2009

Investigating student outcomes from a service learning project

Shona Gibson
*University of Wollongong*

Follow this and additional works at: https://ro.uow.edu.au/theses

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
Background of this Study
Purpose, Goal and Significance of This Study
The Review of Literature
Theoretical Framework
The Participants’ Service Learning Program
Scope of the Study
Organisation of This Thesis
Chapter Summary

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

Part One
Distinction Between Four Service Related Terms

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

Part Three
Theoretical Background that Underpins Service Learning
   Experiential Based Learning
   The Development of Service Learning
   Service Learning a Socialisation Process
   Service Learning Does Not Occur in Isolation
   Models of Service Learning
   Reflective Practice a Component of Service Learning
   Reflective Practice in Service Learning Programs
   Reported Outcomes of Service Learning
   Why People Participate in Service Learning
   Service Learning’s Potential in Enhancing Australian Education
   Summary

Part Four
Field, Paradigm, Analysis
Qualitative Research
An Overview of the Origin, Theoretical Development, and Use of Grounded Theory
Grounded Theory Methodology
Critiques
Review of Prominent Authors in the Field of Grounded Theory
   Glaser and Strauss
   Glaser
   Martin and Turner
   Strauss and Corbin
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
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

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