

NATIONAL SERVICE TRAINING PROGRAM AS POTENTIAL SERVICE-LEARNING PLATFORM IN THE PHILIPPINES

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Abstract

1. Introduction

The National Service Training Program (NSTP) of the Philippines was promulgated through Republic Act No. 9163 in 2001 and implemented in 2002. The primary aim is to enhance civic consciousness and defense preparedness among higher education and technical-vocational students through the development of the ethics of service and patriotism as expressions of love of people and country in their cognitive and affective learning domains. Designed for both male and female students, as a one year or two-semester program with a total of six-unit credits, the NSTP is comprised of the Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC), Literacy Training Service (LTS) and Civic Welfare Training Service (CWTS).

As originally designed, it was not explicit that NSTP will be implemented with service-learning as a pedagogical framework, but how it was structured, particularly in LTS and CWTS, there was already a space for students to render community service. This is what I notice as the potential of NSTP as potential platform for service-learning but there was no formal link yet between the two. The NSTP is being implemented not exactly following all the principles of service-learning although some may claim they did because students serve the communities through the skills they had learned in school. And that is what this paper wants to pursue: how to enrich NSTP implementation, except ROTC which is outside the scope of this paper because of its military orientation, applying the service-learning pedagogy without getting away from its legal mandate based on the experiences of selected higher education institutions in the Philippines.

2. Theoretical Framework/Literature Review

One of the practical guides for implementers of the LTS and CWTS, the non-military components of the NSTP, entitled *Towards Effective and Relevant NSTP Implementation* (Vidal, Labuguen, and Balajadia, no date) reveals service-learning as pedagogy or teaching tool of the program (e.g., Balmeo et al., 2015). However, it does not have a section that prepares and orients NSTP teachers and students what and how service-learning is being pursued in teaching the topics required by its implementing guidelines as provided by law. Some of these topics include defining “man” (human person, Filipino characteristics, Filipino citizenship values); group dynamics (types and characteristics of groups, leadership, decision-making); national issues and concerns (national security; disaster awareness, preparedness and management, substance abuse education) (e.g. Quendangan and Laquesta, 2014; Zapata, 2015; Crisostomo 2017).

The aforementioned topics are best taught through experiential learning where service-learning is theoretically anchored. This pedagogy is a need of the time because service-learning demonstrates the fact that social or community engagement and intellectual development are integral, and not separate, components in the learning process of students. The students are not only introduced into social realities, they are also prepared how to handle such realities while still students so that they can value their chosen careers not only for personal gains but also for others. And NSTP is a potential platform for service-learning because it is academically-based, starts with forging community partnership, and requires direct engagement of students with the community.

3. Methods/Analysis

The LTS and CWTS of selected higher education institutions in the Philippines are hypothesized to have enhanced the self-worth of the students as they realized that they have something to contribute to the welfare and empowerment of their partner communities. I reviewed the research reports and publications of selected public and private higher education institutions in the Philippines in the past five years. I looked for information that measure the kind and quality of the community engagement of students and if this had demonstrated the basic elements and principles of service-learning. The following were the themes that served as frame of references in reviewing the selected reports and publications: services rendered by students, evaluation of community service and impact, personal impact of the program, and gaps to enrich the NSTP with service-learning principles and practices.

4. Results and Discussion

Services rendered. The students under the NSTP of a state university in the metropolis involved capacity building and awareness raising services through lectures and training on topics and issues related to drug abuse prevention, health education, environmental resource management, recreation, livelihood program, first aid and emergency, values education, voter's education, and literacy program (Quendangan and Laquesta, 2014). The state universities and colleges in the provinces showed more or less similar community services rendered by students as reflected in the kinds of preparations the faculty implementers had undergone to capacitate or equip their students in dealing with the needs of their partner communities (Zapata, 2015). Meanwhile, the long partnership of a private university with surrounding communities where students were assigned to serve with conscious considerations of their courses (Losabia and Gabriel, 2015).

Evaluation of NSTP and community impact. Considering that the NSTP is a requirement for college graduation, there is no denying that the students would demonstrate high-level participation in its community activities and show their best effort and skills (Lasobia and Gabriel, 2015). The assessment of Quendangan and Laquesta (2014) reflected some awareness of community participants of what was relevant to them when the students came and engaged with them. The recipients of services expressed "strongly agree" sentiments on the relevance of environmental and waste disposal programs to the community. This response is indicative of their awareness of the growing problem of pollution and all forms of waste materials which have affected the health quality of the residents. How provincial state universities and colleges delivered the NSTP community activities during the period covered in the study of Zapata (2015) reinforced the relevance of the specific programs in a particular state university in an urban setting (Quendangan and Laquesta, 2014).

Personal impact of the program. Losabia and Gabriel (2015) found out that integrity and God-centeredness were equally rated high while nationalism and service-orientation were also within the same range after the students had engaged with the community. The results imply that the values the students first realized in serving others were those internal or about them, and those toward others only logically follow as expressions of the former. Meanwhile, Balmeo et al. (2015) agreed that the community engagement of students was effective because they had improved as persons, performed better in and outside the classroom, become more involved in the community, and demonstrated more competencies. Meanwhile, Crisostomo (2018) observed that the students under the program had enhanced leadership skills, ability to listen and ability to communicate. There was also a gendered impact of NSTP to students wherein the females scored higher than the males particularly in interpersonal relationship which requires communicating and listening skills.

Enriching NSTP with service-learning. There are subjective sets of evidence showing that the NSTP had met the program goals in selected Philippine higher education institutions. Not only that the residents of partner communities considered the services they received relevant and responsive to their needs, the students correspondingly had a positive assessment of the impact of their community engagement on their personal lives and social relationships. This makes NSTP a potential platform for service-learning which could further enrich the cognitive, affective and active components of learning. But what else needs to be included in NSTP module so students will seriously contemplate on the meaning of service as purposive rather than a latent consequence of community engagement? All other things being equal, the NSTP has to start with the principles of service-learning and introduce reflection session in the module of activities of students because it is in the sharing of experiences documented in the form of journals and orally shared to classmates that learning becomes explicit and appreciated. The students could discuss and find more meanings out of their community experiences than simply writing them (Lai 2010) which could be classified as technical, cultural, political and anti-foundational learning (Butin (2007).

5. Conclusion and Contribution to Theory and Practice

The assessments of NSTP in selected higher education institutions in the Philippines, guided by service-learning principles and the typologies of learning, has revealed that NSTP is indeed a potential platform of service-learning pedagogy. The program is academic-based, built on community partnership, and performed in actual community service by students with the supervision of teachers. The institutionalization of this pedagogy in every NSTP, which has a legal basis—not only institutional—as a requirement for college graduation, will be a major achievement. If deliberately and systematically implemented with the close observance of journal keeping and reflection sessions to surface acquired learning, the exposure of students to community service is not just for academic marks but also for promoting civic consciousness that they will carry on until they practice their professions.

Keywords: National Service Training Program, higher education institutions, service-learning, community engagement, Philippines

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Biographical sketch of presenter

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Short Biography

Dr. Enrique G. Oracion piloted an interdisciplinary community-based service-learning program at Silliman University and published the results in the *Silliman Journal* in 2002 along with other involved faculty. He holds a Master's degree in Sociology and a Ph.D. in Anthropology and serves as board member of the Philippine Sociological Society and the Anthropological Association of the Philippines. He is a regular member of the National Research Council of the Philippines.