Investigating student outcomes from a service learning project

Shona Gibson

University of Wollongong

Copyright Warning

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

This work is copyright. Apart from any use permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process, nor may any other exclusive right be exercised, without the permission of the author.

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.

Recommended Citation


Research Online is the open access institutional repository for the University of Wollongong. For further information contact the UOW Library: research-pubs@uow.edu.au
NOTE

This online version of the thesis may have different page formatting and pagination from the paper copy held in the University of Wollongong Library.

UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

COPYRIGHT WARNING

You may print or download ONE copy of this document for the purpose of your own research or study. The University does not authorise you to copy, communicate or otherwise make available electronically to any other person any copyright material contained on this site. You are reminded of the following:

Copyright owners are entitled to take legal action against persons who infringe their copyright. A reproduction of material that is protected by copyright may be a copyright infringement. A court may impose penalties and award damages in relation to offences and infringements relating to copyright material. Higher penalties may apply, and higher damages may be awarded, for offences and infringements involving the conversion of material into digital or electronic form.
Investigating Student Outcomes from a Service Learning Project

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

from the

University of Wollongong

Faculty of Education

by

Shona Gibson
B. Teach (dist), M. Ed (Research)
Certification

I, Shona Gibson, declare that this thesis, submitted in fulfilment of the requirement for the award of Doctor of Philosophy, University of Wollongong, is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. The document has not been submitted for qualification at any other university or academic institution.
Acknowledgements

I feel grateful to a number of people who have provided support and assistance in many forms during the past years as this thesis has taken shape.

I cannot fully express my gratitude to the exceptional team of academics at the University of Wollongong for their generosity and time. Professor Steve Dinham and Associate Professor Narrottam Bhindi, helped me take an idea and develop it into a worthy research project.

As a project like this draws so heavily on personal and family time, I need to acknowledge my family’s sacrifice. I am so very grateful that you worked alongside me for the past few years. Paul, Mike, Claire, Laura, Jess, Rick, Mum and Dad, thank you for pretending to know what I was talking about as I read parts of this text to you.

Special thanks go to my mentor and friend Maurice Johnston for knowing exactly when to challenge and when to gently guide - a true model of an effective educator.

My sincere appreciation goes to the entire community at PLC Sydney, with special thanks to the Year 11 (2005) girls, their teachers and the school’s principal Dr W. McKeith. It has been a privilege being able to associate with you during this research period. Each of you have been an inspiration to my personal life and actions. As a result I now 'give' more to others.
Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the outcomes of a group of 15 and 16 year old school students who participated in a service learning project, referred to as the ‘Adopt a School’ project. This study was undertaken to understand what effect the project had on these students, and how it impacted on them as people. This study focused on the experiences these students had during their field trip in Sri Lanka in September 2005.

A qualitative methodology incorporating the grounded theory was selected to analyse the data.

The study identified that service learning engagement provides powerful and deep learning experiences which encourage students to reflect on their beliefs, attitudes and relationships with others, especially on their life as teenagers in Australia and, as a result, what they had come to take for granted or have not questioned.

A core finding from this study was that service learning involvement promoted identity formation. Immersion in the host community facilitated new and more complex thinking about their personal and social identities, the construction of identity in relation to serving others, and the kinds of commitments participants wanted to make in their lives. Because students were introduced to and developed relationships with, individuals and experiences with which they were unfamiliar, previously held notions of self and other were challenged, and reconstructed. Implications for education have been drawn from the results of this study.
# Table of Contents

Abstract                      i  
Table of Contents            v  
List of Figures              viii  
List of Tables               viii  
List of Appendix            ix  
Definition of Terms          x
Chapter One: Introduction to This Study

Introduction 1
Background of this Study 1
Purpose, Goal and Significance of This Study 3
The Review of Literature 5
Theoretical Framework 5
The Participants’ Service Learning Program 5
Scope of the Study 6
Organisation of This Thesis 7
Chapter Summary 8

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction 9

Part One 10
Distinction Between Four Service Related Terms 10

Part Two 14
Setting the Scene: Historical Events in Australian Education Leading to 14
Service in Education

Part Three 17
Theoretical Background that Underpins Service Learning 17
  Experiential Based Learning 17
  The Development of Service Learning 21
  Service Learning a Socialisation Process 23
  Service Learning Does Not Occur in Isolation 24
  Models of Service Learning 26
  Reflective Practice a Component of Service Learning 28
  Reflective Practice in Service Learning Programs 29
  Reported Outcomes of Service Learning 31
  Why People Participate in Service Learning 34
  Service Learning’s Potential in Enhancing Australian Education 35
Summary 36

Part Four 36
Field, Paradigm, Analysis 36
Qualitative Research 36
An Overview of the Origin, Theoretical Development, and Use of 39
Grounded Theory
Grounded Theory Methodology 40
Critiques 42
Review of Prominent Authors in the Field of Grounded Theory 44
  Glaser and Strauss 45
  Glaser 46
  Martin and Turner 46
  Strauss and Corbin 47
### Chapter Three: The Research Approach

**Introduction**

**Study Design**

Research Questions

Qualitative, Quantitative Research Approaches

Grounded Theory Methodology

Overview of the Methods of Data Collection

Ensuring Credibility and Trustworthiness

- Triangulation
- Thick Description

The Research Participants

Ethical Clearance

How Data Were Collected

- Interviews
- Email Correspondence
- Observations
- Documents Supplementary Data
  - Researcher’s Journal
  - Field Notes

**Data Analysis**

Phases of the Study

**Phase One**

- Phase One – Data Analysis
- Phase One – Preliminary Coding
- Phase One – Codes, Themes and Categories

**Phase Two**

- Phase Two – Preliminary Coding
- Phase Two – Refining Codes into Themes

**Phase Three**

- Phase Three – Coding to Themes: The Final Analysis
- Development of a Core Category

Chapter Summary

---

### Chapter Four: Results of the Study

**Introduction**

**Part A: Portrait of PLC, a Snap shot of the Adopt a School project and a Profile of the Participants**

PLC Sydney’s Foundation and Current Form

The School I Saw: On One Visit

Manifestation of PLC Sydney’s Culture

The ‘Adopt a School’ Service Learning Project
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Background to the Project</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How the Project was Formed</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing the ‘Adopt a School’ Project</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Journal</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principles’ of ‘Adopt a School’ Project</td>
<td>88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>While In Sri Lanka</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Profiling the Participants</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part A: Summary</td>
<td>93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part B: The Outcomes for the Students</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Core Category - Identity Formation</td>
<td>97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing a Whole New World</td>
<td>103</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Development and Application</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Experiences</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Development</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: Discussion</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>147</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Formation</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seeing a Whole New World</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge Development and Application</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflective Experiences</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationships</td>
<td>156</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional Development</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Summary</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Six: Conclusions, Implications and Recommendations</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrutiny of Aspects of Their Lives</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implication</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Acceptance of New People</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implication</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased Acceptance of New Ideas and Experiences</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implication</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open-Mindedness Extended Beyond the Project</td>
<td>165</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implication</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers as Facilitators</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implication</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recommendations</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Researcher’s Final Reflections</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What have I learned?</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>References</td>
<td>171</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
List of Figures

Figure 2:1 Map of the Literature Review 9
Figure 2:2 Adaptation of Henry’s (1989) Meaning and Practice in Experiential Learning Model 20
Figure 2:3 Adaptation of Morton’s Model of the Paradigms of Service Learning Involvement 27

Figure 3:1 Organisational Framework for Chapter Three 50
Figure 3:2 Three Phase Design 53
Figure 3:3 Summaries of the Timeframe and Types of Data Collection Methods 54
Figure 3:4 Triangulation Process 55
Figure 3:5 Ensuring Trustworthiness: Ensuring Student Voice 56
Figure 3:6 Phase One Open Coding Sample 66
Figure 3:7 Phase One Interview Open Code Matrix : A Sample 67
Figure 3:8 Developing Codes into Themes 73
Figure 3:9 E-mail Interview: An Example 75
Figure 3:10 ‘Adopt a School’ Service Learning Projects’ Conceptual Map 77

Figure 4:1 Concept Map of the Grounded Theory Categories 96

List of Tables

Table 2:1 Synthesis of Definitions and Examples of Service Related Terms 13
Table 2:2 Predisposition of Qualitative Mode of Inquiry 39
Table 2:3 Evolution of Grounded Theory: Adapted of Charmaz (2000, 2002) and Kriflik (2005) Reviews 44
Table 4:1 Manifestations of PLC’s School Culture 84
Table 4:2 Student-Participant Information 93
Table 4:3 Staff Information 94
Table 4:4 Parent Information 94
List of Appendix

Appendix 1  Principal’s Information Sheet
Appendix 2  Teacher’s Information Sheet
Appendix 3  Student’s Information Sheet
Appendix 4  Parent’s Information Sheet
Appendix 5  Research Participant Information Package: Student Consent
Appendix 6  Consent Form for Students
Appendix 7  Consent Form for Parent of Student
Appendix 8  Consent Form for Teacher
Appendix 9  Profile Question for Student Participants
Appendix 10 Profile Question for Teachers
Appendix 11 Examples Research Questions Asked of Teachers
Appendix 12 Examples Research Questions Asked of Students
Appendix 13 Comparison of Qualitative Strategies to Determine Their Fit to this Study
Appendix 14 Combined Phase One and Two Codes
Appendix 15 Combined Phase One and Two Codes Emergent Themes
Appendix 16 The Model Used to Explain the Developing Theory
Definition of Terms

Adopt a School

‘Adopt a School’ refers to a project linking Presbyterian Ladies’ College (PLC) Sydney with three tsunami affected schools in Sri Lanka.

The ‘Adopt a School’ project is aimed at providing the students involved with an ‘immeasurable opportunity for personal growth as they make contributions as responsible global citizens’ (Brewer, 2005).

AdoptSriLanka

AdoptSriLanka is an organisation helping villagers along Sri Lanka’s southern coast, following the tsunami on December 26, 2004. The organisation comprises Sri Lankans and expatriates with intimate knowledge of the situation on the ground. They are all volunteers. (Brewer, 2005)

Experience

This term reflects Dewey’s definition of experience. Dewey argued that educative experiences could be judged by whether or not the individual grew, or would grow, intellectually and morally, the larger community benefited from the learning over the long haul, the ‘situation’ (Dewey, 1916) resulted in conditions leading to further growth, such as arousing curiosity and strengthening initiative, desire and purpose.

HSC

The Higher School Certificate (HSC) is a locally, nationally and internationally recognised qualification for students who successfully complete secondary education in New South Wales (NSW) Australia.

Non-government, Independent, and Private Schools

Non-government schools are defined as schools that are ‘founded and wholly organised by individuals or non-government bodies’ (Grimshaw, 2002, p. 18). These
schools are ‘self-managed by their own board of governors, hence the use of the term independent’ (Daniels, 2003, p.3). These schools, despite government funding since the 1960s, have also been tagged ‘private’ (Meadmore, 2004).

Outcomes

Outcomes are intended and unintended consequences of a project, usually in the context of knowledge, attitudes, values, skills, behaviour, condition or status concerning the project’s participants (Mark, Henry and Julnes, 2000).

PLC Sydney

The Presbyterian Ladies College (PLC) Sydney is a non-government day and boarding school of girls from Reception to Year 12. It offers an academic curriculum underpinned by ‘Christian values that encourage the pursuit of excellence in all areas of life’ (PLC, website, 2005).

Service Learning

Service learning is a teaching and learning strategy that integrates meaningful community service with instruction and reflection to enrich the learning experience and strengthen communities.

Year 11

The NSW school education system is structured into five educative groupings: Pre-school, Infants school, Primary school, Secondary school and Tertiary studies. The school groups are further identified by ‘Year’ labels, concluding with Year 12, the last year of secondary school, which requires the students to undertake a formal externally prepared examination. The participants in this study were in Year 11 at PLC.