

Proposal for a Paper Presentation

Exploring Cross-Cultural Overseas Service-Learning Outcomes of International Students and Domestic students in Madurai, India

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Abstract:

Increasingly, colleges and universities across the Asia Pacific region are engaging in overseas Service-Learning experience for enhanced cultural appreciation, social sensitization and critical thinking skills. This study explores the cross-cultural engagement of the service-learning participants with the community along with the domestic students (support team). The findings suggest effective growth results in the participants, domestic students and the community. Results also indicate that programmatic elements may be as strong of a predictor of student outcomes as for the community.

1. Introduction

Higher Education across the world has been internationalized. It is a strategic approach that universities have embraced to maintain relevance in a highly globalized society. Service-Learning pedagogy in education is not far too.

Service-Learning is an innovative pedagogy that connects theory and practice. The term 'Service-Learning' was coined in 1967 in the US and its growth in the educational field have been witnessed. The concept and practice were introduced at the end of the 1990's and further developed in Asia in early 2000s. As a result of the first Service-Learning conference in Asia, hosted by International Christian University (ICU), in the summer of 2002, a student exchange network of interested colleges and universities in Asia progressed. In 2005, Service-Learning Asia Network (SLAN) was launched. ICU's government funded International Service-Learning Model Programme (ISLMP) was agreed to be hosted by Silliman University, Philippines in 2006 and Lady Doak College, India in 2007. ISLMP was launched in July-August 2007 in Lady Doak College with SLAN institutions' students attending.

Lady Doak College, a premier Christian institution and the first women's college in Madurai, was founded by Miss Katie Wilcox, an American missionary with dedicatory zeal and vision. Lady Doak College commenced its pioneering service in the cause of women's education in and around the city of Madurai on 14th July 1948. Lady Doak College aims to bring about the wholesome transformation of women with a well-balanced moral, social and spiritual outlook. With this spirit for transformation, Service-Learning stands as an integral part of the teaching and learning process.

ISLMP grew each year with the college and stands today as International Service-Learning Programme (ISLP) which is offered twice a year - Summer (July-August) and Winter (January-February) for a period of one month. This international service-learning programme is titled "Learning Indian Culture through Service – the Madurai experience". The International Service-Learning Programme at Lady Doak College has been successful over

years as it has been continually upgraded and enhanced with the changes in the local and global scenarios keeping it relevant to the current trends.

ISLP's objectives are 1) To introduce Service-Learning and meaningful community service to the students 2) To combine classroom learning and practical knowledge 3) To instill a sense of service in the students 4) To emphasize critical thinking in the students 5) To benefit from the intercultural learning experience 6) To experience academic and campus life in Lady Doak College.

ISLP's expected outcomes are 1) Appreciate the social and cultural diversity of India 2) Understand the social realities of the Indian context through service experiences 3) Reflect and analyze the role of youth in social transformation.

ISLP through the programmatic elements of the academic study, community service and reflection enables a critical learning process for the participants of the programme along with the other stakeholders of the service-learning process, i.e. community and domestic students.

2. Literature review

International education has a deep history of looking systematically at intercultural competence development and how it relates to program factors such as homestays, pre- and post-immersion coursework, peer- and faculty-facilitated learning, and other course and program dynamics. The research establishes the extent to which systematic reflective learning processes grounded in a process of careful challenge and support are correlated with advances in student intercultural competence development – and not simply going abroad as the determining factor (Vande Berg, Paige, & Hemming Lou, 2012).

The long-standing assumption that study abroad programming will advance student development of intercultural competence strongly influences Global Service-Learning practice. As mentioned above, study abroad researchers have recently established that going abroad is not a determinative factor in intercultural competence development; rather, intercultural competence and more broadly intercultural learning

(Kiely, 2010), must be continuously nurtured in a systematic process of reflective challenge and support (Vande Berg, Paige, & Hemming Lou, 2012). Only careful attention to numerous forms of border crossing (Kiely, 2004, 2005), coupled with systematic reflective practice relating to each area of desired learning, deepens students' intercultural competence.

Immersion plays a significant role in fostering the disruption or dissonance identified as an essential element in the transformational learning process (Kiely, 2004). Students on immersive international programs cannot have a "critical incident" and then return immediately to the comforts, distractions, and often culturally hegemonic spaces of their own homes and communities

(Hermann, 2011; Langdon & Agyeyomah, 2014). Instead, their disruption and dissonance are sustained to various degrees for weeks or months at a time (Kiely, 2002, 2004).

3. Methods/analysis

This research study used systematic in-depth study through focused group discussions and qualitative methods during the ISLP Summer 2018 and ISLP Winter 2019 to examine the participants' outcomes and domestic students' outcomes.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings highlight the need for facilitated reflection to connect experience with learning. Also, the need for guiding the students to critically self-reflect on their values and actions to develop critical thinking skills, social responsibility and cultural appreciation of self-identity and others.

This study has proved an effort at documenting the life experience of students as they undergo the process of learning which is challenging in many ways. This study also discusses in depth the nuances of sustained engagement with the community and also encouraging action based outcome in participants, in the end.

5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

This study highlights the outcomes of the cross-cultural international service-learning participants and the domestic students who are involved as a support team for the programme. As an outcome of this engagement, the community impact is also explored. This study also presents plausible solutions for enhancing international service-learning programme components, through the outcome evidence of practice that enables sustained community engagement for learning and growth in cultural understanding and appreciation, social sensitization, critical thinking skills and becoming social change agents of the society with a global outlook. The outcomes of the study presented in this paper will further the successful implementation of the programme as a novel academic based cultural initiative and will also help develop a model for replication in other academic institutions. Action based solutions for international educators and service-learning practitioners to support students' self-exploration for growth are explored in the study.

Keywords: Cross-Cultural, Social Responsibility, Critical Thinking, International Service-Learning, Community Engagement

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Mathangi Kalithas, graduate of English and post graduate of Social Work, works with Lady Doak College to promote and strengthen the Service-Learning programs of the college and in the region. She was the student participant of Cross-Border Service-Learning Summer Institute (SLSI) 2015, Lingnan University, Hong Kong and was the Project Coordinator of SLSI 2016. She has presented a paper and chaired a session in 6th SLAN conference in Indonesia, 2017.

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