

Climate change and Service Learning in the light of Laudato Si: Reviewing Teacher's Perceptions

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Abstract

Integral ecology is a concept introduced by Pope Francis in writing Laudato Si (On Care for our Common Home). It is “integral” because the question of global warming that results to climate change is a shared issue of humanity. By integrating service learning in the curriculum, this can bring significant change in the preservation of the environment and reverse the effects of climate change. Service learning is introduced as an essential component in the formation of students to prepare them for lifelong learning. The aim of this study is to shed light to the understanding of Laudato Si and its relevance to climate change and service learning. The study also shows the perceptions of educators in their understanding about climate change and their response to make a better world.

Keywords: *service learning, climate change, laudato si, teacher's perceptions*

INTRODUCTION

The gap between schools, industries and local communities in the Philippines is a challenging point for education. Schools are expected to prepare knowledgeable and skilled professionals for the industrial and business sectors. At the same time, they are also expected to play an important role in helping local communities. The response of schools to address the gap between the education sector and communities is enshrined in the principles of an educational initiative called service-learning (Benett et al., 2003 as cited in Toledano & Lapinid, 2009). Service learning is the means of higher education institutions to fulfil its responsibility for community extension work vis a vis teaching and research (Tanjueco-Tamapon 2016).

“(S)ervice learning is a course-based service experience that produces the best outcomes when meaningful service activities are related to course material through reflection activities such as directed writings, small group discussions, and class presentations.” (Bringle and Hatcher 1996, 222)

The introduction of service learning in the present curriculum in schools broke the walls that previously isolated schools of higher learning from the communities due to preconceptions that university life has nothing to do with community life (Guanzon 2017). Through service learning, higher learning institutions have opened themselves to new opportunities of collaboration

and cooperation with local communities. Such collaboration brings the students to new walls of learning, the wall of local communities. Lindsey Jamplis (2015) saw how students' sensitivity to the realities of the world (BHSU Communications 2016) is strengthened by their service learning engagements through their reflections in the university. Hatcher and Bringle views students' reflection as engagements with their experiences "in light of particular learning objectives" (1997, p. 153). Service learning reflections are performed through varied approaches that fit student dispositions such as web-based group journal service learning reflections (Mills 2001).

Today service learning (SL) is introduced as an essential component in the formation of students to prepare them for lifelong learning. However, a significant number of teachers in the Philippines are yet unfamiliar with SL. Many schools in urban and provincial areas are either unaware or have not acted about the need to integrate SL in their curriculum. The traditional terms that many educators are familiar include "community service" or "community immersion". These terms reflect old school initiatives that are external to the academic performance of students or simply conceived as a school initiative for communities nearby. The recent shifts and developments in educational perspectives from the west have given rise to the introduction of SL in curriculum design. Given the relative unfamiliarity of educators to the topic, the researchers thought of clearing first the ground by describing how teachers respond to the questions of interest in this inquiry. Since they are the first significant players to realize the goals of SL, educators are one of the key personalities to be reviewed to identify any possible difficulties regarding the management of SL programs in the country.

This article reviews teacher's perceptions towards climate change and service learning in the context of the call to care for the earth in the recent papal document "Laudatu Si". This inquiry analyses the views of teachers participating in two seminar workshops on the integration of service learning on the environment in their curriculum in Cebu and Manila. The workshops were externally funded by the United Board for Christian Higher Education. The instrument is a self-made questionnaire designed to know in a qualitative manner their perceptions about climate change, the role of schools and, service learning. The questionnaire consists of 8 statements in four poles of inquiries: the problem and urgency of climate change, human response and solutions, educational response and, responses of values educators vis a vis service learning. A total of 30 workshop participants took part in the survey in Cebu and in Manila.

SERVICE LEARNING FOR A BETTER WORLD

Among the areas of interest that needs an urgent response from the education sector is the crises brought about by global warming. The predicaments arising from global warming and climate change underscores the need of global inhabitants to raise their efforts to arrest an impending global catastrophe that is already manifested in different parts of the globe. Stakeholders from various sectors including businesses, industries, and education are only among the key sectors expected to take part in proposing concrete solutions. For educational institutions service learning can be a key strategy to promote and unify efforts of educational institutions to address global warming. Such possibility is better addressed when educational institutions have also refitted their curriculum to prepare students for global citizenship (Lee, Baring, Sta Maria &

Reysen 2017). One of the means of education is to promote a new perspective that fits the desired lifestyle of an environmentally conscious individual (Assis, Reysen, Katzarska-Miller 2017).

Among the new perspectives that education can introduce is integral ecology. Integral ecology is a relatively new concept introduced by Pope Francis in his recent writing *Laudato Si* (On Care for our Common Home). It is “integral” because the question of global warming that results to climate change is a shared issue of humanity. The problem is not exclusive to some. Hence it requires an integrated response from the different sectors of society. According to Cardinal Turkson integral ecology (Pruett 2015) underscores four principles that correspond to the following needs namely: a. need to protect the environment, b. care for creation, c. need for a caring attitude and, d. the need for global solidarity. Service learning promotes integral ecology in the following manner: First, it offers an alternative mindset to the “throw-away” culture. David Kwang-sun Suh (2002) believed that, by engaging in service learning, educational institutions form future leaders who are sensitive to the needs of the marginalized in society. Second, service-learning counteracts the technocratic model. Service-learning directs both students and teachers not only to consider financial and economic issues and gain through technology but also look at the common good (sun Suh, 2002).

The common good is “the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfillment (*Laudato Si*, para.156, p. 103)

By introducing integral ecology into educational instruction, schools incorporate environmental education as an essential aspect of their preparation for the future. Students are then made to realize that a sustainable future is not only about having money and properties. Equally important is living in a world where ecological balance persists. Such education affords both educators and students to see the value of the environment and human relationships while benefiting from the earth’s resources:

Environmental education should facilitate making the leap towards the transcendent which gives ecological ethics its deepest meaning. It needs educators capable of developing an ethics of ecology, and helping people, through effective pedagogy, to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care (*Laudato Si*, para. 210, p. 135).

The responsibility attached to the care for creation also demands that education considers the comprehensive picture when dealing with the question of utilizing the earth’s resources. Students therefore are made to evaluate the merits of our present systems, economic lifestyles and activities with respect to consumption activities and resources of the earth.

Environmental education has broadened its goals. Whereas in the beginning it was mainly centered on scientific information, consciousness-raising and the prevention of environmental risks, it tends now to include a critique of “myths” of a modernity grounded in a utilitarian mindset (individualism, unlimited progress, competition consumerism, the unregulated market). It seeks also to restore the various levels of ecological equilibrium, establishing harmony within ourselves, with others, with nature and other living creatures and with God (*Laudato Si*, para. 10, p. 135).

RESULTS OF THE SURVEY

The surveys were conducted during the seminar-workshops that took place in Manila and Cebu. The participants were then given the questionnaires at the beginning of the workshop and they freely gave their opinions to the eight questions. A total of 30 teachers responded. Tables 1-4 provides a qualitative summary of their responses which are clustered in terms of: (Table 1) the problem and urgency of climate change, (Table 2) human response and solutions, (Table 3) educational response and, (Table 4) responses of values educators vis a vis service learning.

Table 1. Summary of responses for climate change and its urgent appeal

Items	Cebu Participants (N=17)	Manila Participants (N=13)
a. The world is presently experiencing climate change	<p>1. All except one said yes.</p> <p>2. Reasons for agreeing: there are manifestations/indications expressed in terms of natural occurrences (change in temperature, unpredictable change in weather, massive flooding, very strong typhoon, extreme heat) and human undoing (human stupidity).</p>	<p>1. Everyone agreed that the world is experiencing climate change</p> <p>2. Climate change is indicated by changes in the weather conditions and ecological imbalance through: increase in temperature (towards a higher temperature), increasingly intense catastrophic events due to stronger typhoons, tornadoes, and intense flooding in many areas.</p>
b. The Climate problem is urgent	<p>1. All except one agreed that it is urgent.</p> <p>2. It is believed that the urgency is occasioned by serious consequences this climate change brings upon the communities. It is these consequences that necessitate the <u>need to act on it immediately</u> by reversing the damage to the eco-system; and citing the need to <u>educate</u> people to act on it.</p>	<p>1. All agreed that the climate issue is urgent necessitating a clear and fast response.</p> <p>2. What makes it urgent is that human beings are increasingly affected, and the impact of these changed weather conditions is more devastating. Climate change has proven to be detrimental to human beings. Second, it is urgent because the future generation will suffer without an action. Third, the damage it creates could be irreversible.</p>

Both participants from Cebu and Manila (Table 1) agree that the world is suffering from climate change. The reasons for the agreement are basically pointing to the presence of intense

catastrophic conditions brought about by massive ecological imbalance and human undoing. Actual experiences of flooding, very strong typhoons and extreme heat are just the common manifestations.

There is common agreement that climate change is an urgent issue. The urgency of the issue, the participants believe, requires immediate action through education. Both participants think the urgency is due to the negative impact that climate change brings upon humanity. These impacts include more human sufferings it can generate and the irreversible losses it will create.

Table 2. Summary of responses for Human agency and solutions proposed

Items	Cebu Participants (N=17)	Manila Participants (N=13)
c. Who is responsible for the world's problem?	<p>All agreed that it is due to human action.</p> <p>It is a collective responsibility of humanity, not just someone's fault.</p> <p>Some people are more responsible than the others towards the destruction of the world.</p>	<p>1. All agreed that it is humanity who is responsible for this.</p> <p>2. Moral responsibility is attributed to the sins of human kind against nature through abuse and irresponsible use. Human beings caused it to happen.</p>
d. What solutions do we need?	<p>1. Collective response: united effort at waste management, planting trees, energy conservation & information drive.</p> <p>2. Conscientization: awareness drive in schools and application of what is learned</p>	<p>1. Education – integrate environmental solutions to the classroom.</p> <p>2. Environmental solutions – through sustainable and renewable energy solutions</p> <p>3. Changing mindset/ perspectives/ values towards the environment.</p> <p>4. Environmental advocacies—plant more trees, go for lesser carbon footprints.</p> <p>5. Ecological conversion of all -- Collective efforts by all people throughout the world.</p>

There is a clear agreement (Table 2) from both participants that humanity is to blame for climate change. The responsibility is collective rather than individual since the causes are seen to arise from practically all the regions throughout the world in varying degrees. However, due to the specific context of pollution issues, some people are deemed to be more responsible than the

others. The moral responsibility of humanity that is perceived by the participants is seen to arise from various occasions of human abuse and irresponsible use of the earth's resources.

Since the responsibility is collective in nature, the perceived response required of this problem is also collective. Collective efforts in managing pollution and waste, information drive towards conscientization in schools is suggested by participants from Cebu are some of the necessary responses needed to address the issue. Participants from Manila believed in integrating environmental advocacies in education and ecological conversion.

Table 3. Summary of responses for Educational response

Items	Cebu Participants (N=17)	Manila Participants (N=13)
<p>e. What can the schools do? (school action)</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Include Environment lessons in the curriculum 2. Integrate environmental awareness & care for creation in all subjects, inculcate values like love of country and the world, encourage research in waste management and saving the earth programs 3. Inculturated education 4. Involve students and parents in environmental concerns: pollution prevention, garbage management. 5. School needs to connect with the community through service learning initiatives aimed at addressing environmental concerns. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Emphasize values instruction. Strengthen the curriculum in values. 2. Integrate actions towards environmental issues in school culture and raise the awareness through social media and other platform. 3. Schools can be change agents by providing the platform for discussion and understanding among students. 4. Increase interest in advocating for environmental care. Inculcate love for creation. 5. Schools need to promote eco-living which emphasize waste segregation practices and prohibition of materials like styro in the campus. 6. Promote Christian ideals that deal with care for creation.

<p>f. Education should serve society, but our present education is not serving society enough.</p>	<p>Only one disagreed to the idea that education is not serving society enough.</p> <p>Agreement is based on the following reasons:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Education curriculum is mostly oriented towards discipline specific needs rather than environmental needs. 2. It is observed that school effort at developing and preparing students for their future is mostly internal to the curriculum. 3. There is an apparent gap between doing the ‘business’ of educating and the duty to save the world. 4. Education has gone a long way in advocating for the environment but external factors beyond their control like corruption in government interfere in the initial gains of these educational campaigns. 	<p>Only one did not agree to the idea that our present education is not serving society enough.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The proof is that the growth of our society is too slow or stunted. 2. Education is very specific to company needs and concerns about the environment is not the priority. 3. It is discipline oriented and not environment oriented. It is very limited to textbooks. 4. What is learned in class about society is not complemented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -because education is not able to cope up with the fast-changing society. -because many educational programs are not effective. -this is indicated by the school’s failure to imbibe in students the true value of stewardship of creation.
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The participants (Table 3) believed that schools can respond better by integrating environmental issues in classroom instruction. This can be complemented by a meaningful values instruction aimed at forming an attitude of care and responsible stewardship for the environment. In saying this schools can be change agents for the communities. Schools can develop a culture-sensitive curriculum, promoting service in the community to link school learning and community development, and promoting eco-living that emphasize sound environmental practices.

Majority of the participants believed that there is a gap between society and the school. Reasons for saying this include: a. schools are pre-occupied with disciplinal programs meant to familiarize students with content only, b. education appears to be alienated from local community needs acting as if education has nothing to do with the community, c. the failure of education to imbibe in students love for creation and, d. many educational institutions are not able to keep up with the fast phase of technological advances and modernity.

Previously university life is believed to have nothing to do with community life. The university was perceived to be a community of elites whose preoccupations are not related to community life. Shadows of this medieval sentiment persist in schools that are only bent on producing diplomas for their graduates. Through service-learning educational institutions are reminded that the goal of education is not merely to produce “technocrats” but authentic human beings (Sun Suh, 2002) with a heart for communities in need. The present struggle to completely leave behind the influence of perceptions about an indifferent learning institution is facing an uphill climb. The recent shift of universities towards service learning integration addresses the issue.

Table 4. Possible responses from Religious / Values education vis a vis Service Learning

Items	Cebu Participants (N=17)	Manila Participants (N=13)
g. What can Rel. Educators/ theology teachers/ values education teachers do?	1. The first significant step is integrate service learning in the curriculum like in CL or theology classes. 2. The school needs to engage in conscientization activities. 3. a deeper interest by the school in investigating environment related issues has to be demonstrated by schools. 4. empower students to act in favor of the environment— classroom lessons need to be seamlessly connected to actual community realities. e.g. coastal clean-up. 5. inculcate/develop values that highlight stewardship of creation, and a sense of responsibility for creation.	a. Integrate values in the curriculum. b. Show the importance of caring for the environment. c. Integrate environmental issues in the teaching of particular lessons. d. Teach the value of discipline. Appreciate the value of loving our environment; learning to appreciate the value of our environment. e. Active participation in civic programs; conduct symposiums. f. RE teachers to serve as guide in appreciating the human role as stewards of mother earth.
h. Perceptions about Service Learning	1. Its learning that serves all outside the school. 2. It combines learning objectives to attain certain learning experiences. 3. It teaches and trains students to serve society. 4. Its about training the trainers	1. It’s about studying and giving action plans for service. 2. It is intended for the majority. 3. it is an invitation for us to act. 4. A teaching & learning strategy that integrates

	<p>5.Its about imparting one’s giftedness for the service of the world.</p> <p>6.Its where students are taught about real life situations.</p> <p>7.A way of engaging with the community where students earn credits and reflect on their experiences.</p> <p>8.The actualization of learned concepts in the community level. It is about putting into practice what students learned in class.</p> <p>9.Learning is directly applied for the benefit of the community.</p>	<p>meaningful community service.</p> <p>5. Doing in community what I have learned in class.</p> <p>6. Learning must make a difference in community.</p>
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The participants (Table 4) generally view service learning as an integrated component in instruction. It is viewed as a tool for conscientization of learners. Integrated service learning in the curriculum is a powerful means to create new attitudes and values favourable to the environment (Assis, Reysen, Katzarska-Miller, 2017; Del Castillo, 2013). It is also seen as a means by which students can engage with the community through civic-oriented activities. In saying this, the participants believed that service learning enables the actualization of learning in the community. This notion looks at the community as beneficiaries of learning.

Their views generally reflect their unfamiliarity with service learning. Their view apparently sees schools as ‘saviours’ of the communities they visit. Advocates of service learning think otherwise. Schools are collaborators and partners of the communities they work with. The interactions and partnerships arising between the community and the university reflect effective relationships exhibited by mutual benefits and valuing by both parties (Ruch and Trani 1990-1991). The actualization of learned insights from school becomes possible when students and teachers collaborate with the community they are engaged in. Service learning is an opportunity for students to engage in communities applying the knowledge they gained in real life situations through volunteer work (Benett et al., 2003 as cited in Toledano & Lapinid, 2009). In service learning the schools are not dictators of communities but strive to work together for the greater benefit of community members. In the process, students learn about the community by understanding the humanity of those they serve (Sun Suh, 2002). Students also learn about their own capacities and inner self as they struggle with their engagements (Chisholm 2002).

CONCLUSION

Teacher's perceptions about climate change bring forth some new realizations about their present dispositions and beliefs. There is a clear agreement that humanity is to blame for the climate change. The irresponsibility in the use of earth's resources is the primary reason of the issue. Immediate action is necessary to reverse the effects of climate change. Collective efforts in managing waste and pollution, information drive towards conscientization in schools are necessary responses to address the issue. Academic institutions can help improve the environment through strong and conscious instruction. Schools can develop a culture-sensitive curriculum. They can promote service learning in the environment and link school learning and community development. In this way, schools can promote eco-living that emphasize sound environmental practices.

This study also pointed out the unique traits that describe teacher's perceptions towards service learning. The present inquiry revealed the levels of awareness that the participants have with respect to climate change and service learning. This is a timely exposure considering the deficiencies that teachers in the basic, secondary and tertiary levels demonstrate with respect to the essential role that educational institutions have in community building and the noble ideals of education.

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