

**Application of Social Work Supervision Model  
in University Service-Learning Courses in Mainland China:  
A Qualitative Study on Students' Participation**

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**Abstract:**

**1. Introduction**

Student practicum supervision in social work education consists of an array of teaching methods, for example, guided reflection activities, which aim to help students bridge theories and practice. These methods are not only essential in social work education, but also applicable in general education for university Service-Learning curriculum. This article introduces a university-wide service-learning curriculum program at a comprehensive university in Mainland China as a case study of applying social work supervision techniques in general education service-learning courses. From the theoretical perspective of experiential learning, this paper discusses the influence of supervision on the participation motivation of service-learning students.

**2. Theoretical framework/literature review**

Chesbrough (2011) found that the initial reasons for college students to participate in service-learning courses may be external, such as enriching resumes and gaining credits, but as services continue, students may become more internally motivated. The reason for this shift in motivation comes from the students "feeling strongly about a cause and wanting to contribute". As students

gain insight into the values and goals of service-learning, their motivation will increase (Brody & Wright, 2004; Duffy & Raque-Bogdan, 2010) Therefore, cultivating the motivation is necessary for the students' participation when students are ready to enter the community and start services. Social work practicum education emphasizes students' active participation, which involves a similar aim with service-learning education and practice. In social work, supervision is valued as a crucial activity for professional learning and development (Bogo & McKnight, 2006). The concept of supervision in social work can be divided into three types: administrative, educational and supportive. This can also be regarded as the three functions of social work supervision (Kudushin, 1992). The three functions are close-knit, and their good integration is conducive to ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness in social services (Gu, 2006). In particular, the supporting function of supervision can boost the initiative and self-confidence of participants in their services as well as enable them to transform critical reflection into personal actions. (Busse, 2009). In other words, the introduction of the concept of social work supervision into the service-learning curricula will enhance students' engagement .

### **3. Methods/analysis**

This study operated a qualitative research method to conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 undergraduate students in service-learning courses and 10 service-learning STARs (Supervisors to student, Teaching-Assistants to instructor and Researchers to service-learning program, Hong, 2019). The interview outline includes five dimensions: service and learning, individual and community, difficulty, initiative and passive, promotion and gains. After each interview, the recordings were transcribed and coded, and then thematically analyzed to answer the research question whether there is any change in students' motivation and what influences their motivation. The study followed standard research ethics guidelines, and informed consents were obtained from all interviewees.

### **4. Results and Discussion**

Based on the collation and analysis of interview data, we argue that the application of the concepts and techniques of social work supervision (taking the reflective group as an example) in university service-learning courses can effectively enhance the active participation of undergraduates in the curriculum. The service-learning curriculum STARs from the social work department guide

students in reflection and provide useful advice in the form of groups after the community service. For example, students are first encouraged to discuss what they have done in the communities as well as specific problems they have encountered. Then STARs guide students through a process of problem-solving and program design in which students' aspiration and abilities to apply classroom knowledge is enhanced. Through these supervision activities, students received peer and supervisors' support in connecting course materials with the service field. It was found that the supervision leads to positive learning experiences in which students may be more motivated to actively participate in both service and classroom learning and assimilated values and goals of service-learning.

### **5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice**

This paper reports some developing practice of supportive teaching methods in service-learning courses in Mainland China. By involving teaching methods based on social work supervision mode in service-learning curricula, students are more motivated to active participate in the whole process of experiential learning. Therefore, results of teaching and learning in service-learning courses in higher education may be improved employing these methods. What we reported here are first initiatives and preliminary findings drawn from service-learning practice in higher education in Mainland China. It is our belief that future development of service-learning in higher education in China must be built on research informed practices.

**Keywords:** Service-learning, social work supervision, student motivation, general education, Mainland China

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Wang, a second-year graduate student in the Department of Social Work at Fudan University, is a STAR of the Fudan University Service-Learning Program. She has served as a teaching assistant for several courses and has assisted in the research of this program. Wang once attended and gave a lecture at the Fudan University Service-Learning Course Building Seminar and also published relevant research in the school's publications.

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Dr. Hong is an Assistant Professor of Social Work at School of Social Development and Public Policy, Fudan University. He entered the field of service-learning in 2009 as a program evaluator in Canada. Now he is an enthusiastic advocate of adoption and adaptation of service-learning practices in higher education in China, assuming the roles of curriculum designer and chief researcher on the service-learning team at Fudan University.

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