Proposal for a Paper Presentation

Conceptualizing Assessment of Community Impact in Service-Learning based on the case study on Japanese NPOs

Midori Akimoto
Aoyama Gakuin University, Japan
Email address: akimotom@aoyamagakuin.jp

1. Introduction

Effective and sustainable Service-Learning depends on mutually - beneficial partnerships between campus and community. Moreover, Service-Learning is impossible without community involvement (Gelmon, S. B., Holland, B. A., Driscoll, A., Spring, A. and Kerrigan, 2001). However, it cannot be said that such diversity of constituencies has always been emphasized as Service-Learning study accumulation, and there are few surveys focusing on the community in particular as a trend.

Regarding the situation in Japan, Service-Learning has been spreading as a pedagogy from around 2000, in response to the flow of higher education reform. However, as a similar tendency, in previous studies by Japanese researchers concerning Service-Learning in higher education, most research was mainly focused on the student learning outcomes.

Because Service-Learning is an educational practice closely linked to social improvement, it is necessary to accumulate practical research focusing on community impact, at the same time, the concept and method of assessment of community impact based on the practice in the social context such as issues and a situation surrounding education in the country or region is required. This study examines the factors that are important for the formation of community impact concept for its assessment through Service-Learning based on the voice of community partners (NPOs) in Japan.

2. Overview assessing community impact in Service-Learning.

The difficulty is considered as the reason that there is little focus on the community impact assessment in the Service-learning prior research compared to studying on the student learning outcomes. In a review of research on communities as a key factor in Service-Learning, Cruz and Giles (2000) identify political, intellectual, and practical dimensions as obstacles to research on the communities. In addition, to assess the impact of community is the most challenging aspect in Service-Leaning for two main reasons Gelmon, S. B, et al., and (2001). First, it is difficult to define what we mean by "community". There is no one "community" in fact. Second, researchers must clearly embrace a definition that articulates what aspects of organization, clients, and larger social system will be included in the assessment. Third, the community is its own agent, and is not under the oversight of the university.

There are several research studies concerning the impact of community through Service-learning. Gelmon, S. B, et al., (2001) showed the principles, framework and techniques of assessment through Service-Learning. They have been developed a multi-constituency approach to assessment of Service-Learning at Portland State University in the U.S. The study presents the impact on student, faculty, community and institution as individual assessment methods of service learning. According to their research result, successful assessment requires bringing together players central to the activity being assessed, and helping them to step outside their normal roles and create a new culture (Gelmon, S. B., Holland, B. A., Driscoll, A., Spring, A. and Kerrigan, S., 2001).

As research which made the importance in development of sustainable campus-community partnership of service-learning a perspective, Jacoby, B.（2015）describes a basic principle, the different types of partnerships, the stages of the development partnerships, etc. Bringle, R G., (2013) discussed on community outcomes of Service-learning, and examined service learning from the perspective of community organization capacity by showing conceptual frameworks and assessment of service-learning research.

However, it is not clear how the results of the assessment are used to improve Service-Learning practice in those previous literatures. In addition, these useful research results are findings derived mostly from practice in the U.S, no case studies based on the results of these previous researches have been found in Service-Learning practical research in Japan. Therefore, it is necessary to examine critically the previous research from the practice and case studies in Japan.

3. Methods/Analysis

To examine the factors that are important for the formation of community impact concept for its assessment through Service-Learning in Japan, this research conducted a workshop (qualitative survey) targeting 15 NPOs that are community based internship program partners of about 10 Japanese universities. For the research purpose, the study collected and categorize (by the participants as a part of the workshop) the voices of the participants through their dialogue by focus group discussion (FDG), then analyzed the cards and transcript from participants' statement.

The question of FDG was **"*What community organizations (NOPs) expect to create through Service-Learning programs*"**. The reason why this study organized FDG in this research as a method is related to the idea of participatory evaluation theory. The definition of participatory evaluation is "evaluation in which stakeholders of the program participate in the evaluation activities and utilize this process to promote improvement and social change. In the participatory evaluation, the stakeholders are provided an opportunity to discuss what society aims for and what to consider as "good". This means a deeper understanding of the evaluation subjects, fostered awareness of stakeholders and sense of responsibility, advanced mutual understanding among stakeholders, and so on. Thus, participating assessment would make people to have ownerships and to be agency in their community (Minamoto, 2008, 2016). These ideas surrounding participatory evaluation theory were valid for this study and were incorporate.

4. Results and Discussion

For the question of ***"What community organizations (NOPs) expect to create through Service-Learning programs"***, participants in the FGD shared each idea by explaining their own experience with student's activities in the community. There were 32 different ideas in each card, and the participants tried to categorize the cards by each idea. Then, as a common core value of "realizing a symbiotic society" was shared among participants although they belong to different theme of NPOs, such as support for the handicapped person, childcare support and environmental education.

As other ideas from participants, NPO expect of students the following elements: to build trusting relationships with staff, to get to know the realities of the community, to be actors in the community, to understand the challenges in the community and to collaborate with community residents and understand the value of symbiotic living in a society. Put briefly, community organizations expect quality of student's commitment from the reciprocal partnerships rather than from physical support of students.

In this FDG, another point of view became clear in the process of dialogue; NPOs aim to understand and embrace sensitivities of young generation, explore potential human resources, and maintain consciousness of students. In short, NPOs expect their capacity building and sustainability through collaboration with students. NPO expect students to be active and understand the challenges of the community as well as collaborate with community members. Originally, NGOs and university students have different mission, purpose, role in the society, etc. However, in the process of Service-Learning practice, they overcome the differences and form trusting relationships allowing them to the steps necessary to realize a symbiotic society.

In the previous research on the assessment of community impact, Gelmon, S. B, et al., (2001) showed matrix for community assessment. There, capacity to fulfill organizational mission, economic benefits and social benefits as variables of assessment about community partner organization. On the other hand, nature of community-university relationship (partnership), nature of community-university interaction, satisfaction with partnership and sustainability of partnership as variables of assessment about community-university partnership.

These previous research described more on the relationship between community and university. However, what becomes an assessment of community impact variable depends on the target and method of the survey. Through this study with Japanese NPOs, it was found that more variables of assessment of community impact could be considered.

5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

Studying the assessment of community impact, the assessment methods and variables are not a fixed one. It is possible to reveal the different assessment variables from various perspective in each social context. As a trial, this study explored formation of concept and variable of assessment based on the voice of Service-Learning field in Japan. From the point of view of the significance of assessment or evaluation for the practice improvement, it is most important that the results of the assessment be useful to those who practice in the community and educate the students. Reciprocal and sustainable partnership between community, university and students in Service-Learning is not limited to on-site activities in the field, but is generated in the overall process including these assessments and its utilization such as PDCA (Plan, Do, Check, Action) Cycle.

On the other hand, it is the next challenge to clarify what kind of correlation factor with the Japanese social context or situation can be he variable of the assessment of community impact. For that challenge as a study and activating practical research focused on Service-Learning, especially on community impact in Japan, verification from more FDGs and case studies are needed with different NGOs stuff or regions in Japan.

Keywords:

Service-learning, Assessment, Community impact

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Biographical sketch of each presenter

Presenter 1:

   i. Last name followed by first name:

      Midori Akimoto

  ii. Position/department/organization/country:

      Research Assistant / Volunteer center / Aoyama Gakuin University / Japan

 iii. Short biography (word count should not exceed 70 words)

      In charge of coordinator and lecturer of Service-Learning program (Domestic and International) /student volunteer program in Rikkyo University (2010 to 2013), St. Margaret Junior College (2014 to 2018), Aoyama Gakuin University (2018 to now) in Tokyo, Japan.

      Vice President of Japan Service-Learning Network (2018 to now)

 iv. Contact information (address, email address, homepage)

      Email: akimotom@aoyamagakuin.jp, nmidori7@gmail.com

      Website: http://www.aoyamagakuin.jp/eng/

      Address: Aoyama Gakuin University Volunteer Center 4-4-25 Shibuya-ku Tokyo 150-8366 Japan