the community; and
- Empowerment was experienced and realized both by the communities and the student researchers.

In terms of Habit:

- The output and process of community engaged research had taught the student researchers to be sensitive to the situation of others, communities and society at large;
- Built-up consciousness, strengthen conscience and stronger solidarity work for the poor and powerless. Environment concerns strengthen; and
- Always conscious with the Sociological Imagination.

In general, there were reflective learning list down:

- Continue to learn and live the process of community engagement in many research agenda/topics/problems; and
- Sharpen the knowledge, skills and values in research;
- Widen the participation of communities; and
- Fully recognize the capacities of the communities.

Discussion

The results prove the reflective learning of the research participants by laying down their direct and personal encounter in the community engaged research. They rationalize the importance, substance and processes of community engaged research. They have fully shared their “reflection in action” (thinking on your feet) and “reflection on action (retrospective). Through their community engaged research, they totally experienced the “something happened” and observed “what happened.” Through this research, research participants made an abstraction from what happened (“so what?”) and lead them into different social engagement after their college graduation. It was right that emotions like fear and hesitation was felt before and during the community engaged process. But it was overcome.

Their community engaged research is a concrete form and strategy of service learning because it really addressed both the educational and community objectives.

This research was able to answer and lay down the reflective learning of the research participants. Service learning is applicable and can really be expressed and measured through community engaged research. Thus, this research achieved its objective to lay down the reflective learning of the student researchers.

5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

The experience and process of community engaged has proved to be a good means to create reflective learning. It balanced the educational objectives and community objectives. Therefore, community engaged research engagement is a powerful means and process of/for service learning. Theories and concepts on reflective learning and service leaning facilitated this research and also the research participants to sense the dynamics of serving, learning, reflecting and responding to the call of the communities and society at large.

Keywords: Reflective learning, community engaged research, service learning

References: no more than 10 references.

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Biographical sketch of each presenter

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Short biography (word count should not exceed 70 words)

Assistant Professor Froilan A. Alipao, MCD, is a development worker and educator with communities, students and fellow development workers. He has academic preparations in Social Sciences, Community Development (MA), and Philippine Studies (Ph.D. Cand.) at the University of the Philippines, Diliman. Alipao is one of the founding members of the Community Development Society of the Philippines (CDSP), where served as the National Vice-Chairperson (2009-2012) and National Chairperson (2012-2015).

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