

Sustainable Development Goals and Service Learning Integration Enhancing University Students' Personal Development and Youth Entrepreneurship

Introduction

Youth is the Future of every nation & inheritors of the earth tomorrow. This statement stands true in every sense. When a country has a healthy youth population, you will find the country making headway in terms of overall development and progress. A country with high aging population and lower youth population has a lot of problems to contend with that can slow its growth.

Globalisation has brought countries together and created entire world market. We are seeing a lot of changes in the international political map of the world. Countries are beginning to show determination to move from the old age monarchies and dictatorial regimes towards democracy.

Service learning is an educational process that students participate in a service activity designed and arranged to meet specific community needs in the objective of understanding social responsibility and good citizenship (Bringle & Hatcher, 1996). It is a form of experiential and action learning that attached students in organized activities targeted to address community needs (Caruso, Bowen, & Adams-Dunford, 2006). In general, service learning can benefit faculties and generates positive teaching and learning outcomes. Faculty members reflect that students involved more in service learning process, participate more in class discussions, develop a better understanding of subject contents, and become increasingly fall in love in community activities (Caruso, Bowen, & Adams-Dunford, 2006). At our university, Hong Kong Polytechnic

University, service learning is one of the compulsory subjects starting in the academic year 2015-16 and it is estimated more than 3000 students every year will participate in service learning in local Hong Kong, China and overseas.

The Subject of Service Learning

Service-learning refers to learning that actively involves students in a wide range of experiences, which often benefit others and the community, while also advancing the goals of a given curriculum. Community-based service activities are paired with structured preparation and student reflection.

In Hong Kong, China and other countries, we are facing many serious problems like the poverty gap, ageing population, global warming, energy shortage and food crisis which are inescapable in this globalized world. We expect that all in our university students can take action beyond the campus, see the world as their home and become leaders, to spread love, care and act for the good of people in need. A service learning project called as “Business Project Development and Implementation for Underprivileged Communities” was developed in our university. There are 5 sessions of 3-hour lecture/tutorial and 7-8 day field trip in China for the entrepreneurship and sustainability education through this service learning project. Students need to have the knowledge of entrepreneurship, project management and business plan before their onsite hands-on project in China. During the visits, students need to interact with the beneficiaries directly, to understand their real problem, collect the business data and suggest, develop and implement a workable solution for a social enterprise in the community.

This subject is collaborated with China Mainland Affairs Office (CMAO) from our university.

The co-ordination work with China NGOs, source of funding and logistic of the onsite hands-on project will be organized by their office. There will be collaborative workshops with China NGOs to provide students with a hands-on training in conducting surveys and site visits, and also help students to familiarize how to help the underprivileged community with their knowledge and skills.

The service component supports the academic focus of the project as follows:

1. Gain perspective and understanding for helping others, and learn about their own purpose and motivations through first-hand observations in the onsite hands-on service learning project
2. The setting in which social entrepreneurship knowledge and skills are prepared and practiced in classroom, and the methods employed by the social entrepreneurs in providing social services through the project in developing social enterprise in the underprivileged community
3. Appreciate how social entrepreneurship relates to social problem solution, poverty reduction and sustainable development in the social project
4. Conceptualize social entrepreneurship in terms of a formal analytical framework in project execution
5. Understand the role of innovation and creativity in the development of social enterprise with real social environment setting in the community

6. Go through in-depth analysis of the opportunities, challenges, and tensions facing social enterprises in the community

The Teaching and Learning

The teaching and learning methods to be employed are to facilitate learning, and a justification of how the methods are aligned with the intended learning outcomes of the subject:

1. Students are required to successfully complete the e-learning module within the first four weeks of the semester in which they are taking the subject.
2. In the lecture/tutorial, students learn the knowledge of social entrepreneurship, project development and business plan writing before the onsite hands-on project through lectures, case studies, workshops and guest seminars.
3. Students are expected to read assigned materials and actively participate in class discussion and the preparation of service projects. Case studies will be widely used throughout the course.
4. The project-specific lecture sessions are designed to: (a) emphasize on the application of knowledge to address the issues relevant to the service-learning project, (b) develop students' understanding of the targeted clients/ underprivileged community, as well as other issues relating to the service-learning project, (c) provide training for students in generic skills in planning and delivering the service project. Some of the tutorials may be collaborative workshops organized jointly with the NGOs.
5. Students are required to attend all of the discipline-specific and project-specific lectures, seminars and workshops, and successfully complete all of the required assignments/learning tasks prior to participation in the service-learning project.

Conclusion

The findings from the survey for students after taking the service learning subjects in the past few years are encouraging. These service learning projects are positively increasing the academic focus, the served community and the learning outcome and the students' understanding of entrepreneurship skills and sustainability management.

In the reflection paper written by the students, they indicated that they had gained a greater appreciation of community needs, of participating in a project that had a visible result in the community, and of being able to meaningfully apply the skills they learned in business classes on entrepreneurship, marketing, management, strategic planning, and sustainability. Through hands on experience, students were able to apply the management theory they had learned in the classroom and were more engaged in the learning process.

Entrepreneurship can be a powerful tool to help fight youth unemployment. As such there is real value in studying youth entrepreneurship programmes. These five recommendations come from the first-person experiences of volunteers and entrepreneurs. For development workers and policy-makers working in youth entrepreneurship these findings can help craft better programmes and policies that help to tackle rural poverty and foster new opportunities for young people today and tomorrow.

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