

Proposal for a Paper Presentation

The Social Impact of the Service-Learning Components of the National Service Training Program in the Philippines: The Case of the University of Santo Tomas

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Abstract:

1. Introduction

Service-Learning (S-L) in the Philippines has been institutionalized in 2001 by the government through the Civic Welfare Training Service (CWTS) and Literacy Training Service (LTS) components of the National Service Training Program (NSTP). However, many studies about CWTS and LTS and other S-L initiatives have mostly delved into looking into student learning experiences and the formation of their socio-civic responsibility (Cuelo, Manatad, & Torres, 2012; Oracion, 2012; Yu, 2011), but only few tackled on the S-L services rendered and their social impacts to communities that have benefitted from the service (Dela Cruz et al., 2013; Sampa, 2012). Thus, this study addresses the gap by focusing closely into the CWTS and LTS projects of the University of Santo Tomas (UST) and delves into the social impact of such projects on their partner communities.

2. Theoretical framework

Social impact means the positive effect of the deliberate set of activities on the social fabric of the community and the well-being of individuals and groups (De Cotta et al., 2016). There are many ways of measuring social impact of S-L projects, but this will depend on the intended outcomes for the community of the concerned Philippine higher educational institution (HEI). In UST, aside from expecting positive effects on the well-being of individuals and groups in communities for each CWTS and LTS projects, the ultimate goal is for partner communities to become empowered. By empowered, it means having the capacity to make purposive choices and to transform those choices into desired outcomes (Alsop, Bertelsen, & Holland, 2006).

In order to identify positive effects of S-L projects, participatory evaluation is heavily used in this study. Participatory evaluation puts primacy in putting all the decisions about evaluation in the hands of the people affected by the project and recognizes that knowledge and experience of communities regarding their own context, gives them an important insight into what is important and relevant in that context (Kananura et al., 2017). Hence, through participatory evaluation, people are more likely to act upon evaluation results since they are the ones who make valued positions on what is important and what needs to be improved in their lives (Verwooy, Qiu, & Jianchu, 2006). Finally, the empowerment of UST's partner communities is measured using the participation matrix which is based on Harvey, Baghri, & Reed's (2002) stages of development intervention vis-à-vis Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation. As

shown in Table 1, the participation matrix serves a tool to identify how different internal and external stakeholders are involved in the different stages of development interventions.

Table 1. Participation Matrix

Stages of Development Intervention	Ladder of Citizen Participation						
	Manipulation or Therapy	Informing	Consulting	Placation	Partnership	Delegated Power	Control
Needs assessment							
Planning							
Mobilizing							
Training							
Implementing							
Monitoring and Evaluation							

3. Methods/analysis

This research is a case study which primarily gathered data through the use of comprehensive documents and records review for 4 school years starting SY 2014-2015 up to SY 2017-2018. Documents and records subjected for review were official documents and records from the Simbahayan Community Development Office (UST SIMBAHAYAN), which is the central public mission and community engagement office of UST. The documents and records consisted of the office minutes of the meetings, monitoring fieldwork reports, unpublished thesis on the different programs of UST SIMBAHAYAN made by various undergraduate students of the University, *Kamanlalakbay* proceedings, quarterly progress reports, and annual terminal reports on community development. Aside from this, data from this study have been drawn from the in-depth knowledge of the author as an ethnographic participant observer where he has been part of the public mission and community engagement of UST for the past 10 years and currently heads the UST SIMBAHAYAN since SY 2015-2016.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on the results of the study, the CWTS and LTS components of UST NSTP is able to implement a yearly average of 18 S-L projects that neatly fall into UST SIMBAHAYAN's 8 social transformation programs which are on the areas of (1) health and wellness development, (2) equitable and inclusive education, (3) leadership, organizational development, and good governance, (4) employability and social enterprise development, (5) socio-pastoral ministry and evangelization, (6) culture, heritage, and sports and development, (7) environmental sustainability and action, and (8) disaster risk reduction and management (DRRM). Among these social transformation programs, UST partner communities are mostly involved in CWTS and

LTS projects concerning education, DRRM, and health respectively. On the other hand, on the side of the CWTS and LTS students, many are involved in implementing projects concerning health, education, and cultural and sports development respectively. But due to UST's TOMAS (Training, Organizing, Management, Advocacy, and Spirituality) approach, most CWTS and LTS projects require a series of development interventions, usually consisting of 7-8 fieldwork sessions, in order to complete a certain project. Since CWTS and LTS students are only required to undergo two fieldwork sessions every second semester, such strategy entails properly engineering different CWTS and LTS classes in order to complete the phases of an S-L project. Due to this, the study reveals that CWTS and LTS projects are able to positively contribute in achieving desired community outcomes.

Research findings also reveal that specific S-L projects of CWTS and LTS on the Yellow Kitchen Feeding program had a 50% success rate in addressing children's malnourishment, academic tutorial services led to improved National Achievement Test scores of targeted public elementary school students, construction and rehabilitation of school classrooms, laboratories, libraries and village day care centers enhanced learning environment, and various other construction and rehabilitation projects for community use (e.g. health centers, chapels, multipurpose halls) helped boost people's morale and cohesiveness. But generally, many of the CWTS and LTS projects cannot be isolated from the complementary role of voluntary community outreach projects of student organizations and other S-L projects of other academic programs in UST. The combined efforts of CWTS and LTS projects, voluntary community outreach projects, and other S-L projects of other academic programs have resulted to innumerable gains that partner communities have acquired in their partnership with UST. These gains pertain to the strengthening of community cohesiveness, improvement of health conditions, start-up of livelihood projects, helping marginalized children and youth finish their schooling and education, strengthening of communal relationship with God, learning various arts, mitigating environmental problems, and adapting with the adverse effects of climate change. However, as a word of caution, most of these mentioned positive effects were drawn from fieldwork monitoring reports and participatory evaluation with key community leaders during the annual Kamanlalakbay, but no quantitative measure has been used to establish statistically significant differences of the community's general well-being before and after the implementation of S-L projects. This means that there is no hard evidence that CWTS and LTS projects contributed in the overall socio-economic development of partner communities.

Nevertheless, the aforementioned gains translate to partner communities claiming to be empowered in terms of being able to negotiate and engage in trade-offs when it comes to needs assessment, mobilizing, training, implementing, and monitoring and evaluation of both S-L or voluntary community outreach projects. But when it comes to planning the details of the said projects, the final decision-making rests mostly in the hands of the students and faculty of the University. This is perhaps because given the numerous community development projects that are being implemented, planning together project details with partner communities might be cumbersome due to the difference of time availability between students and key community leaders. Somehow, such limitation is being addressed through the annual gathering called the Kamanlalakbay where general project plans are formulated together with key leaders of partner communities. However, this still significantly points to the importance that UST should focus more on S-L projects and voluntary community outreach projects that should foster community action and strengthen community social capital through the formation of grassroots organizations

in partner communities that can plan, implement, monitor, and evaluate their own community development projects.

5. Conclusions and contributions to theory and practice

Guided by the use of participatory evaluation and the participation matrix, comprehensive documents review and ethnographic participant observation covering four school years (from SY 2014-2015 up to SY 2017-2018) reveal that CWTS and LTS projects of UST NSTP focused on health, education, disaster resilience, and culture and sports development projects. Coupled with other various voluntary community outreach projects and S-L projects from other academic courses, these community development interventions have resulted into positive effects and innumerable gains on the well-being of individuals and groups in UST partner communities. Generally, findings reveal that UST partner communities are able to negotiate and engage in trade-offs when it comes to the different stages of development intervention. However, there is a need to further improve in focusing S-L and voluntary community outreach efforts towards capacitating partner communities to initiate and sustain their own community-based initiatives. This study serves as an important contribution in building the literature about S-L in the Philippines in general and knowing more about S-L projects through the CWTS and LTS in the context of Catholic universities in particular.

Keywords: Civic Welfare Training Service, Literacy Training Service, National Service Training Program, Service-Learning, Social Impact

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