

The viewpoint of disability studies in service learning

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Abstract:

The importance of service learning is emphasized in many schools especially in universities. Considering that it is not only capable of implementing the social responsibility of universities, but also enable the students to grow within the process of service learning. The features of service learning, which is to equip students with interdisciplinary knowledge in a real setting, meanwhile enable them to cultivate the attitude of introspection and be kind to others.

The emphasis of this article, which is to rethink the hierarchy (The relationship between the main body and object) included in service learning from the perspective of disability studies. Even with the emphasis in intersubjectivity on service learning, there is still controversy in the operations on account of the short term stay, inefficient preparations, and ambiguities concepts etc.

Therefore, the disability studies, which fairly emphasizes on the order of main bodies and objects, could bring with theoretical contributions for reference. Besides, it would enable local community empowerment and more fulfilled learning outcomes for the students if we can apply the disability studies on the service learning operation.

Finally, I will talk about the enforcement of disability studies spirit via an example of service learning activity lead by me.

Disability studies is the main theoretical structure of this article. The Western disability studies includes three phrases: moral model, medical model, and social model. Religious thought dominate the moral model, which thinks the mortal tragedy of individual or family contributes to the disability; According to Medical model, which propose disability is personal unfortunate, leads by the misbehaviors such as congenital defect and acquired diseases; Social model focus on the environmental restriction of body, which change someone into a disability.

However, how is service learning reflect the various perspectives of disability studies?

Take an example of disability services that pity and giving alms which focus by morality model would normally appear in individual who assists the disability. Otherwise, we could take another example of service learning which is common for Chinese universities: volunteer teaching. Students as an outsider who commonly have limited knowledge of the local situation would use “open their eye for the beauty of the world” “one week to change their lives” or “take them out

of the mountains” such unavoidable superiority to face the local children under the circumstances of the limited time.

And the professional personality which reflects on the medical model, which is going to restrict the disability services in the area of therapy, planning, and assistance for daily life. And that reflects on volunteer teaching, would be the neglect on the local network and becomes a guideline principle. On account that the teams of service learning mostly origins from universities, an inappropriate gap between local network would appear when the local community deeply depend on the professionalism of the university team or polite acceptance when facing the representative of professionalism- the university.

Including the morality model or medical model, both of them lay the responsibility on the individual itself. Therefore, these two models are called “personal model”. You are miserable or this is all you get for it for being disabled. This attitude is also reflected in service learning. Just like the previous example, even the service learning activities which target at disability, no matter it is a visit to the nursing home or disability or the assistance for therapies and rehabilitation to society. It is no need for society to make any adaptations. The disabled body has to strive for his unfortunate experience.

It is the same happening in the example of volunteer teaching. “Remote area” “rustic” “border area” “ need help” these concepts are put on the schools and students. And they are the same as the negative impacts such as “ undeveloped” “ low level” even “ uncivilized”. “Open the eyes” “set a good example” “ an influence of life” become the tasks of the service body. Because of the sense of responsibility of “giving a helping hand” to the local children, this sense of responsibility makes the service body an authoritative role. Therefore they can “teach”, “develop” or “inspire” the service target. This is reflected in the situation when the local children need to follow the trend, to work hard and get the tickets for leaving this original environment.

As we can see, pity or guidance would easily appear in the service object considering the subjectivity of the service body. And I would state in this article, the concept of intersubjectivity focused by social model, which emphasizes on the exclusion of social restriction, would enable the disability to be excluded from the social and physical restriction and put the focus back to social structure, which is not just a one-off occurrence of service learning. Therefore, the redefinition of “service” would occur in service learning and take the social model as the future direction of service learning.

At the meantime, I would show the enforcement of social model concept into service learning with an example activity lead by me. The purpose of this activity, which is to build a resource platform via the cooperation with the local community. And the proposal of accessible tourism, which enables the disability to participate in leisure activity without restriction. Anyway, the disability would like to go out, but it is because of the unfriendly environment which disables them to leave home.

Even with the continuity of introspection for various morality issue, and developed into various operational styles. Still, the perspective of disability studies, especially the social model would able to give better suggestion and enrich the introspection ability of service learning. The expected contributions of this article, which is to enrich the interior of service learning through the theory and practice of disability studies. And with the real example, I wish to develop more operational areas. Meanwhile. In the practice of service learning, would enable the students a more concrete and comprehensive gain, and capable of community empowerment and avoid morality controversy which will not customize the local community.

At last, on account that the article included the experience and research on the volunteer teaching in a Chinese university, with the social model perspective of disability studies, the discussion procedure would bring cultural clashes of service learning.

Keywords: service learning, disability studies, social model, intersubjectivity

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